IN MAGNAE RATIONIS PALATIO:
REASON AND PHILOSOPHY IN JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICAL DIALOGUES
OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

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As iron sharpens iron, so does one person sharpen another.

– Proverbs 27:17

One of the three wise men said: … We should debate and see which of us is in truth and which in error. For just as we have one God, one Creator, one Lord, we should also have one faith, one religion, one sect, one manner of loving and honoring God, and we should love and help one another, and make it so that between us there be no difference or contrariety of faith or customs, which difference and contrariety cause us to be enemies with one another and to be at war, killing one another and falling captive to one another. And this war, death, and servitude prevent us from giving the praise, reverence, and honor we owe God every day of our life.

– Ramon Llull, The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.......................................................................................................................... vi

Introduction......................................................................................................................................1

I. Jewish-Christian Relations and Polemic until the Twelfth Century ...........................................4

II. Reason and Philosophy in the Twelfth-century Renaissance ....................................................10

III. Reason in Jewish and Christian Polemics of the Twelfth Century ........................................14

IV. Reason and Polemical Dialogue ..............................................................................................18

Chapter 1........................................................................................................................................25

I. The Use of Reason in Polemic ......................................................................................................26

II. Peter Abelard, Collationes ........................................................................................................34

III. Judah Halevi, The Kuzari .........................................................................................................43

IV. Peter Alfonsi, Dialogue against the Jews ..................................................................................49

V. Joseph Kimhi, The Book of the Covenant .................................................................................55

VI. Final Considerations ..............................................................................................................57

Chapter 2........................................................................................................................................61

I. Peter Abelard, Collationes ...........................................................................................................63

II. Judah Halevi, The Kuzari ..........................................................................................................71

III. Peter Alfonsi, Dialogue against the Jews ................................................................................77

IV. Joseph Kimhi, The Book of the Covenant ...............................................................................85

V. Final Considerations ..............................................................................................................89

Chapter 3........................................................................................................................................93

I. Personification of the Self and the Other ..................................................................................97

II. Personification of Reason ..........................................................................................................105

III. Other Considerations ............................................................................................................110

Conclusion ................................................................................................................................... 113

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................125
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Sine ira et studio
Introduction

Jewish-Christian Relations, Polemics, and Intellectual History

In magnae rationis palatio accubituri ipsius palatii solum quibusdam sententiarum floribus sternamus, ut post delectabilius in eo ratiocinaturi sedeamus.

When we will lie down in the palace of great Reason, let us strew the ground of this same palace with some flowers of opinions, so that afterward we will sit there more delightfully when we argue.¹

– Peter Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*

This striking line seems almost out of place among the strongly worded attacks against Jewish rabbinic tradition in the work of a twelfth-century scholar, Peter Alfonsi. While it certainly does not abate the fiercely anti-Jewish tenor of his polemic, this brief reference to a “palace of reason” suggests some sort of neutral ground between representatives of both faiths, a common space where both sides could consider *sententiae* and offer arguments. Of course, genuine mutual understanding was hardly Alfonsi’s aim—the dialogue was ultimately *contra Iudaeos*, after all—but this line does reflect a trait belonging to many polemics written by Jews and Christians in the twelfth century. Reason was often invoked as a common authority for both religions by a number of different Jewish and Christian writers, all of whom held a variety of divergent views on philosophy and, of course, religion. In this study, I attempt to uncover both how and why these medieval intellectuals all gathered before *magna ratio*, especially given that they lived in an era of increasing enmity between the two faiths.

By the twelfth century, Christians and Jews had already had a long and tense history together. Even in the first century CE, when many early Christians still were Jews and followed the ritual law of Moses, both religious communities widely diverged in how they viewed God’s

plan for humanity and how the received tradition which is common to both faiths—the Hebrew scriptures of the Tanakh, or Old Testament—ought to be interpreted. For two thousand years, discussion, dialogue, and debate between representatives of the two great religions have constituted an essential aspect of their relationship, although Christians tended to dominate the conversation in most periods, for the obvious reason of Christendom's social ascendance. Until the modern era, much of what constituted recorded religious dialogue was largely within the bounds of polemic. This genre could be used by authors as a tool for proselytization (for Christianity) and defending one's religion against attack (usually in the case of Judaism), as well as a means of defining one's faith against the other (largely on the Christian side, but arguably sometimes in the case of Judaism as well). Studying these dialogues can give us a little insight into what, if any, genuine discussions and interaction may have taken place. More importantly, however, polemical dialogues can reveal the attitudes of the clerical and intellectual class toward the opposing faith, and so can also offer us a perspective on how the two religious communities viewed one another.

During the fairly turbulent development of this relationship, the philosophical traditions of the Greco-Roman world were adopted by eager scholars of both traditions and carried into the Middle Ages. Christian thinkers in the Latin West admired much of what their ancient pagan predecessors had to say about the use of reason and their knowledge of the natural world. Spanish Jewish intellectuals also had a great deal of interest in the writings of Aristotle, Plato,

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and other ancient philosophers and scientists, and studied these luminaries alongside their Muslim and Christian colleagues in the so-called *convivencia* of Islamic rule in Al-Andalus. The assimilation of philosophical reason into religious thought was not entirely smooth, however, and medieval thinkers often wrestled with the problem of what secular reason's role ought to be in a theological framework.

These two axes—the ongoing Jewish-Christian conversation and the adoption of philosophical reason—crossed in an intriguing shift in focus of polemical dialogues of the twelfth century. Some writers, such as Peter Alfonsi or Joseph Kimhi, crafted new arguments which differed from the ordinary polemical appeals to Scripture in that they were based heavily, or sometimes even solely, on reason. Of course, the type of reasoning involved could change from writer to writer, but the common feature of this trend in polemical technique is the reliance on some form of reason as a kind of universal authority. The polemical dialogues of this period can therefore grant us a keen insight into how philosophy and reason were incorporated into the conversation between Christianity and Judaism. As we shall see, the use of reason in dialogue reveals some significant commonalities between polemical thinkers of the two faiths; in particular, the appeal to the authority of reason provided an essential basis for the depiction of one's religious opponents as intrinsically irrational.

In this treatment on the role of reason in twelfth-century Jewish-Christian polemics, I will be examining the ways in which literary dialogue acted as a vehicle for polemicists to reflect on reason and its role in religious matters, how reason could be used in such synthesized discussions with members of the other faith, and how reason related to the image of the author's own faith and that of his imagined opponents. Christian and Jewish writers of polemical dialogues had
widely diverging solutions to the challenge that reason posed to the authority of revealed knowledge—even among members of the same faith there was disagreement. Yet all of these authors were struggling with the same fundamental questions, and often had remarkably similar ideas while working out the answers. A great number of these twelfth-century dialogues are extant, but in order to provide an extensive analysis, I will work with a cross section of the most significant Jewish and Christian texts of this time: namely, those of Peter Abelard, Peter Alfonsi, Judah Halevi, and Joseph Kimhi. To lay out the historical context of these authors, I will first provide a more in-depth background of Jewish-Christian relations, dialogue, and philosophy, up until, and including, the twelfth century.

I. Jewish-Christian Relations and Polemic until the Twelfth Century

Since the first century of Christianity, Christian theologians wrestled with the problem of the persistent existence of the Jewish religion. The leaders of the early church, starting with the apostle Paul, declared that Christ had fulfilled the written law of Moses and provided salvation for all mankind through his sacrifice, thus rendering the law impotent and removing the need to practice Judaism. Yet most Jews refused to recognize the authority of this new revelation and continued to follow the faith of their forefathers. Thus, even from the second century CE, Christians needed to explain why Jews did not see the truth and abandon their defunct faith, and also to justify their interpretation of the Old Testament/Tanakh while supporting those Christian doctrines which clashed with traditional Jewish belief. One of the earliest attempts to do this is a work by the second-century apologist Justin Martyr entitled *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew.*  

The *Dialogue* consists of a fictionalized discussion between Justin and his Jewish acquaintance.

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Trypho declares that “you [Christians] have believed this foolish rumor, and you have invented for yourselves a Christ for whom you blindly give up your lives.” Justin counters this charge by asserting that “you [Jews] understand everything [i.e., the law] in a carnal way, and you deem yourselves religious if you perform such [ritual] deeds,” while explaining and defending Christian spiritual, non-literal exegesis and the christological doctrine which was founded upon that reading of Scripture. While Trypho is not convinced, Justin admonishes his Jewish friend to accept Christ, and the two disputants part ways amicably. Despite its moderately conciliatory tone, the Dialogue is one of the earliest examples of the Adversus Judaeos tradition of Christian polemical literature against Judaism, which began with the ante-Nicene fathers and was consistently developed by clergy and intellectuals in the Middle Ages.

Since this study will focus specifically both on the polemical genre of dialogue between a Jew and a Christian and on the implementation of philosophy and reason into dialogue, two interesting features of Justin's work are particularly relevant. First, Justin chose to write in the form of a dialogue between himself and a Jew, instead of simply writing a tract which spoke directly to his audience. This does not imply that the dialogue was a genuine record; Justin's own voice dominates the vast majority of it. It is certainly not representative of the balanced give-and-take between two participants in a real disputation, nor was it likely very accurate to the details of whatever authentic encounter on which the book may have been based. Fairness to one's fictional opponent and an accurate rendering of real-life disputation are not the goals of a polemical dialogue; verisimilitude is good enough to convey the polemicist's case. But ignoring

5 Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 8.3.
6 Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 14.2.
8 Thomas B. Falls, first introduction to Dialogue with Trypho, xv.
its intrinsically fictitious nature, the dialogue genre deserves consideration for other reasons. Dialogue allows a writer to place his views in direct competition with those of a simulated opponent, whether based on an existing person or completely imagined. The author may use the voice of the opponent to raise any anticipated objections to his argument, and answer them with the voice of the author/protagonist, while also projecting onto the opponent whatever image is fitting for the purposes of his polemic. The character of Trypho is allowed to object to Justin's reasoning, giving the author an opportunity to answer arguments the reader might have already heard, while also painting Trypho as an open-minded but stubborn figure. Trypho is sympathetic enough to consider a Christian's claims, while still persisting in his old faith and refusing to accept the sound arguments of a representative of the new one. This literary strategy allowed Justin to paint an idealized, microcosmic portrait of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism for his readers. Christianity was still a young religion and not officially accepted at the time, so such a picture would have been helpful to convince Justin's intended readers, many of whom were likely pagans. Of course, the character of Trypho does not necessarily represent how all real Jews felt about Christianity. For most dialogues in the Adversus Judaeos tradition, the Jewish figure is simply a puppet invented by Christian imagination. However, the dialogue genre continued to be extremely useful in differentiating Christianity from Judaism, even long after the younger faith had become the state religion of the Roman Empire.

The second significant aspect of this dialogue is how Justin implicitly appeals to the authority of philosophical reason to convince Trypho and, through this device, his readers. Both Trypho and Justin agree on the importance of philosophy, especially when it is used to “inquire about the Divine,” after which Justin relates how he was converted to Christianity by another

9 Thomas P. Halton, second introduction to Dialogue with Trypho, xxi.
philosopher.¹⁰ Trypho respects Justin's philosophical status but not his Christian beliefs, so Justin argues that his philosophy and his faith are one and the same (Christianity is “the only sure and useful philosophy”), just as he tries to show how the Christian faith includes and fulfills the old law.¹¹ This appeal to the authority of philosophy is worthy of note, since it anticipates a number of twelfth-century polemical dialogues that contain similar appeals to the authority of reason or philosophy. As we shall see, Christian writers a thousand years later would not only make arguments against Judaism and for Christianity based partially or entirely on reason, but also appeal to the authority of philosophical reason itself to buttress Christian claims.

Before the twelfth century, Jews did not generate as much polemic against their younger siblings in faith as Christians did against them.¹² The Babylonian Talmud contains some dismissive references to Jesus, the discovery of which by the Church caused a major shift in Jewish-Christian relations in the thirteenth century.¹³ In the early medieval centuries, there was little interest in attacking Christianity since most Jews lived apart from areas of Christian dominance, and those who did not were protected by the Augustinian dictum that Jews ought not to be destroyed since they were living witnesses to the Old Testament canon.¹⁴ Unlike Christians, who continued to produce anti-Jewish polemic to differentiate and define Christianity from Judaism, Jews had no such theological pressure. One of the oldest specifically anti-Christian texts, the Toledot Yeshu, hardly contained rigorous argumentation, but rather evoked a kind of

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 1-8.  
¹¹ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 8.1.  
¹² Cohen, “Toward a Functional Classification,” 95.  
scoffing contempt for Christianity. Some other exceptions to the overall lack of anti-Christian literature in the early Middle Ages include the ninth-century *Polemic of Nestor the Priest* which was likely produced by Jews living under Islam, lost texts by the Jewish philosopher Dawud al-Muqammas, and some comments on Christian doctrines in works by Saadya Gaon. However, until the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when contact and interaction between Christendom and Jewish communities increased and subsequently deteriorated, there was little reason to produce lengthy screeds against the younger faith. When the systematic Jewish response to Christianity finally did begin to rise, it was motivated more by social pressure and the need to defend the community from intellectual assault than from a desire for theological self-definition, as was the drive behind much of the *Adversus Judaeos* literature.

All this had changed by the twelfth century—the period in which the major texts of this study were written. The Christian kingdoms of the *Reconquista* were slowly reclaiming territory from the Islamic *taifa* states in the Iberian peninsula, with the result that Sephardic Jews now encountered Christians in power. While the supposedly “tolerant” *convivencia* of the Andalusian caliphate may have allowed for Jews, Christians, and Muslims living under Islamic rule to interact peacefully, Jews now had to find their way in the newly conquered territories (although no major episodes of violence against Jews occurred under Christian rule in Spain until the fourteenth century). By this time, there were already many Jewish communities in Christian lands, to which some Sephardic Jews traveled, such as Joseph Kimhi, who fled the Almohad

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invasions of Al-Andalus to Provence.\textsuperscript{18} Despite Augustine's teaching on the protection of Jews, Jewish life in Christian kingdoms was not entirely secure: Jews who had been permitted to live in the Rhine Valley with protection by the bishops there were brutally attacked by rogue bands of crusaders in 1096.\textsuperscript{19} While these attacks were not sanctioned by the Church, the event still marks the beginning of the decline in Jewish-Christian relations. In the thirteenth century, the newly formed mendicant orders directed much of their missionary attention to Jews, especially with the discovery of the blasphemous portions of the Talmud (along with the realization that rabbinic Judaism had branched out beyond the written law).\textsuperscript{20} Jews felt the need to respond to the increasingly aggressive polemical attacks on their faith, due to fear of apostasy in their own ranks, and eventually out of a need to justify their existence to Christian authorities. Situated between these two glaring instances of the increasing erosion in Jewish-Christian relations, the twelfth century stands out as a transitional period between the relative peace before 1096 and the explosion of missionizing and violent pressure on Jews in the thirteenth and later centuries.

Christian thinking toward the Jews began to change in this century in form and content from the older \textit{Adversus Judaeos} conceptions, fostered not just by increased direct contact, but especially by the intellectual trends of this century. This shift will be examined after a brief overview of those intellectual movements of the twelfth century which had an impact on polemical dialogue.

II. Reason and Philosophy in the Twelfth-century Renaissance

The twelfth century was a fascinating period of many cultural and intellectual transitions. For the dialogues that will be covered in this study, the most significant of the new challenges of this century was the fundamental problem of what the role of reason ought to be in directing religious belief. This question was being discussed in roughly the same period by thinkers in all three of the major Abrahamic faiths. This was not a coincidence, given that there was a transfer of scientific knowledge and philosophical ideas from Islamic to Jewish and Christian circles. Along with the Aristotelian corpus, which had been translated from Syriac into Arabic after the Islamic expansion in the eighth century, works by Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) were translated into Latin and Hebrew and absorbed by Western Christian and Jewish scholars.21 At the same time, some Christian theologians who had a burgeoning interest in the Hebraica veritas (“the Hebrew truth”) were also beginning to consult rabbis on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament/Tanakh, and a certain degree of reciprocal and amiable interaction took place—what Cohen has called a sort of convivencia in Christian Europe.22 The fact that such interaction occurred may explain some of the curious similarities in the works of Christian and Jewish writers. As we shall see later on in this study, certain arguments and notions about the problem of reason and revelation were repeated in polemical dialogues by authors on both sides. While no direct connections can be proven from the sources available, it is still plausible that some of these similarities had a basis in the intellectual exchange between religious cultures circa the twelfth century.

The problem of reason in Latin Christianity was raised within the context of what is known as the twelfth-century renaissance. Charles H. Haskins first coined the term in reference to the social, cultural, and intellectual developments of that century. Western Christendom saw an expansion in multiple directions: economic growth, increasing contact with the world outside Christian borders with the Crusades and Reconquista, the strengthening of Church centralization, and, most significantly for our purposes, the birth of a new academic system and the re-evaluation of classical learning, along with the rediscovery and integration of lost philosophical works.\(^{23}\) The Greco-Roman philosophical tradition had never been foreign to Christian thought; while significant works of ancient philosophy had been lost to Western Europe until the mid-twelfth century, available works, such as Boethius' Latin translations of some of Aristotle’s works, were faithfully preserved and transmitted by monastics, albeit without much innovation in their interpretation.\(^{24}\) But beginning in the late eleventh century, a resurgence in philosophical activity took place with the birth of a new intellectual movement: scholasticism. Certain academics and theologians, such as Anselm of Canterbury and Peter Abelard, began to reevaluate philosophical authorities and develop innovative reconstructions of old systems of thought.\(^{25}\) Scholastics were vigorously engaging with the philosophical texts that they already possessed when the complete corpus of Aristotle and works by Arabic philosophers began to trickle into the Western Christian intellectual world in the mid-twelfth century.\(^{26}\) An example of twelfth-century

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26 Ibid.
scholastic innovations is the *logica modernorum*, a new formal system of logic derived from Stoic sources which went beyond the Aristotelian logic that was currently available.\(^{27}\) When the new translations began to circulate, this surge of critical interest in philosophical reason had already set the stage for their integration into the intellectual milieu of the thirteenth century.\(^{28}\)

Anna Sapir Abulafia argues that with this rising interest in classical learning, both the “old” and the “new,” Christian intellectuals desired to incorporate knowledge from non-Christian sources into a Christian framework due to their exclusive “view of truth.”\(^{29}\) All truth came from God, and so even knowledge from a pagan author should be accepted where it did not conflict with Church doctrine.\(^{30}\) Yet this absorption model had its difficulties. One of the most pressing questions was what the relationship between the authorities of reason and revelation ought to be; if both came from God, could reason then lead to knowledge of God that ordinarily came from revelation? Even in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, conflict over the use of philosophical reasoning that was derived from non-Christian sources was already brewing. The controversy between Lanfranc and Berengar of Tours over the philosophical understanding of the Eucharist was a critical debate which led to diverging views of intellectuals and clergy over how individual reason and Christian authoritative teaching ought to be reconciled.\(^{31}\) Anselm of Canterbury and Peter Abelard exemplify two differing approaches to the problem in the next stage of this debate: both upheld the use of reason in defense of the faith, but Anselm subordinated reason to faith in his dictum, *fides quaerens intellectum* (“faith seeking

\(^{30}\) Marrone, “Medieval Philosophy,” 34.
understanding”), while Abelard took a decidedly more rationalistic approach, even going so far as to argue that God offered another path of revelation through philosophy. Of course, no scholastic argued that reason should be irrelevant to faith (although some monastics such as Bernard of Clairvaux were extremely suspicious of the new movement), but the question of what the proper use of reason ought to be was strongly contested in the twelfth century.

Jews did not have as strong a chain of philosophical traditions throughout their entire history as did Christians; the philosophical and religious synthesis of Jewish thinkers of the Hellenistic diaspora (e.g., Philo) seems to have been largely disconnected from Jewish thought in the Middle Ages, unlike Christians who held their Hellenized Church fathers in high regard. However, many medieval Jewish intellectuals, such as Saadya Gaon, did take a strong interest in philosophy. By the twelfth century, the Jewish approach to pagan and non-Jewish reason had been shaped by contact with other cultures, particularly Islam, and motivated largely by exegetical needs. The Islamic intellectual world provided the background for Jewish approaches to philosophical reason. The Kalam school of the rationalist Mu'tazilites, who thought that one could reach God through reason alone, clashed with the Ash'arites, who were more skeptical of man's ability to comprehend God through reason—the latter eventually won the argument in Islamic society. Within the Jewish community, a parallel conflict was taking place between the Karaites, who accepted only the written law as authoritative, and rabbinic Judaism which relied on the tradition of the oral law as well. These currents caused different

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32 Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 47.
36 Sarah Stroumsa, “Saadya and Jewish kalam,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*
Jewish thinkers to adopt various positions in response to the problem of reason and faith. Some, like Saadya Gaon and Maimonides, were optimistic about reason's ability to explain revealed knowledge—Maimonides even went so far as to subordinate an open, literal reading of religious texts to an esoteric, philosophical one.37 Others, such as Judah Halevi, chose to take a more cautious approach, even while still claiming that logical truths did not necessarily conflict with God's revealed truth.38 Like Christians, Jewish thinkers wanted to harmonize reason and revelation, but attempts to do so diverged widely, as with the early scholastics. This common intellectual drive was likely the cause for the preoccupation with reason's authority shared among Jewish and Christian writers of the major dialogues of this study.

III. Reason in Jewish and Christian Polemics of the Twelfth Century

Despite some instances of amicable cooperation, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity continued to be characterized by polemic in the twelfth century. The Adversus Judaeos tradition which shaped and defined Christian perceptions of Jews had continued uninterrupted from the early church until this time. But in the twelfth century, due to the exposure to Jewish thought and the increase of Jewish communities living within the borders of Christendom, anti-Jewish polemic became all the more intense. Jaroslav Pelikan has argued that the twelfth century saw a tremendous increase in polemical “disputations” compared to the previous centuries.39 Furthermore, polemics began to change substantially; no longer were Christians using Jews as an imagined artifact and tool to define Christian self-image, but now

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38 Schatz, “The Biblical and Rabbinic Background,” 19.
polemic was slowly being tuned towards real arguments voiced by real Jews living in their midst. Eventually, polemic grew more acerbic and harsh than in past centuries, accompanying the growing degradation of the Jewish image in Christian minds.\(^{40}\)

Much of these changing trends in polemic started in the twelfth century, although they did not have the fullest effect until the thirteenth century when they influenced mendicant missionaries in their attempts to convert Jews. Most importantly for our interests, the twelfth century saw the rise of arguments which were based partially or entirely on reason, and not only on Scripture like the vast majority of past *Adversus* polemics. Amos Funkenstein has proposed a broad classification of anti-Jewish polemics written in and after the twelfth century; one of his categories is “rationalistic polemics, attempting a deduction of the Christian dogma or a demonstration of the philosophical superiority of Christianity.”\(^{41}\) He further argued that the “rationalization of religious polemics” was due to the tendency of some twelfth-century scholastics to derive Christian principles *sola ratione*. As we shall see, such a rationalistic approach fits well within the reason-based polemical dialogue of Peter Abelard.\(^{42}\)

Scholars have grappled with this notable shift in polemical strategy, building on and refining Funkenstein's observations. Jeremy Cohen argues that Jews were increasingly thrust conceptually into a wider category of unbelievers, due to a number of factors, such as increased contact with the world outside Christendom.\(^{43}\) This change in the Christian perception of Jews in turn necessitated a wider appeal in polemical treatments. No longer could Christian thinkers appeal to the authority of the Hebrew Bible, since not all infidels accepted it. Conversely, reason-

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40 Funkenstein, “Basic Types,” 373.
based arguments were “universally acceptable” for a broader non-Christian audience. Jews provided an accessible target for this new approach, and served as a model of other outsider groups, such as Muslims. Furthermore, Cohen suggests that this rationalist approach had a hand in the “hollowing out” of the Jews' “privileged other” status which originated from Augustine's doctrine that they were the bearers of the old law.

One of the other interpretations of this change in polemics is what Abulafia terms the “christianization of reason.” Christian scholastics in the twelfth century thought that a proper use of reason would lead one to accept Christian doctrine. Furthermore, these thinkers conceived of reason as a fundamental element of human nature, and the main feature that separates us from beasts; reason was a universal aspect of the human race. Therefore, she argues, this “universalistic construct of humanity based on reason … was deemed to coincide with universal Christendom,” a conception which led to the exclusion of those who were unable to conform to Christian philosophical and religious formulations. The endgame for this development was the notion that Jews were somehow outside the boundaries of humanity itself due to their obstinate inability to assent to the new covenant of Christ. Not only were they blind in their literal interpretation of Scripture and their inability to perceive the spiritual truths therein that predicted the new covenant, but they were irrational and even animalistic in their refusal to accept rational arguments for the Christian faith. Abulafia's theory will be discussed more fully in chapter two.

Jewish anti-Christian polemics were largely a reaction to increased aggressiveness of Christians in this period. While anti-Christian polemics had been written by Jews previously in Islamic territories, dedicated polemical treatises against Christians did not emerge within

Christendom until Christian pressure finally necessitated a response by the late twelfth century. Robert Chazan describes this response as an attempt to “parry” the Christian “thrusts,” intended to provide internal reassurance of the validity of Judaism and the invalidity of Christianity. Since much of Jewish polemic was reactive, it is not unreasonable to argue that the growing Christian emphasis on reason-based argumentation and the charge of Jewish irrationality would be countered and reflected back at Christians. Daniel J. Lasker argues that Jewish twelfth-century polemicists placed an emphasis on rational argumentation, which reflects the same emphasis in Christian polemics. Lasker, in his lengthy survey of medieval Jewish philosophical arguments against Christianity, has also noted the importance of the Sephardic context for later polemics; philosophy and polemic walked “hand in hand” for Jewish intellectuals. Sephardic Jews who migrated to northern Christian kingdoms brought both traditions with them, enabling Jews living in northern Europe to compose more comprehensive responses to Christian attack. Since philosophy was heavily integrated into the Sephardic intellectual milieu, Jewish scholars were already considering the problems that reason posed to revealed authority by the time the first polemics appeared in Christian lands, and such considerations appear within their strikes on Christianity. Judah Halevi's magnum opus The Kuzari exemplifies this kind of examination of reason and revelation in the context of a polemical dialogue.

Finally, Alex Novikoff points out the convergence of these two arenas—the intellectual conflict between Christians and Jews and the debate over reason and revelation—in three

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50 Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics,* xxi.
significant literary dialogues of the early twelfth century: Peter Abelard's *Collationes*, Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, and Peter Alfonsi's *Dialogue against the Jews*. The role of reason in religion was a major issue for the authors of these works, and each proposed differing models for the harmonization of reason with the authority of revelation, which Novikoff delineates in his paper. I agree with much of what he has written, and my own work will run along similar lines, albeit with a different emphasis and analytical bent. My study is less focused on the specific philosophical argumentation and notions of natural law in these dialogues, which Novikoff covers extensively, and more on how the idea of reason was adopted as a rhetorical and polemical device.

**IV. Reason and Polemical Dialogue**

The literary genre of dialogue has a long history of use in philosophy and theology: one only need think of Plato's Socratic dialogues to realize that the format of discourse played a significant role before its adoption in the Christian tradition. Cicero also wrote a number of philosophical dialogues between representatives of various viewpoints and schools, and this genre was adopted by the Roman Christian philosopher Boethius in his monumental and immensely influential work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. In the Middle Ages, dialogue was not unique to polemic, but rather it was used in a variety of other settings and for different purposes. Many medieval dialogues took the form of a student-teacher disputation, a form which was widely used from Alcuin. Anselm wrote his famous *Cur Deus Homo* in this format,

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51 Alex Novikoff, "Reason and Natural Law in the Disputational Writings of Peter Alfonsi, Peter Abelard, and Yehuda Halevi," in *Christian Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Middle Ages*, ed. Michael Frassetto (New York: Routledge, 2007), 109-136.
52 John Marenbon, “The Emergence of Medieval Latin Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval
drawing from Augustine's own early philosophical dialogues. Justin Martyr's polemic does not stand alone before the twelfth century in its use of dialogue, but rather the genre was common in *Adversus Judaeos* literature. Given its ubiquitous status, being used in philosophical, theological, and polemical contexts, it is not a surprise that dialogue was used by twelfth-century Christian authors to work out the convergent problems of both reason and Judaism. For Jewish polemicists, dialogue may have been picked up mostly in response to Christian use, as the few anti-Christian works prior to the late twelfth century were generally not dialogues; however, there were exceptions, such as Halevi's unique work in which Christianity is briefly featured.

Before embarking on an examination of reason as an authority in twelfth-century Jewish and Christian dialogues, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the four major works which comprise the majority of source material in this study. These works are significant for several reasons: while the influence of these works varies widely, they exemplify the intellectual and polemical trends of the time, and exhibit diverse approaches to reason, but with the common traits that I have remarked on above. Their size and depth give a great deal of material to reflect upon, and so are prime representatives of the different styles of polemical dialogue and various types of reason-based arguments. Two of these works were authored by Christians and two by Jews. The first work by Peter Abelard (1079-1142), likely written between 1123-35, was commonly titled *Dialogus inter philosophum, Iudaem et Christianum*. John Marenbon, in his critical edition of the work, argues for the original title of *Collationes*, due to the unique structure of the dialogue and the references Abelard himself made to the work. In truth, there are two dialogues: the first between the characters of the Philosopher and the Jew, and the second

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53 Ibid.
between the Philosopher and the Christian. The Jew and Christian barely interact, since Abelard seems to have intended to present a comparative analysis of reason and the ethical foundations of Judaism and Christianity with a neutral figure as a guide—hence the title, meaning both “discussion” and “comparison.”55 The work starts out as a dream, in which the three figures appear before Abelard and request that he act as a judge in their debate. While Abelard himself is not present in most of the work, his own voice often comes through the Philosopher and the Christian when advocating his own positions. Abelard's background has already been mentioned above; his rationalist approach to religion and his pursuit of systematic theology are heavily reflected in much of the content of this work. Significantly for us, the question of the role of reason takes up a great portion of the text.

Peter Alfonsi (ca. 11-12th c.) wrote his *Dialogue against the Jews* (ca. 1109) from the unique perspective of a Jewish convert to Christianity.56 Not much is known about his early life, except that he received a strong education as a Jew living in Islamic Spain, which included scientific and medical knowledge that would become significant in this later written attack on his former religion.57 The reason for his conversion, according to his own account, was purely rational, with no material motivations.58 His dialogue can be seen as a kind of justification of that claim to his former fellow Jews or new Christian friends, since he spent one half of the work demonstrating the rational reasons for rejecting Judaism, and the other half defending his new beliefs as a Christian. The dialogue takes place between fictional representations of his past and current selves, the former named Moses (his former Jewish name) and the latter with his

55 Ibid.
57 Resnick, introduction to *Dialogue against the Jews*, 10-11.
Christian name of Peter. The background context for this work is the *Reconquista*: Peter originated from the town of Huesca, and he wrote his dialogue about a decade after the town had been taken from the Muslim kingdom of Saragossa by King Pedro I of Aragon in 1097.\(^5^9\)

Also living during the Reconquista was a Jew who remained loyal to the faith of his fathers: Judah Halevi (1075/86-1141). While well-educated and well versed in philosophy, Halevi considered himself more of a poet than a philosopher.\(^6^0\) This likely fueled his more critical and reserved approach when considering the relationship between philosophical reason and religious truth in his life's work, *The Kuzari*.\(^6^1\) This five-book dialogue is based on the legendary account of the conversion of the Khazar king to Judaism. In Halevi's version, the king, seeking out the right way of honoring God, calls on a Philosopher, a Christian, a Muslim, and a Rabbi to demonstrate the validity of their belief systems before him, so that he can convert to the religion of the representative who gives him the best answer. The subtitle for the work, “a book of proof and argument: an apology for a despised religion,” poignantly illustrates the intent and context of the work. Halevi was attempting to give an apologetic for the validity of Judaism, which had suffered oppression and contempt from Islam and Christianity, while also demonstrating that other two great religions which fought over the known world were ultimately inferior, despite their earthly success. However, the vast majority of the dialogue consists of the Rabbi responding to the king's interrogation on theological and philosophical matters which do not pertain directly to the other two faiths. Instead, the Rabbi takes the Philosopher's position more seriously and comments on that character's arguments even when he is no longer present in

\(^{59}\) Resnick, introduction to *Dialogue against the Jews*, 9.


the dialogue, as Novikoff notes.62 This fact demonstrates the importance that the issue of reason and revelation played for Halevi's dialogue, and its relevance to this study (despite the limited treatment of Christianity in The Kuzari).

Finally, Joseph Kimhi (1105-1170) wrote his Sefer ha-Berit (“The Book of the Covenant”) ca. 1160-70.63 Having fled the Almohad invasion of Spain in 1148, he settled in Provence and joined the flourishing Jewish intellectual community in Narbonne.64 Kimhi’s work was one of the first polemical treatises expressly aimed at Jewish-Christian disputation.65 He introduced the study of philosophy into Provence and translated some Jewish philosophical works into Hebrew.66 While he was not a philosopher, Kimhi held to a rationalist approach to religious tradition. Therefore, while much of the Covenant deals with exegetical arguments, the appeal to reason appears throughout the work, along with some reason-based attacks on Christian doctrine and the common theme of Christianity's inherent irrationality.67 The dialogue takes place between a min, an apostate from Judaism (to Christianity), and a ma'amín, a faithful adherent of Judaism, who refutes the min's arguments. Much of the dialogue is a direct response to real Christian arguments and doctrines, with the intention of protecting individuals from straying from Judaism, like Peter Alfonsi had.68

66 Talmage, The Book of the Covenant, 12.
68 Talmage, The Book of the Covenant, 23.
The outline of this paper is as follows: in the first chapter, I will establish how the authors of these dialogues appealed to reason as a universal authority, while simultaneously constructing their own vision of the proper use of reason in conjunction with religious authority, so that the author could then advance his arguments on this foundation. My central argument in this chapter is that despite the differences of faith between these writers, and the fact that each one had a different perspective on what constituted a proper use of reason in religion, they all upheld some form of secular reason as an authority. In the second chapter, I will further explore how each writer presented his own religion as capable of fulfilling the standards of his model for the relationship between reason and faith, while portraying the opposing religion as having failed that model—in effect, accusing the enemy camp of being inherently irrational. I argue that this strategy followed directly from the appeal to reason, as the authority of reason (of the type that the author chose) was the standard by which he justified his own faith and condemned that of his opponent. In the third chapter, I will compare and contrast the various ways in which the personification of Judaism, Christianity, and in some dialogues, Philosophy itself, could help these authors build their respective cases for the right use of reason and the capacity of either religion for compatibility with reason. I argue for two styles of dialogue which distinguish each author's particular polemical method: the open disputative style, which featured the two standard characters who represented the two religions alongside a third figure who represented independent rational judgment, was used by some polemicists to present their cases in a more nuanced manner. What I label as the didactic style of dialogue, in which only the first two characters appeared, and which featured the author's own religion in a dominant role, was used by other polemicists as a more direct method of attacking the opposing faith. In the conclusion of
this study, I will briefly consider the impact and possible influences of these dialogues.
Chapter 1
Reason as Authority in Dialogue

The most remarkable feature of these four dialogues is the consistent appeal to the authority of some form of secular reason, which is present in every text, regardless of the particular fashion in which each author made this appeal or the type of reason that he used. In this chapter, I will examine each dialogue to determine how reason was established as a universal authority, how it was modeled by the protagonist characters, and what specific kinds of reasoning were upheld in this process. Some authors of twelfth-century dialogues, such as Abelard and Halevi, developed a more nuanced consideration of the role of reason in religious matters, while others, like Alfonsi and Kimhi, made a more blunt appeal to its authority against an imagined opponent. I will show that despite these and other differences in the types of reasoning that were employed, all these authors, on both sides of the religious divide, accepted and adopted some form of reason into their polemical works, and therefore made the explicit or implicit claim that right reason and true faith should agree. This shared appeal strongly suggests that common internal pressures and concerns about reason existed within each religious community, and that these polemicists all saw the need for an independent authority in interreligious debate. Before engaging in an analysis of the texts, I will first discuss what an appeal to reason meant for Jewish and Christian thinkers of this period, and examine the particular sorts of reasoning that were employed in polemical dialogue.
I. The Use of Reason in Polemic

Since the beginning of the Jewish-Christian debate in the first century, the primary subject matter in contention was the Hebrew scriptures. Until the twelfth century, the vast majority of polemical material on the Christian side drew from passages in the Old Testament that exegetes argued prefigured the coming of Christ and his new covenant. The task of Christian polemicists was twofold: first, it was necessary to appeal to the authority of the Old Testament/Tanakh, since the foundation of Christianity lay in the elder religious tradition, and both groups held that text as authoritative. They could not rely on the New Testament gospels as proof that Jesus was God and that his incarnation was necessary for mankind's salvation, for the very simple reason that Jews did not accept it as inspired scripture—in fact, they regarded it contemptuously, as can be readily demonstrated from the Toledot Yeshu and certain passages from the Babylonian Talmud. Therefore, Christians had to rely on the text that both groups held in common as the word of God to show Jews the error of their ways. The second challenge proceeded directly from the first: Jews believed in the authority of the Old Testament scriptures, yet why could they not see the christological meaning within the text, which Christians found so apparent? The answer lay in a supposed difference of exegetical methods between the two religions. Christians argued for the validity of their interpretation by claiming the superiority of their spiritual, non-literal exegesis of Scripture. Jews, conversely, interpreted their scriptures literally and materialistically without taking heed of the deeper meanings hidden within (which, of course, was not the case, as Jewish exegetes could employ a non-literal reading of Scripture as well). Thus, Christian polemicists had to simultaneously appeal to the authority of the text,

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70 Joseph Kimhi, for instance, argued in The Book of the Covenant that one should interpret the Torah allegorically
while arguing for a methodology that fit their doctrinal objectives.

When rational argumentation became a part of the polemical milieu in the twelfth century, its implementation followed a parallel process. If a polemicist was to appeal to reason in debate, he was acting with the assumption that the opposing side accepted reason as an authority, just as they accepted the scriptures. However, there were problems with this presupposition: just as there was contention over what version of the scriptures was valid (Christians relied on the Latin Vulgate with apocryphal books from the Septuagint, which the Jews rejected), so there could also be debates over what type of reasoning was authoritative (e.g., reason derived from Aristotelian philosophy, or “reason” from empirical evidence of miracles). Moreover, the question of reason’s role in a religious context was not settled in either community at this time, and since polemic was just as much intended for an internal audience as it was as an attack on outsiders, the assertion that reason was a universal authority in religious debate could be problematic. In fact, we shall see that some of the polemicists we will examine consciously devoted much of their dialogue to considering reason’s rightful place. Furthermore, just as it was necessary to explain the proper method for interpreting authoritative scriptures, polemicists who utilized reason faced a similar problem. If the members of the opposing religion could use reason just as well as those of one’s own faith, then why didn’t they reach the same conclusions? One obvious and simple answer was that they were intrinsically irrational, a solution which will be explored in the next chapter. At the same time, polemicists who felt that the doctrines of their faith could be derived rationally (or at least were in agreement with reason) needed to demonstrate the appropriate use of reason necessary to reach their conclusions—or reject those doctrines which they thought contradicted reason. For the four main writers examined here, this

when reason demands it; 47-8.
approach could take the shape of a discussion between the characters of the dialogue, or by the author making an explicit appeal to reason and modeling its use by way of his argumentation. The two processes of making an appeal to reason and showing its “correct” use went hand in hand, as we will see in this chapter and the next.

But when an author made an appeal to “reason,” what exactly did he mean by this term? Anna Sapir Abulafia notes the difficulty in determining which of the overlapping notions of reason twelfth-century thinkers were using at a given time.71 She provides several different uses of the term: ratio technically referred to “the intuitive quality that human beings possess and with which they are able to perceive truth,” which originates with God.72 Abulafia links this conception of reason to influences on medieval intellectuals from Stoic thinkers. Indeed, reason could also refer to the doctrines of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. Finally, reason could in a looser sense mean a “methodical use of data.”73 On the Jewish side, a parallel use of the term “reason” appeared in the first responses to Christian polemics; Daniel Lasker notes that Joseph Kimhi and Jacob ben Reuben employed the Hebrew word sekhel which “reflected” the Christian use of ratio.74 But even if an author did not use ratio/sekhel itself, different kinds of cognitive functions that could be associated with “reason” were relied upon, such as an appeal to empirical evidence. This should not come as a surprise, since moderns also tend to equivocate on the terms “reason,” “logic,” and even sometimes “science,” and blur the distinctions between them. In the twelfth century, when various philosophies and sciences were being reinvented or “rediscovered” by Latin Christians, or were

71 Abulafia, Christians and Jews, 25.
72 Abulafia, Christians and Jews, 23.
73 Abulafia, Christians and Jews, 24-25.
already heavily integrated into the intellectual milieu of Sephardic Jews, it was easy for a polemicist who admired these disciplines to rely on various fields of inquiry as one authoritative whole under the label of “reason” in order to prove his point.

In order to better understand how these authors utilized a variety of types of argumentation in their appeal to “reason,” I will briefly offer a categorization of the uses of reason that expands upon Abulafia’s analysis of the term. The broadest definition which applies to all the possible types of reason that a polemicist might employ is simply any use of critical thinking which lay outside religious intellectual tradition. Of course, even this category could be violated, as some polemicists could integrate religious authority into what was promised to be an argument from reason—a prime example being the bait and switch in Gilbert Crispin’s *Dialogus cum Gentili*, when he claims he will argue *sola ratione* but then relies heavily on Scripture.75

Given that polemics were first and foremost internally directed, and with the inchoate conception of reason in this period, it should expected that scriptural and rational arguments were sometimes blurred together. Barring these exceptions, however, arguments from reason were generally based in the category of religiously neutral thought.

Most of these arguments drew from one of five specific uses of reason. First, much rational thought was derived from the philosophical concepts and methodologies of ancient pagan philosophers, such as natural law and logic. This includes the method of dialectical reasoning itself, to which the form of these polemical dialogues can be traced (although the function and purpose of medieval polemics were quite far removed from those of ancient dialectics). For Jews, philosophical tradition could also include the Kalam schools of thought. One should keep in mind that polemicists did not necessarily consider the entire corpus of

ancient philosophy as uniformly authoritative, Halevi's skepticism of Aristotelian thought being a prime example—yet even he paid some respect to philosophical reasoning where he thought it was reliable.

The second type of reason consisted of arguments from nature, which could either be appeals to scientific and medical knowledge (physica), or analogies from nature for theological concepts. Repeated uses of the former appear in Peter Alfonsi's dialogue, and examples of the latter can be found in several other Christian dialogues. Odo of Tournai and Pseudo-William of Champeaux both used the analogy of light shining through glass to explain to Jews how God could incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary without limiting himself. Like with arguments based on philosophical doctrines, the assumption behind arguments from nature was that such knowledge was neutral and universally accepted, so that opponents could not deny the foundation of one's argument.

Somewhat more unstable, however, were the appeals to the three other types of reason, which were more contested among different polemicists. The third possible type was empirical reasoning: some authors argued for the truth of their religious faith on the grounds of evidence, namely the sense experience of miracles. Judah Halevi, as we shall see, rested much of his case for rabbinic Judaism on what he argued was the reliable record of God's appearance to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai, and Peter the Venerable also made a similar case for Christianity by appealing to miracles at the tomb of Jesus, which he argued “human intellect” must accept. As Abulafia notes, Peter believed that evidence from miracles fit within the boundaries of rational argumentation, since everyone can observe and understand their meaning. Halevi advanced his

76 Abulafia, Christians and Jews, 81-4.
77 Abulafia, Christians and Jews, 87-8.
arguments from miracle claims from the starting point of skeptical criticism of other religious claims, so in a sense he saw such proofs as a kind of reason. However, such attempts were far less inclined to success, since miracle claims are rarely believable except to the faithful, and those miracles that were accepted across religious borders (such as the appearance of God to Israel at Mt. Sinai) had an alternative interpretation within the opposing tradition. The fourth kind of reasoning was rationally derived exegesis, which some authors, such as Peter Alfonsi and Joseph Kimhi, employed to demonstrate a correct understanding of Scripture which did not conflict with other types of reason (generally philosophical or scientific reason). Notice the blurring of scriptural and rational argumentation; this attempt was not likely to be as successful either, since the scriptural arena had already existed for some time, and both traditions brought their own exegetical baggage to the debate. Fifth and finally, Jewish thinkers could sometimes appeal to what Lasker and other scholars refer to as “common sense” reasoning, or what I argue constitutes a kind of folk reason. Lasker notes that this form of reason was grounded on the value judgments of Jewish theologians which Christians did not share (although apparently Jewish polemicists were not aware of this, or did not care).78 The most prevalent example of this tactic is the argument that the Christian doctrine of the Virgin Birth is intrinsically absurd, since it implies that God became incarnate in the “filthy womb and the menstrual blood” of a woman, as is argued in *The Polemic of Nestor Priest*, a ninth-century Jewish polemic which heavily influenced Joseph Kimhi and Jacob ben Reuben.79 This attack rests on the unstated assumption that there is something inherently unclean about female anatomy, which could be traced to Jewish ritual purity laws and social customs, not any kind of universally accepted reason. However, this

method was also mixed with appeals to philosophical reason (in this case, the notion that God could be limited to a finite space was sometimes argued to contradict logic).

This very argument was employed by the Jewish character in Odo of Tournai’s early twelfth-century dialogue, *Disputatio contra Judaeum Leonem*. 80 Leo states, “You say that God was conceived within his mother's womb, surrounded by vile fluid, and suffered enclosure within this foul prison for nine months…. (who is not embarrassed by such a scene!). Thus you attribute to God what is most unbecoming.”81 Odo meets this assault with a different line of reasoning:

Moreover, there are two ways by which we judge all things: sense and reason. But reason judges in one way and sense another. For sense judges by usefulness, pleasure, desire, and their contraries…. Reason investigates the nature of things more subtly. Reason prefers animated things to inanimate, sensible to insensible, and heavenly to earthly…. So too our sense despises our genitalia, viscera, and excrement, and judges them unclean. Reason, however, judges nothing unclean but sin because God created all things good (Gen 1:10).82

Here we see how various types of rational strategies could be utilized, and how the interplay between them complicated broader appeals to “reason” as a whole. Leo argues from commonsensical notions of the body and divine behavior, while Odo counters with a vaguely platonic argument against intuitive notions derived from the senses, and for abstract and pure “reason” which sees through the sensory world to the true nature of things. Oddly enough, Odo himself makes an analogy to the rays of the sun to explain the possibility of God's incarnation, relying to some degree on sensory input for understanding theological concepts.83 This example demonstrates how complex, and sometimes contradictory, the appeal to reason could become,

80 Odo of Tournai, *On Original Sin; and, A Disputation with the Jew, Leo, Concerning the Advent of Christ, the Son of God: Two Theological Treatises*, trans. Irven M. Resnick (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

81 Odo of Tournai, *A Disputation with the Jew*, 95.

82 Odo of Tournai, *A Disputation with the Jew*, 96.

83 Odo of Tournai, *A Disputation with the Jew*, 95.
and how appeals to different kinds of reasoning could clash in a dialogue setting.

Odo's *Disputatio* reflects how the appeal to reason could be integrated into polemical dialogue. The importance of reason to both disputants could be affirmed by having the protagonist character assert reason as an authority, and having the antagonist accept the proposition. In the dialogue, Odo explains the importance of reason over sense perception, and puts it to use to demonstrate the incarnation of Christ. Leo assents to his exposition, stating that “I hear what I have not heard before so fully articulated; before this, I did not know that you have [sic] the support of so many reasoned arguments.” Thus, Odo could model the correct use of reason before a presumably critical audience, and have his opponent accept his method, allowing his arguments to succeed on the dialectical stage. We will see further uses of this same strategy, with particular clarity in Peter Alfonsi's dialogue.

The *Disputatio* is a didactic setting between two characters: Odo instructs Leo, and Leo agrees with or questions Odo. This model was common to polemical dialogues in the twelfth century, and is best exemplified in the dialogues of Alfonsi and Kimhi. But another type of setting was also used by several authors in the same period: Peter Abelard and Judah Halevi both employed a model for dialogue that was more akin to an open-ended disputation between several characters. The interlocutors in their dialogues are less aggressive and condescending towards one another, and a spirit of mutual understanding and desire for the truth tends to prevail. This setting, as we shall see, was largely a rhetorical device which supported the lengthy discussions on reason and authority that are carried out in these dialogues. While Alfonsi and Kimhi present their version of reason as an authority matter-of-factly, and their opponent characters agree or silently acquiesce, Abelard and Halevi explore the use of reason in a more detailed and nuanced

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84 Odo of Tournai, *A Disputation with the Jew*, 97.
fashion, and place appeals to it in the mouths of multiple characters to achieve uniform assent. I will discuss these two styles of dialogue more fully in chapter three, but for now we will turn to an examination of the appeal to reason.

II. Peter Abelard, Collationes

Of all the polemical dialogues in covered in this study, and of most of the other dialogues of the twelfth century, Peter Abelard's *Collationes* focuses heavily on the question of reason's rightful place. As I shall demonstrate, Abelard's goal in discussing the use of reason was to establish it as the foremost guide in religious debate by using all three of the characters of the dialogue to affirm its authority. By the time Peter Abelard wrote this work ca. 1126-35, several other Christian thinkers had already written dialogues in which they also relied on the use of reason in arguing their case. The first instance of rational argumentation in the form of dialogue in and about the twelfth century was *Cur Deus Homo* by Anselm of Canterbury, in which he attempted to demonstrate “for what reason and on the basis of what necessity” God needed to become man in order to atone for humanity's sin.85 His approach was grounded on theological reasoning independent of scriptural support, but not, as he explains, to establish the foundation of religious belief on reason alone, but in the words of his fictional Christian interlocutor, Boso:

> Just as right order requires that we believe in the deep matters of the Christian faith before we presume to discuss them rationally, so it seems to me to be an instance of carelessness if, having been confirmed in faith, we do not eagerly desire to understand what we believe. Indeed, assisted by the prevenient grace of God I am, it seems to me, holding so steadfastly to faith in our redemption that even if I were not in any respect able to understand what I believe, nothing could wrest me from firmness of faith.86

Thus, Anselm understood reason's role in religion to be a method of confirming and understanding what is believed on the basis of faith alone—a view best illustrated by his dictum *fides querens intellectum*, which was intended as the original title of his *Proslogion*.\(^8^7\) Anselm's dialogue was influential on several other writers; Gilbert Crispin's *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani* and its continuation, *Disputatio Christiani cum Gentili*, extended Anselm's approach to reason in defense of faith to debate with external opponents of Christianity.\(^8^8\) Gilbert attempted to draw from reason following Anselm's arguments for the Incarnation, but he still relied heavily on scriptural authority, even when he promised to provide rational arguments (the Gentile leaves the dialogue when Gilbert refuses to give a rational defense of the Trinity).\(^8^9\) As Abulafia points out, Anselm's principle could not prove effective against disbelief, since it required preexisting belief.\(^9^0\) Thus, applying this approach to reason to debate with voices hostile to Christian beliefs was doomed to failure, as the breakdown in communication between Christians and *infideles* is apparent even in the context of fictional dialogue.

Abelard, however, took a less fideistic direction in his dialogue which avoided the pitfall created by Anselm's view of reason in disputation with non-believers. This is apparent in two points of contrast between the *Collationes* and the dialogues of Anselm, Gilbert Crispin, and others, such as Odo of Tournai and Peter Damian (some of whom may have influenced Abelard).\(^9^1\) Philosophical reason—dialectical argumentation, logic, and natural law—takes a far more prominent position of authority in Abelard's dialogue, unlike the Anselmian model which

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\(^8^7\) Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 41; Steve Marrone, “Medieval Philosophy in Context.” 23.
\(^9^0\) Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 79.
\(^9^1\) Marenbon, introduction to *Collationes*, xi.
places reason below the authority of Christian revelation and expects it to be used only after belief has been secured. Abelard seems to have been cognizant of the problem that results from this view in defending the faith to unbelievers, and so he proceeded to establish reason as an independent arbiter of truth, with which (he thought) Christian belief could be justified. In order to do this, Abelard spent a considerable amount of space in the dialogue pondering reason's role in religious debate, unlike Anselm, Gilbert, and Odo, who more casually acknowledged reason's importance but quickly moved on to arguments over doctrine and Scripture. The debate over reason appears in three progressive stages in the *Collationes*: in the introductory open discussion with all three disputants and Abelard himself, in the first dialogue between the Philosopher and the Jew, and in the second dialogue between the Philosopher and the Christian.

The *Collationes* opens as a dream, in which “three men, each coming on a different path”—the Philosopher, Jew, and Christian—appear to Abelard and ask for him to judge their disputation: “We have been discussing and arguing about our differing faiths for a long time; now, finally, we have come to submit ourselves to your judgement.” The Philosopher explains how, driven by his quest to discover the highest good, he investigated “the various faiths into which the world is now divided,” in order to discover and follow the one that was “most consonant with reason.” Yet having discovered that “the Jews were stupid and the Christians mad,” and holding fruitless debate with the two men of faith present, he states that he and his fellow disputants will submit their arguments to Abelard's judgment, since “you, we knew, are familiar both with the force of philosophical reasoning, and with the cases which both laws make

92 Abelard, *Collationes*, 1.
93 Abelard, *Collationes*, 2.
in their own defense.” 94 Two points here reveal Abelard's approach to reason and faith: the entire debate is driven by the Philosopher's desire to determine each religion's compatibility (or lack thereof) with reason; reason is the standard by which each faith must be tested. Moreover, the debate is placed before the independent judgment of a man who is skilled in reasoning and knowledgeable in both “philosophy and sacred doctrine”—a man none other than Abelard himself, as the Philosopher attests in his long string of flatteries of the scholastic's intellectual accomplishments. 95 Knowledge of philosophy and reason, not just Scripture and doctrine, is necessary to judge the veracity of contradictory religious systems.

Furthermore, Abelard seems to have thought that reason as an authority in interreligious debate held a greater advantage over the authority of Scripture. Speaking directly in the dialogue, Abelard agrees to the Philosopher's request, while accepting the Philosopher's supremacy in the debate:

But you, Philosopher, who profess no law and yield only to reasoning, should not consider it anything great if you appear to be the strongest in this contest, since you have two swords for the fight, but the others battle against you with only one. You are able to use both written authority and reasoning against them, but they cannot base any objections to your position on a written law, since you follow no law; and also the fact that you, being more accustomed to reasoning, have a fuller philosophical armoury, means that it is harder for them to tackle you by reasoning. 96

For Abelard, ratio is superior to scriptum in adjudicating contests between religions, as it stands apart from the constraints of scriptural dogma. The Philosopher is in a better position to scrutinize each faith, while the Jew and Christian must justify their doctrines to the Philosopher on the basis on reason alone—they cannot appeal to the authority of the text, as they might in a debate with each other. Later on, the Philosopher argues that he should question the others first

94 Abelard, Collationes, 3.
95 Abelard, Collationes, 4.
96 Abelard, Collationes, 5.
“since I content myself with natural law, which is the first law,” and to which “the teaching of your laws adds to them various commands to do with external signs, which seem entirely superfluous to us.”

Perhaps Abelard realized the fruitlessness of endlessly repeating scriptural arguments against Jews, who held to an entirely different exegetical method than Christians. Abelard could offer another way of demonstrating the inferiority of Judaism in the independent court of reason—but that way would require submitting faith to the authority of reason, and not vice versa as Anselm would have had it.

In discussion with the Philosopher, both the Jew and the Christian accept the rationalist standard, and attempt to demonstrate that their respective tradition's law is aligned with reason. In the first *collatio* between the Jew and Philosopher, the latter makes an interesting further argument for the authority of reason over tradition. He challenges both the Jew and the Christian, who “rely especially on a written law”:

Is there some reason which led you to your particular faiths, or are you following here common opinion alone and love of your own people? Should the first alternative be the case, it deserves full approval, whereas the other alternative is entirely unacceptable. But I believe that in his conscience no person of judgement would deny that it is the second which is true—especially since we see frequent examples of it…. For there is a love naturally present within all people for their own race and for those with whom they are brought up, which makes them shrink with horror from anything which is said against their faith; and, turning what they have become accustomed to into part of their nature, as adults they doggedly hold whatever they learnt as children, and before they are able to grasp the things that are said, they affirm that they believe them.

The Philosopher further quotes the sixth-century Christian philosopher Boethius saying that things learned in childhood should not be held as sacred, and observes that society comes to hold


98 It is important to distinguish between this stance taken here in the dialogue, and Abelard's views about reason's authority over faith in general. As Marenbon notes, Abelard advanced conflicting views on reason and faith, sometimes seeming to adopt a fideistic approach, and other times a rationalistic one (Marenbon, introduction to *Collationes*, lvi). Nevertheless, Abelard's views in the *Collationes* are distinctly rationalistic, at least in so far as it is necessary for each religion to defend its validity to the Philosopher.

views which are never challenged nor investigated, leading people to profess beliefs that they
don't even understand. Remarkably, the Jew fully agrees with the Philosopher, further arguing
that when children “have grown up and are now able to decide according to their own choice,
they should be left to depend on their own judgment, not another's: it is not right to follow
opinion rather than seeking out the truth.”

He quickly adds that Jews hold to their beliefs, not because they were originally raised in them, but “it is reasoning rather than opinion which now keeps us in [our faith].” Thus, the Jew accepts the Philosopher's criterion for a rational belief system, and adopts the appeal to reason as a foundation for the validity of his faith. Throughout the rest of the dialogue, the Jew attempts to show that the old law is consistent with reason, even if it cannot be proven by reason to outsiders. Of course, the Philosopher goes on to reveal the inconsistency and irrelevance of the Jew's position using reason and natural law, which we will examine more fully in the next chapter. However, it is important to note that the Jew accepts reason's authority—a device which allows Abelard to more fully demonstrate Judaism's critical failure as a candidate for rational religion, rather than simply making the Jew reject reason altogether.

The Christian also accepts the rational standard; he and the Philosopher work out a more developed model for the relationship between reason and religious authority. After a discussion of moral philosophy, the Philosopher praises the Church for having converted the Greek philosophers who relied on reason. The Christian asks the Philosopher why, if he takes their teachings as authoritative, he does not follow their example and convert as well, to which the Philosopher replies:

We do not yield to [the ancient philosophers'] authority in the sense that we fail to discuss

100 Abelard, Collationes, 12.
rationally what they have said before we accept it. Otherwise we would cease to be philosophers—that is to say, if we put aside rational enquiry and made great use of arguments from authority, which are considered to require little skill and are entirely without connection to the matter in hand, and are based on opinion rather than the truth.\textsuperscript{101}

Here, Abelard sets forth his model for reasoning using the Philosopher as an example. Religious authority is valuable, but must be considered rationally and not relied upon without continuous reappraisal. When the Christian suggests that Christ is the source of natural law and “true wisdom,” the Philosopher then applies his principle to Christian thought as well:

If only you were able to convince your own people of what you are saying, so that you would show yourselves truly as logicians, armed with verbal reasoning, through what, as you say, is the highest wisdom, which you call in Greek the *logos* and in Latin the 'word of God'—and not put to me that commonly cited escape-clause for wretches provided by your Gregory when he said, 'Faith lacks merit when human reason provides proof for it.' … For if faith should not be discussed rationally at all, otherwise it will lose its merit, and what should be believed should not be considered by the mind's judgment, but one should assent immediately to what is preached, it serves no purpose to pick out any errors which are sown by preaching, because where reason is not permitted to be used, reason is not permitted to refute anything.\textsuperscript{102}

The Philosopher ties together a rejection of fideism (placing faith before reason) with the necessity of relying on reason when convincing others of religious error. If one cannot rationally judge what one believes, and reason is rejected or relegated beneath blind faith, then it will be of no use in attempting to convince others of the falsity of their beliefs and the veracity of Christianity. The Philosopher's criticism targets real opinions within Church tradition which cast doubt on the utility of reason in matters of faith. No doubt Abelard recognized the critical flaw in fideistic thinking, especially as Christianity was charged with the task of grappling with hostile belief systems that did not share its authorities. The Philosopher gives an example of attempting debate with an “idolater”: if the Christian attempts to criticize him, the idolater can simply turn

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Abelard, *Collationes*, 70.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Abelard, *Collationes*, 72.
\end{itemize}
the same fideistic logic on the Christian by triumphantly asserting “faith lacks merit.” As the Philosopher concludes, “[The fideist Christian] cannot rightly use reasoning to attack anyone about the faith, since he does not at all allow himself to engage in attacks.”

Ultimately, the Christian accepts this model for the relationship between reason and faith, but first he hesitates and points out that reason can lead one astray. The Philosopher counters by observing that religious authorities themselves can contain error just the same, and if reason does not take priority, then one would have to accept all views without discrimination. In philosophical debate, he continues, authority has the “lowest place,” as one relying on it merely borrows from the opinion of others instead of using their own reasoning abilities. Error in reason comes about in those who lack skill—such as Jews—but God can aid us where we are deficient. Somewhat ironically, he draws from Christian authorities, such as Boethius and Augustine, to convince the Christian of these and other arguments, which perhaps reveals a tacit admittance that authority still holds powerful sway in religious debate. Apparently, this strategy succeeds, as the Christian finally agrees:

For sure, none of our writers who has good judgment prohibits the faith from being investigated and discussed by argument, nor is it reasonable to accept what is doubtful, unless the reason why it should be accepted is first proposed. When the reason brings about faith in the thing doubted then it becomes itself exactly what you call an argument. Indeed, debate, both about texts and about views, makes itself a part of every discipline, and in every clash of disputation truth established by reasoning is more solid than the display of authority.

He further states that reasoned argument in support of a matter of faith is more reliable than authority, since there is always doubt about the correct interpretation of the text, while

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103 Abelard, Collationes, 72.
104 Paraphrasing Boethius in De topicis differentiis I; see Abelard, Collationes, 77, n.41.
105 Abelard, Collationes, 77.
reasoning—even if it is unsound—does not give any cause to doubt on its own merit.\textsuperscript{106} This a significant point for reason's importance in Christian confrontations with Jews, since so much of the debate between the two faiths ended in an impasse over exegesis. Indeed, he adds:

There is all the less reason to use authority with you [the Philosopher], the more you rely on reason and the less you recognize the authority of holy scripture. No one can be countered except on the basis of what he agrees to; he will not be convinced save through what he accepts. You and I must conduct our dispute differently from the way I and my Christian colleagues would dispute together.\textsuperscript{107}

Thus, the Christian assents to the supremacy of reason in interreligious debate on the basis that it is an authority which can be accepted by both sides of the divide. All members of the \textit{Collationes} are in agreement on the necessity of reason, but as we shall see in the next chapter, the Jew ultimately proves incapable of defending his beliefs rationally, while the Christian successfully adapts to the criteria of rational argumentation, and promotes Abelard's conception of Christ as the source of reason itself.

Before moving on to an examination of Judah Halevi's dialogue, it is worth noting the setting of Abelard's dialogue and how it fertilizes this approach to reason as authority. The congenial and relatively tolerant atmosphere of the \textit{Collationes} allows for all characters to voice their assent to reason's dictate without sounding forced or artificial (at least in the Christian medieval context). Halevi also created a comparable setting of open disputation which helped develop his approach to the role of philosophy and reason. While it is unlikely that the two thinkers ever met or exchanged ideas, there is a remarkable level of similarity in form and even some content, although the two writers reached rather different conclusions on the question of the role of reason in religion.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., n.42.
\textsuperscript{107} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 78.
III. Judah Halevi, The Kuzari

Like Abelard, Halevi sought to bring together reason and revelation in conversation. Although his approach was more cautious in that he did not place philosophical reason above religious tradition, he still took reason seriously enough to emphasize Judaism's adherence to logic and rely on empirical evidence as support of the truth of the Jewish faith. Isaak Heinemann identifies Halevi in the “zeistromland” class of Jewish thinker who attempts to forge a “synthesis between their Jewish inheritance and general philosophy.” Yet, as Heinemann acknowledges, Halevi was far more skeptical of the legitimacy of philosophy—Aristotelian thought in particular—in contrast with Jewish rabbinic tradition. Halevi rejected the strategy of the rationalist Kalam thinkers, many of whom attempted to blend Islam with Greek philosophy, and their Jewish counterparts, the Karaites. Some rabbinic thinkers also took an optimistic approach to philosophical reason, such as the view Saadya Gaon propagated in his *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*. Instead, Halevi opted for a more cautious and reserved approach to philosophical reason, adopting it where he thought it held validity, and rejecting it as an authority where he saw conflict between the two traditions. Yochanan Silman argues that tension between philosophy and Judaism in the *Kuzari* reflects the development of Halevi's view of Aristotelianism as he wrote the work, from acceptance to skepticism. While we will not analyze *The Kuzari* in such depth, a cursory examination is sufficient to illustrate Halevi's complex attitude toward reason. Halevi did not accept the philosophical worldview, in as much

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110 Saadya Gaon, *Three Jewish Philosophers*, 167-326; Saadya argued that the revealed laws are based upon rational laws which are innately knowable for all people—yet the revealed laws expand upon, and inform us as to the correct implementation of, the rational laws, so revelation is still necessary (219-231).
as it represented an alternative to the Jewish one, but he nevertheless accepted reason as a legitimate methodology. Halevi utilized several of the various types of secular reasoning delineated above to support his apologetic for rabbinic Judaism; in particular, he made explicit appeals to the authority of empirical, experience-based reasoning.

For Halevi, Jewish revelation in the form of the Torah was superior to, and superseded, speculative philosophy. This is apparent from the opening disputation of the first book between Khazar king and the philosopher. The king, goaded by dreams of an angel who tells him that “your intentions are desirable, but not your deeds,” decides to discover the religion that would be most pleasing to God. 112 He first asks a philosopher about the dream, who delineates his philosophically-based religious system that ignores the importance of religious observances and laws, and instead focuses on attaining purity of soul by reaching unity with the Active Intellect. Any religion which helps bring about this purity is sufficient, or one can choose to invent one's own religion, or even follow the “intellectually stimulating rituals of the philosophers.” The Kharazi, however, replies that while “your words seem logically sound,” the method proposed by the philosopher does not fulfill his need to find the actions which God desires. 113 After all, he argues, the Christians and Muslims also have pure intentions, but they continually war against one another. This exchange reveals two aspects of Halevi's view of philosophy: he accords it a high place, despite his critical attitude, by giving the philosopher the first say in the dialogue. 114 On the other hand, Halevi does not find philosophy a sufficient basis for the fullness of religious life. Philosophy does not supply the correct means, only the right intent, for proper religious behavior. The prophetic truth of Jewish tradition is ultimately more reliable than the theories of

112 Halevi, The Kuzari, Book I, 1.
113 Halevi, The Kuzari, Book I, 2.
114 As Korobkin notes in The Kuzari, Book I, 1, n.4.
the philosophers; as the Khazari himself observes:

This being the case—that you are so correct and they [religions] are so wrong—then as a result of the philosopher's practices, their wisdom, and their efforts at arriving at truth, we would have expected to see prophecy abounding amongst them…. We see, however, just the opposite: those who have not studied wisdom or prepared themselves according to your prescribed methods have achieved Divine communication, whereas philosophers have achieved none of this. This indicates to me that the truth about God lies somewhere else, outside of what you have told me, philosopher.115

This sentiment characterizes Halevi's conflict between philosophy and Jewish religion: the former is founded on speculative thought, while the latter is solidly based on divine revelation which gives true knowledge of God. The king turns from the philosopher to representatives of the Christian and Islamic faiths, and finally to the Rabbi, who makes a general statement of Jewish belief based on the biblical account of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and reception of the Torah. The Kharazi criticizes the Jews for their lack of “depth of wisdom,” and for choosing to base their faith on miraculous accounts rather than universal principles. In response, the Rabbi vigorously confirms the Khazari's earlier suspicion about philosophy:

What you are referring to is religion arrived at through logic and analysis [which] is subject to much ambiguity.116 That is why when you ask philosophers their opinion on religion, you find that they are unable to agree on one proper routine of conduct or on one philosophy. This is because philosophers base their religion on logical arguments, some of which are based on absolute fact, others [that] seem reasonable, and others that are not even intellectually satisfying, let alone based on fact.117

The Rabbi elucidates the fundamental problem with basing religion on intuitive reason: it cannot give a sure foundation for the right religious actions since it is based on theory. The source of knowledge distinguishes the “rational religion” from the one with divine origin, as the Rabbi

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116 Heinemann renders “religion arrived at through logic and analysis” as “speculative and political religion” in Three Jewish Philosophers, 358. The idea is the same: a religion which is grounded on human reasoning and social activities, and not on divine intervention.
argues later on in the first book of the dialogue. Both believers and non-believers attempt to invoke “divine influence” in the world, but the believer has correct knowledge directly from God's word in the Torah, whereas the unbeliever stumbles about in ignorance, trying various rituals and magics based on the use of his limited human intellect, with no real knowledge of what he is doing. The Rabbi further contrasts prophetic knowledge with the sort derived from dialectical reasoning: the dialectician is like an expert on the rules of poetry and metric, while the prophet is like one “naturally gifted”—the former seems to be more knowledgeable due to his erudition, but he is really striving to be like the naturally gifted.118

Yet despite this seemingly low view of reason, Halevi still acknowledged its authority as long as it remained within its proper place. Some aspects of philosophy are acceptable; philosophers have successfully proven their “wisdom” in logic and mathematics, but their metaphysical and physical theories are not as reliable.119 Since logical reasoning is legitimate, the Rabbi insists in response to the Khazari's challenges that Judaism does not conflict with reason: “The Torah never expects us to believe in things contradicted by evidence or proofs,” and “never does the Torah write something that logic dictates as false.”120 He further relies on logical thinking to demonstrate his points to the Khazari, such as in his argument for the division of human language at the Tower of Babel.121 In the last book, the Khazari begs for the Rabbi to use dialectical reasoning to prove the truth of the Jewish faith, and the Rabbi hesitantly complies, stating that “one who uses dialectics will not acquire faith before he first is exposed to many

118 Halevi, The Kuzari, Book V, 16. Contrast this with Aristotle's opinion that experience precedes and yet is inferior to theory (art), since the latter reveals the causes of things whereas the former only applies to individual cases; Metaphysics I.1, 981a13-981b9.
120 Halevi, The Kuzari, Book I, 67; 89.
heretical ideas…. For a few individuals, however, faith comes naturally.”\textsuperscript{122} Reason, for Halevi, can help to bring faith in some individuals, but it should not form the basis for religious practices and doctrines—natural faith is a far better foundation for one's beliefs. As Alex Novikoff points out, the Rabbi is more open about using reason to prove the truth of Judaism after the Khazari has been converted; only once dialectical reason can be bound within the right framework is it safer to use it.\textsuperscript{123}

However, there is another authority on which Halevi is heavily dependent throughout \textit{The Kuzari} to prove the validity of Judaism and its superiority over philosophy and the other religions: the appeal to sense experience as evidence. This can be considered to be a type of reasoning, since the methodology Halevi uses to support his claims lies somewhat outside the appeal to revelation alone as an authority. The Rabbi sets out to defend the truth of his faith by appealing directly to the record of the Israelite people's encounter with God in the Torah, without any “additional demonstrations or proofs.”\textsuperscript{124} He makes an analogy of an Indian king, whom the Khazari has heard is a righteous ruler. But without evidence of gifts received from the king, the Khazari has no sure way of knowing the king's benevolence except by the word of the Indian people.\textsuperscript{125} In the same way, the Rabbi relies on the Israelite experience of God at Mt. Sinai, which he claims to have been passed down “without interruption” to the present. The foundation of the Jewish religion is evidence from experience, and not on principles derived from human intellect. This is why, the Rabbi explains, he defends Judaism as a faith which is particular to Jews, and not a universal, “rational” religion; the God of the Rabbi is the God of “Abraham, 

\textsuperscript{122} Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book V, 2.  
\textsuperscript{123} Novikoff, "Reason and Natural Law,” 122.  
\textsuperscript{124} Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 15.  
\textsuperscript{125} Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 19-25.  
Isaac, and Jacob” recorded in the Torah. However, this does not mean the Rabbi accepts any miracle claim—if he were, then he would open himself up to the obvious rebuttal that other religions also claim to have had direct contact with God. The record of Mt. Sinai is reliable, since it is the multitudinous experience of the entire people of Israel, unlike other miracle claims which are not as well supported by many witnesses. The Jewish faith is superior because it is based on this account which has no other possible explanation and is well confirmed.\textsuperscript{126} He also compares the spread of “rational religions” with what one would expect from a religion of divine origins. The former is promulgated by a few disciples who convert the masses, whereas the latter appears suddenly since it is instituted by God.\textsuperscript{127} Therefore, Halevi's appeal to historical experience is, contra an intuition-based rationality, based upon a kind of corroborative methodology—what Heinemann defines as a “radical empiricism”—which provides a solid basis for belief, in contrast to the unreliable nature of philosophically based religion.\textsuperscript{128}

Like Abelard's \textit{Collationes}, \textit{The Kuzari} begins in an atmosphere of open disputation between multiple opponents, with an independent outsider—the Khazar king—to judge the quality of the various disputants' positions. The authority of religious revelation has no hold on the Khazari until the Rabbi can demonstrate the validity of his claims on grounds that the king will accept. Thus, Halevi felt the same pressure to appeal to an authority which an outsider to Judaism would accept, just as Abelard's characters all appealed to the authority of philosophical reason to establish the truth of their religions. Yet Halevi avoided philosophy, and chose instead to found his case on sensory evidence, using logic and dialectics only as a secondary weapon. Clearly, Halevi's focus was on arguing Judaism's case before a philosophically inclined audience;

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{126} Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 83-91. \\
\textsuperscript{127} Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 81. \\
\textsuperscript{128} Heinemann, \textit{Three Jewish Philosophers}, 343.
\end{flushright}
he saw the philosopher's case as the greatest challenge, as illustrated by the fact that the philosopher is given the most speaking time of all the contenders except the Rabbi, and that Halevi dedicated most of the last book of *The Kuzari* to discussing philosophy and religion.\(^{129}\) Halevi's target audience was of course his own people, but the fact that his Rabbi spends extensive space proving Judaism's verity to a philosophically-minded opponent demonstrates how significant the issue of faith and reason was for Halevi's time. While he did not wish to accord to reason the same foundational authority as Abelard, he thought it necessary to give it its due and suggest some method of rational thinking that would uphold Judaism as a serious contender in the battlefield of belief systems. At the same time, it was necessary to contend with what he saw as the threat of religion becoming grafted to human reason. Interestingly, another Jew in the same period adopted the very approach that Halevi feared, and claimed that reason had guided him to convert to another religion—Christianity.

**IV. Peter Alfonsi, Dialogue against the Jews**

Compared to Abelard and Halevi, Peter Alfonsi's appeal to reason, in the form of both philosophical reasoning and scientific knowledge, was more assertive and forceful. Alfonsi placed more emphasis on establishing reason as a guide for religious debate in order justify and support his belief that Christianity was intellectually superior to Judaism. In the prologue to his work, Peter Alfonsi states that he composed his *Dialogue* in response to accusations from his former fellow Jews that his conversion was motivated by the desire for worldly gain, or due to a lack of understanding of Scripture. The *Dialogue* is intended both to validate Alfonsi's intentions, and to establish the superiority of Christianity to all other religions and defend it against attack.

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\(^{129}\) Heinemann titles Book V “The Philosophical and the Religious Approach to God.”
Irven Resnick notes that Alfonsi presents himself as a convert who is entirely rationally motivated, and the dialogue reflects this claim by supplying the reader with the reasons that he thought were convincing for the truth of Christianity and the falsity of Judaism.\textsuperscript{130} Alfonsi takes a far more aggressive stance than Abelard, actively denigrating Jewish beliefs and using “reason and authority according to my understanding” to defeat any objections.\textsuperscript{131} Both the theme of conversion and Alfonsi’s attitude towards his past coreligionists are reflected in the format of his work: he explains that he has chosen to write his arguments as a dialogue, using the persona of his Jewish self, Moses, to stand in for the “adversary,” and his Christian self as the defender, using his baptized name, Peter. The self-conscious use of the two versions of his religious self is notable, but what is more relevant here is the teacher-student relationship between his current and past selves. Note the contrast with the dialogues of Abelard and Halevi, which open in an environment of mutual respect, and which are dominated by an independent character who seeks the truth from the participants of the dialogue. Alfonsi’s dialogue is explicitly polemical and didactic; Peter instructs Moses in the flawed nature of his Jewish beliefs, often in a very condescending tone.

The same brusqueness appears in Alfonsi’s use of reason as a basis for his attack. Little time is spent on establishing reason as an authority. Instead, its validity is simply taken for granted, and Alfonsi uses Peter the teacher and Moses the student as voices to assent to his implicit appeal to reason. Moses first approaches Peter, demanding why he abandoned the “old law,” especially since he was learned in Scripture and zealous in preserving and defending the

\textsuperscript{130} Resnick, introduction to \textit{Dialogue against the Jews}, 13.
\textsuperscript{131} Alfonsi, \textit{Dialogue}, 41.
Jewish faith (Alfonsi here attempts to invoke his authority as a scholar of the Torah). Peter responds:

It is the practice of the Jewish people and of untutored people, that if they observe one do anything whatsoever contrary to their own practice, even if it remains correct and most just, nevertheless in their estimation and judgment he will be subject to the name and crime of injustice. You, however, who had been reared in the cradle of philosophy, suckled on the breasts of philosophy, with what impudence can you cast blame on me, before you have been able to determine whether the things I have done are just or unjust?133

Moses replies that he holds Peter in high regard as a “prudent man” who would not abandon the old law without knowing that the new one was better, and so asks that they “both run back and forth by turns on the field of argument, until I arrive at an investigation of this matter and may be able to learn whether your action is just or unjust.”134 Alfonsi differentiates Moses from the mass of ignorant Jews by his training in philosophical reason, which grants him the ability to judge Peter's case rationally instead of condemning him without good cause. Moses tacitly accepts Peter's assessment, and wants him to prove his new faith by means of argument. In this way, Alfonsi establishes a rational foundation for his claims: only a person who is willing to be guided by reason can follow his arguments. In terms of explicit appeals to individual types of reasoning, Alfonsi makes extensive use of both philosophical reason and scientific knowledge as authorities which ground his critique of rabbinic tradition.

Alfonsi's use of reason runs parallel to his exegetical methodology. Moses and Peter agree on what form of scriptural authority is acceptable in their disputation (Moses asks Peter to rely on the Hebraica veritas when quoting Scripture, which Peter accepts).135 But the
interpretation of Scripture relies heavily on a philosophical foundation: Peter asserts that any notion of God as having anthropological or anthropopathic features runs contrary to (philosophical) reason.136 The Jewish “sages” (i.e., the extra-biblical oral law) teach that God has a body and emotions, which, since this teaching is irrational, demonstrates their unreliability as an authority.137 Yet, Moses objects: don't the biblical prophets also make these claims of God's nature? Peter replies that one must use the correct method of exegesis which will produce the interpretation that is consistent with reason: “When we find things such as this in the prophets, which, when accepted literally, cause us to depart from the path of reason, we interpret them as allegories, so that we may return to the narrow path of reason.”138 This methodology conveniently follows the Christian polemical tradition that spiritual, allegorical exegesis revealed the Christian truth of Scripture, as opposed to the literalistic Jewish tradition—only here, Alfonsi takes this notion one step further in arguing that Jewish reading of Scripture also leads to irrationalism. On the other hand, philosophy can support Christian beliefs, as Peter demonstrates in his defense of the core doctrines of the Trinity, virgin birth, and Incarnation. For instance, he argues for the Trinity from reason by identifying the three persons of the Godhead as his substance, wisdom, and will, and demonstrates the necessity of these attributes through logical reasoning.139 When Moses asks Peter to explain how the doctrine of the incarnation could be possible according to reason, Peter responds that “it did not have to occur for any necessary reason,” but that “nevertheless, no reason prevents it from having had to occur.”140 In other words, even if reason does not lead us to accept Christian doctrine as necessarily true, it does not

137 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 51.
138 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 71-72.
139 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 164-5. This argument may have been based on Kalam thought, see 164, n.1.
140 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 185.
conflict with it either. Alfonsi’s method of reasoning, both about doctrines and the correct interpretation of Scripture, characterizes his view of the balance between reason and faith: the former should not conflict with the latter, and if it does, then it must be reevaluated and made to conform to reason. While his endorsement of reason as a foundation for faith is not as strong as Abelard's, Alfonsi is still quite optimistic about the ability of reason to inform correct belief.

In addition to philosophical reason, science was particularly important to Alfonsi, who saw himself as a natural philosopher and introduced Arabic astronomy to his Christian peers in England. Thus, much of his argumentation against Judaism in the *Dialogue* relies on scientific knowledge of nature; for instance, he devotes much time to demonstrating the shape of the world and discussing medical theory of the time in order to prove his point that the oral law contradicted reason. Indeed, he expressly conflates scientific knowledge with reason in a number of short statements throughout the dialogue, such as through Moses' affirmation in the middle of one proof from the measurement of the earth from the sunrise: “I am unable to deny what reason demonstrates.” Unlike with reason, however, religious doctrines can contradict principles of nature, but only if there is very good reason. Against the Jewish belief in the earthly resurrection, Alfonsi argues that “whatever occurs … beyond the customary [order of nature] should not be believed without an authority or argument, before it happens. Therefore, I determine that [you] believe an error that you cannot prove with any authority.” This method of reasoning from the common experience of nature, which seems to presage the modern

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143 Alfonsi, *Dialogue*, 58.
144 Alfonsi, *Dialogue*, 120; In response to Moses' attempt to produce a proof text from Scripture, Alfonsi claims that “that authority departs from the path of reason,” since Moses was misreading the passage.
skeptical principle of “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence,” is comparable with Alfonsi’s overall view of the role of reason. One’s beliefs should be in conformance with knowledge of nature; they can only violate that knowledge if they have extremely solid grounding. As it so happens, the doctrines of Christianity which also seem to violate science, such as the virgin birth (which Moses sees as an “amazing and difficult thing”) are made acceptable on the basis of its strong support from Scripture. Furthermore, Christian doctrines can be illustrated by analogy to nature, like Odo of Tournai and Pseudo-William's analogy of light streaming through glass. Alfonsi illustrates the notion that Christ could be incarnate and still one of the three persons of the Godhead with the fact that heat and brightness are not always perceived together, although they are always present in the substance of fire. Thus, Alfonsi used science, in addition to reason, as an authority with which to attack Judaism and support Christian theology.

Alfonsi employed his appeal to philosophical reason and science using a more assertive and didactic style than the mild-mannered approaches of Abelard and Halevi. The rhetorical effect he achieved was to paint the acceptance of both fields of knowledge as a means of resolving religious dispute in a stark and explicit light: Moses accepts Peter’s teachings and wholeheartedly embraces the path of reason, following it where it leads—with Peter’s guidance, of course. This strategy was likely driven by Alfonsi’s desire to justify himself to both his former fellow Jews and to his new Christian brethren—the former accusing him of wrong intentions and

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145 This somewhat questionable dictum was popularized in the twentieth century by Carl Sagan. Obviously, Alfonsi’s goal here was the denigration of Judaism, not the establishment of scientific skepticism; although this rule certainly may have been a part of his thinking outside of polemical contexts, especially given his strong interest in the sciences.
146 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 177.
147 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 185-6.
error, and the latter possibly skeptical of the sincerity of his conversion.\textsuperscript{148} Reason and science were powerful authorities which were accepted by his critics on both sides, and so could buttress his claim of a rationally motivated conversion.

\textit{V. Joseph Kimhi, The Book of the Covenant}

Of the four major works discussed in this study, Joseph Kimhi's \textit{Covenant} is by far the most assertive and unambiguous polemic. Motivated by the threat of Jewish converts to Christianity, Kimhi made his appeal to reason in an aggressive and confrontational manner, using rationality as a basis for his refutations of Christian doctrines and scriptural exegesis. By the late twelfth century, the increased contact with Christianity and the rise in Jewish conversion had become a serious enough problem for the Jewish community that a formalized response by leaders was necessary to prevent further apostasy and reassure the flock of Judaism's truth against Christian claims.\textsuperscript{149} Joseph Kimhi and Jacob ben Reuben supplied this need with their fiercely aggressive polemics which modeled the confrontation between Christianity and Judaism on a smaller scale—for Kimhi, between an apostate and a faithful Jew. The \textit{Covenant} was expressly intended to be a manual for debate with converted Jews who were attempting to steal away others from the faith of their fathers, so the dialogue is characteristically vitriolic and hostile. Unlike most of the past Jewish philosophical works which made dismissive mentions of Christianity, like Saadya Gaon's treatise and \textit{The Kuzari}, the \textit{Covenant} was entirely focused on the younger faith as a serious threat requiring a comprehensive and sweeping refutation. Due to this pressure behind the text, the dialogue is largely one-sided; the min is given little to say.

\textsuperscript{149} Cohen, “Toward a Functional Classification,” 99-104.
except to act as a target for Kimhi's arguments. Therefore, the opponent’s assent to Kimhi’s methodologies and use of reason is largely tacit—his meek acquiescence signals acceptance.

Besides countering the christological interpretation of Scripture with arguments for Jewish exegesis, Kimhi and Reuben made use of the appeal to reason to refute Christian doctrines. Lasker draws attention to the special emphasis both polemicists placed on reason: they adopted arguments against the doctrine of the Incarnation from the ninth-century Polemic of Nestor the Priest as being “from reason,” a term which did not appear in the original. For Kimhi in particular, rationality was the proper foundation of religion. Even though he was not a philosopher, but a grammarian, Kimhi still portrayed himself as a proponent of reason. In the opening of the work, Kimhi sets out his goals in defense of the Jewish faith: “I shall begin by the grace of God to search and investigate by the paths of reason and to answer with understanding and knowledge.” He immediately launches into the dialogue with little else to say; reason is the master by which he will prove the “way of truth” against the min. He makes use of logic to reason against the Incarnation and Trinity; but in addition to rational arguments, he fervently applies reason to the area of the debate in which he specialized—exegesis. Thus, in his arguments regarding Scripture, he refers to inept christological readings of the text as being irrational, not merely misguided or wrong. For instance, Kimhi (speaking as the ma'amín) condones Christian belief in the Father and Spirit as aspects of God which are supported in Scripture, and so in this case “wisdom corroborates them and reason is on their side.” But reason does not “constrain” one to believe that God has a son, which he then proves by way of Scripture

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152 Kimhi, The Covenant, 28.
153 Talmage, introduction to The Covenant, 14-15.
(the *min* being unable to “prove [the Son] from reason,” tries to rely on scriptural arguments). Thus, the use of reason and exegetical proofs are mixed and conflated. This urge to appeal to reason, despite the fact that the majority of Kimhi’s dialogue deals with scriptural topics, demonstrates the increasing need to adhere to an independent standard which both sides could accept. Lasker has also noted the tendency among Jewish polemicists to use philosophical arguments against Christianity which were grounded on rational principles acceptable to both sides.\(^{154}\) Scriptural proofs were a hard sell for the opposition—even those who had defected to the other side—but reason was an additional authority that could bring further support to Kimhi’s case if used properly.

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**VI. Final Considerations**

From this selection of sources, the importance of reason for twelfth-century polemicists is clear. Regardless of their widely varying backgrounds, intellectual and faith traditions, and personal views, each writer thought it necessary to develop a rational dimension in his work. This was the case, regardless of whether the author was wholly optimistic about the presumed benefits of philosophical reason for the foundation of the religious worldview, like Abelard, or regarded it with cautious distrust and relegated it to a place beneath the authority of scriptural tradition, like Halevi, or simply appealed to its authority without much qualification like Alfonsi and Kimhi. All of these men felt the need to grapple with the question of reason's proper role or methodology in the theological sphere. Despite their divergent views on reason, these thinkers all upheld some form of extra-religious reasoning as an authority which they thought all men, regardless of belief, should accept. They made their appeal in different ways and utilized various

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tactics in applying that type of reason in their argumentation, but regardless of what sort of reason they held to be authoritative, one central principle was constant: reason (of the sort advocated) should never contradict a true religion, even if it cannot actually prove its particular doctrines. This allowed some degree of flexibility in how these polemicists implemented reason, since they could use it as a shield by demonstrating their faith's accordance with it (even if they had to fall back on traditional authorities for evidence for its truth), and as a weapon to show the rival faith's conflict with reason. As we shall see in the next chapter, the latter maneuver is directly correlated with the former; and the entire strategy follows logically from the appeal to reason.

Polemical dialogue was heavily focused towards the internal community, communicating its arguments to the opposing side indirectly by speaking to an opposing voice in the dialogue which was only a simulacrum. The act of injecting secular reasoning and philosophy into a debate that was founded on religious belief likely stemmed from two motivations: internal considerations of reason's role and proper use in determining theological doctrine within the author's own faith community, and the external demand for an authority which could ground the claims of one's own tradition over those of the enemy. These motivations are evidenced by the fact that all writers made some appeal to reason, whether implicit or explicit, and whether they spent considerable time mulling over the theme, or merely assumed its import as a given. The use of reason was becoming an increasingly significant subject for Christians, and was already a major theme of the Sephardic intellectual world by the time the two cultures were brought into much closer proximity by the *Reconquista*. At the same time as philosophy and reason were foremost on the minds of Christian and Jewish intellectuals, the collusion of the two
communities drove a demand for increasingly articulate denunciations of the opposing side. The two spheres of religious philosophy and Jewish-Christian debate naturally bled into one another.

Whether or not this new rational dimension in polemics on both sides of the divide was the result of direct influence, or merely the result of a shared intellectual culture, is a matter for further consideration. Some scholars hold that Jewish polemics in the Middle Ages were a result of Christian pressure, which seems to supported by the fact that anti-Christian material became more sharply focused and common in the time after the *Reconquista* and the heightened tensions after the First Crusade. Jeremy Cohen argues that Jews followed the Christian lead in adopting reason-based polemics, along with the dialogue format that was so common in the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition.¹⁵⁵ Lasker confirms that polemists of Kimhi’s generation certainly knew about Christian arguments, which suggests that they knew Christian trends in polemical method as well. Even if this theory is correct, however, we must keep in mind that the tradition of philosophy was already a major topic of debate in the Sephardic world. As works such as *The Kuzari* show, considerations of philosophical reason were already an issue for Jewish thinkers before historical exigencies led to the development of highly focused anti-Christian works.

Finally, we must ask a very obvious question about the use of reason in polemic: was it sincere, or merely a rhetorical tool for these writers? Lasker thinks the latter is generally the case for Jewish polemists, since they tended to bring philosophical arguments into their works to augment the more traditional tools of the debate, such as scriptural arguments.¹⁵⁶ In the context of this study, it is worth noting that of the two styles of polemical dialogues we have seen—the open disputation and the didactic setting—the former seems to lend itself more to a sincere

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¹⁵⁵ Cohen, “Toward a Functional Classification,” 99-104.
consideration of reason. While their goals certainly included making an attack on the opposing faith, Abelard and Halevi were more prone to reflecting on the issue of reason and faith. In contrast, Alfonsi and Kimhi seemed far more willing to use reason as a blunt instrument against their foe. Yet even the latter two writers delineated some kind of method or definition of reason that would serve their needs, which suggests that, even in the more acrid kind of polemic, reason was not introduced merely for utilitarian purposes, but was already a key element in how the writer thought about the differentiation between true and false religion.
Chapter 2

“You have erred from the path of reason”: The Charge of Irrationality

As we have seen, the authors of many prominent twelfth-century dialogues felt it necessary to establish some form of reasoning as an authority in conjunction with, or even in the place of, the authority of revelation. The motivations for this approach have been suggested in the last chapter—the internal debate over the role of reason and the external need for an independent authority in interreligious debate. We must now turn to an examination of the literary impetus for reason as authority: the purpose of these dialogues was to present the author's religion as rational and the opposing religion as irrational. Given this polemical aim, the natural continuation of the appeal to reason was to present a convincing case that one's position was securely within reason's boundaries, while arguing that the beliefs of the opponent lay outside it. These latter steps necessarily rest on assuming the foundational principle that reason is an authority that one must obey—otherwise the strategy is impotent.

In all of these dialogues we see the presentation of self as rational—or at least consistent with reason's demands—and the accusation that the opponent is irrational. The two often go hand in hand; an author could demonstrate the former at the same time as the latter, or use the same criteria to argue for both. Some forms of this technique also consist of unambiguous, direct verbal outbursts, especially in the didactic style of dialogue of Peter Alfonsi and Joseph Kimhi. Sometimes the irrationality of the opponent is explained by setting out the correct use of reason carefully to show why his religion gets it wrong. Whether by accusation or demonstration (or both), subtle or explicit, this method is consistently employed in all the dialogues which utilize
reason as a weapon in the battle of faiths.

One further point must be made before continuing onto an analysis of the texts. Dialogue was not the only form of polemic in which this strategy was employed, but it presents a particularly interesting instance of it since the literary format lends itself so well to this purpose. A polemicist who used dialogue did so more than just to make assertions about the opposing religion, but he also used the characters themselves to portray and symbolize what he thought constituted rational and irrational religion. The genre of dialogue provided an ideal literary setting for the author to vocalize the charge of irrationality and to give the mock opponent a chance to respond—either to accept the charge and the protagonist's arguments, or to provide further objections and so solidify the protagonist's case (and sometimes further illustrate the protagonist's accusations of irrationality when he stubbornly resists). Of course, these simulated responses were not intended to give the other side a genuine voice, but to demonstrate the conclusiveness of the writer's thesis.

We will examine the four major texts which we covered in the last chapter, in the same order, starting with Abelard and Halevi and then moving on to the more aggressive examples of this strategy in Alfonsi and Kimhi. The differences in tone had a direct effect on the degree of subtlety that the writers employed when making their case, so it is worthwhile to group these dialogues in the same manner as before. Abelard's approach was to depict both the Jew and Christian as eager to assent to reason's demands, while using their dialogues with the Philosopher to illustrate Judaism's ultimate failure and Christianity's success in according with reason. Halevi's dialogue likewise illustrates that Christianity fails the same rational standards which validate Judaism. Both writers take a gentler tone in their polemic, in contrast to the didactic
style of the dialogues of Alfonsi and Kimhi, in which the student/opponent is presented either as accepting the harsh instruction of the teacher, as in the case of Alfonsi, or the former simply being struck down by the forceful arguments of the latter, as with Kimhi. Regardless of tone and substance, however, all four authors shared the common goal of presenting their own faith as resting on the solid foundation of reason, and the opposing faith as rationally groundless. We will also consider possible explanations for the depiction of irrationality in the opponent characters from both the Christian and Jewish side: in particular, Anna Sapir Abulafia's notion of the “christianization” of reason will be examined in light of Abelard and Alfonsi's dialogues, and I will suggest some possible causes for the Jewish conception of Christians as irrational, which may explain the dismissive nature with which both Halevi and Kimhi regarded their fictional Christian opponents.

I. Peter Abelard, Collationes

The ultimate aim of the Collationes is not as clear as in the other three dialogues, which openly assert the central claim that the author's religion is superior to that of his opponent. In Abelard's work, the presentation of, and contrast between, the Jewish and Christian characters has been interpreted in seemingly contradictory ways by different scholars. Does the Collationes really deserves to be placed in the same category as the other three dialogues of the twelfth century as being largely polemical in intent? The consideration of this question revolves largely around Abelard's depiction of the Jew, which may or may not have had a strictly polemical function. On the affirmative side of the issue, Hans Liebeschutz has argued that Abelard wanted
to portray Christianity as the religion most consistent with reason in contrast with Judaism. Abulafia carries this interpretation further and places the Collationes within the wider framework of twelfth-century scholastic project of “christianizing” reason, a process which led to the exclusion of Jews based on the belief that they were unable or unwilling to accept Christian reason, and so they were intrinsically irrational. She argues that Abelard's dialogue aptly reflects this process, as the Jew is shown to be clinging to the old law which forces his people to go beyond the rational natural law and sets them apart from humanity in their inability to follow reason. Conversely, the new law of Christ is shown to flow directly from, and be in accord with, natural law. Other scholars have disagreed with this analysis, however, and emphasize another possible agenda Abelard may have had in writing the Collationes: his desire to present truth in an open-ended method of inquiry via dialogue between multiple participants. Jason Taliadoros agrees that Abelard was laying out a framework for the incorporation of reason into the orthodox Christian worldview, but at the same time, given the context his other works such as Sic et Non, his dialogue focuses more on the pursuit of truth in an unrestricted environment, which does not neatly fit into the ideological box in which Abulafia wants to place Abelard along with his contemporaries. Constant J. Mews similarly contrasts Abelard's use of dialogue with other polemicists, “for whom dialogue was often a technique for asserting the truth rather than for engaging in a listening exercise.”

Neither of these two general perspectives on the Collationes are mutually exclusive.

159 Taliadoros, “Christianised Reason?” 68.
aim of Abelard's dialogue is made explicit by the Philosopher's opening statement that he wishes to reach the end of moral philosophy by discovering the highest good, and to do this he is examining the various religions to find which is “most in accord with reason.”¹⁶¹ The *Collationes* is quite literally a comparison of the rationality of Judaism and Christianity, the latter coming out the victor. However, the way in which Abelard performs this comparison differentiates his dialogue from the attitude typical of *Adversus Judaeos* literature. Abelard's abnormally civil approach to dialogue also suggests the mentality that Jason Taliadoros and Constant Mews ascribe to him—that he was not interested in a merely hammering the opposition, but exploring the balance of reason and the revealed law of Moses and Christ. Ultimately, however, Abelard's conclusion is that Judaism is incapable of rising to the rational standard that the Philosopher sets, while Christianity is happily able to comply—and in fact the source of Christian law is rational, since all wisdom comes from God.

Recall that the Philosopher first opens the discussion with the two religious characters with the argument that one should not blindly follow the path set by tradition and inherited belief, as most people do, but instead adults should rely on reason as a guide. Ultimately, both the Jew and the Christian accept this line of reasoning—the Jew claims that his fellow religionists maintain their belief through reason—but unlike the Christian, the Jew's claim of fidelity to reason is treated with suspicion by the Philosopher and rejected at the end of their dialogue. This opening statement by the Philosopher colors the entire exchange with the Jew, as the implication that Jews are following the authority of tradition rather than reason remains strong throughout the entire work.

The Philosopher makes his case against the Jew's religion using the “very written law

which you yourself follow.”\textsuperscript{162} The law of Moses goes beyond the natural law, “which consists in loving God and one's neighbor,” and which alone can be sufficient for salvation without the “external observances” of the old law.\textsuperscript{163} The Philosopher points to the Patriarchs and prophets of the OT, such as Abraham and Job, as examples of holy men who did not obey the law of Moses, since it had yet to be given, but were able to attain God's grace through the natural law. What purpose does the revealed law serve, then, if the natural law was sufficient for those born outside the law of Moses? In fact, the “yoke of the law” makes the path towards righteousness even harder, by adding additional requirements that can cause a person to stumble, and making one aware of sin; for this argument, the Philosopher relies on quotations from Paul in the New Testament book of Romans, whose testimonies “no one of any intelligence could judge otherwise [than what is said in them].”\textsuperscript{164} The Jew tries to defend the old law by suggesting that it is useful for preserving religion and suppressing wickedness, and it, along with circumcision, acted as a method to separate Jews from their pagan neighbors.\textsuperscript{165} More importantly, the law agrees with the mandate of natural law to perfectly love God and man—in fact, the natural law is “included within ours.”\textsuperscript{166} The Philosopher replies that ritual sacrifice and observances should be unnecessary if all that is required for holiness is love of God and one's neighbor.\textsuperscript{167} Thus, the Philosopher rejects the Jew's claim that the old law is consistent with natural law:

\begin{quote}
My considered judgment of what has taken place in our debate is this. Even granting that you were given your law as a gift from God, you cannot compel me on its authority to admit that I should submit to its burden, as if it were necessary to add anything to the law which Job prescribes for us through his own example or to that discipline of acting well
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{162} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 19.
\textsuperscript{163} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 20-25.
\textsuperscript{164} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 26.
\textsuperscript{165} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 28-34.
\textsuperscript{166} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 43-5.
\textsuperscript{167} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 58.
which our philosophers left to their successors by setting out the virtues which suffice for happiness.\textsuperscript{168}

The law of Judaism has thus failed the Philosopher's rational standard for a religion which can guide him toward the highest good, since it adds unnecessary stipulations to natural law. This might not be considered enough to regard Judaism as irrational per se, but if one considers the role that Abelard accorded to reason as the ultimate authority, even trumping tradition and other authoritative sources, Judaism appears to have failed the standard of rationality. Even though he accepts the Philosopher's claim that the natural law is sufficient, he struggles at length to defend its legitimacy. Alex Novikoff observes that the Jew, while willing to adhere to a rational foundation, ultimately fails in an attempt to defend Judaism rationally, as he is not arguing from reason but out of “default.”\textsuperscript{169} The old law itself is an authority which the Jew places above reason, in contrast with the position agreed upon by the Philosopher and Christian that reason should come before other authorities.

Even more significantly, Jews are portrayed as being irrational by nature, despite the heroic effort portrayed by their representative here. First, Abelard builds an image of Jews that rests upon the traditional Christian conception of them as materialistic and literal-minded in their observance of the old law: the Philosopher asks why God promised only earthly prosperity for Israel's obedience, and “said nothing at all about which is greatest”—i.e., the spiritual reward of eternal happiness.\textsuperscript{170} He further points out that the ritual law does not provide purity of the soul, which can only be attained by a “sacrifice of the heart,” directly following Christian teaching on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{168} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 60.
\item \textsuperscript{169} Novikoff, “Reason and Natural Law,” 14-8.
\item \textsuperscript{170} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 24. The Jew attempts to respond that God's promise was eternal, and so entailed eternal rewards as well as material ones; but the Philosopher rejects this claim by arguing semantically that “eternal” was used in a figurative sense in the law; \textit{Collationes}, 41, 46, 53.
\end{itemize}
the atonement for sin as laid down by Paul.\textsuperscript{171} The old law is related only to the temporal, material world, in that it regards uncleanness and purity according to bodily, material standards, and offers no “purifications to the stains of souls.” But Abelard builds further on this standard theme of Jewish carnality by adding another flaw to Judaism's legacy. In his dialogue with the Christian, the Philosopher contrasts philosophy with Judaism:

In [natural law's] concern with the rules of good behavior, it is especially suited to philosophers because, clearly, they use this law and follow reasoning—as your learned writer commented: 'The Jews seek signs and the Greeks look for wisdom.' Indeed, the Jews, because they live, like animals, according to their senses and have imbibed no philosophy which would enable them to discuss reasonings, are moved to faith only by miraculous, external deeds, as if God alone were able to do these and there could not be among them illusions produced by demons.\textsuperscript{172}

Not only are the Jews separated from the perfection of the natural law by their adherence to the artificial demands of their own law, but they are limited by their materially grounded motivations from accessing philosophy and reason.

Christianity, on the other hand, is both willing and able to abide by reason's authority. The Christian, despite his initial reservations, is in accord with the Philosopher and accepts reason's supremacy after some convincing, as we have seen. More broadly, Abelard presents the Church's close history with philosophy as a subtle argument for Christianity's compatibility with reason. The Christian chides the Philosopher for his assertion that Christians were “mad,” pointing out that the early church made converts of pagan philosophers (recall Justin Martyr's conversion testimony).\textsuperscript{173} The Philosopher later commends the ancient church for being able to convince the philosophers rationally (although he later retreats slightly from this position and suggests that they were forced):

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{171} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 59.
  \item \textsuperscript{172} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 69.
  \item \textsuperscript{173} Abelard, \textit{Collationes}, 63.
\end{itemize}
It is greatly to the credit of your Christian preaching that it was able to convert to the faith those who relied greatly on rational arguments and had a great stock of them, people who had been filled with the study of the liberal arts and were furnished with arguments—arguments, indeed, which they had not just discovered but had also themselves invented: they were the sources from which rivers flowed through the whole world. From this, I am confident that your teaching, which has now become stronger and better established, will be a very powerful contender in the contest of reasonings.  

He also supports his arguments for the superiority of reason to authoritative opinion by supplying Church fathers such as Augustine and Boethius who rejected fideism and held to reason as a guide. Using these Christians as exemplars of reasoning, Abelard could show that the Church held a tradition which maintained the importance of reason, and so further demonstrate Christianity's compatibility with it—unlike Judaism, which was bound to the suffocating old law which precluded any real accord with reason. Finally, the Christian connects reason with the new law: he claims that Christ brought “true ethics to its perfection” in his teachings, surpassing the teachings of both the ancient philosophers and prophets. Furthermore, Christ himself is the source of natural law and “true sapience, that is, the wisdom of God,” who makes those he teaches “true philosophers.” Abelard sets out here a kind of scheme of the ethical development of history, in which Christ's law supersedes and perfects both the law of Moses and of the natural law of philosophy. Once the Philosopher and Christian agree on the proper role of reason, they commence a long discussion of the highest good and greatest evil which takes up the bulk of the work. In contrast, the debate with the Jew stops short since his beliefs can provide nothing of interest to the Philosopher on the topic of moral philosophy, as his law is not based upon reason.

174 Ibid., 69.
175 Abelard, Collationes, 74, 76.
176 Abelard, Collationes, 66.
177 Abelard, Collationes, 71.
178 Liebeschutz points out that Abelard drew from the Christian tradition of the stages of salvation in human history and added in his own philosophical theme; “The Significance of Judaism,” 8-9.
and he is incapable of defending it rationally, unlike the Christian.

This contrast between the Jew and the Christian seems to justify Abulafia's argument regarding the christianization of reason, by placing Abelard squarely within the camp of Christian intellectuals who sought to fuse Christianity and reason, and exclude Judaism from the community of rational beings on that account. Hers is a reasonable assessment, given Abelard's suggestion that the old law prevents the Jew from reasoning correctly or taking reason seriously as the highest authority for belief. That Abelard drew strongly (albeit with a lighter and more sympathetic overall tone) on past anti-Jewish conceptions serves to solidify this perspective on his position in the *Collationes*. However, we also should recognize a certain degree of nuance in how Abelard communicated his position: the Jew is still in agreement with the principle of reason, even if he is unable to conform to it in practice. This is far from the bellicose denunciations of Jewish irrationality coming from Abelard's contemporaries like Peter Alfonsi and Peter the Venerable.\(^{179}\) At least in the *Collationes*, the Jew's desires are in the right place in wanting to please God, as the he argues and the Philosopher concurs. But, as the latter disputant points out, zeal is not good enough; what matters is the intention behind that passion, and “whether [it] is right or erroneous.”\(^{180}\) Driven by a restrictive adherence to the old law and not to reason, the Jew ultimately fails the Philosopher's test while the Christian passes.


\(^{180}\) Abelard, *Collationes*, 18.
II. Judah Halevi, The Kuzari

In a manner comparable to the *Collationes*, *The Kuzari* couches the attack on the opposing faith within a contest between of various points of view, which results in a more subtle and multifaceted critique than the didactic, assertive approach of later Jewish polemicists. Like Abelard, Halevi founds his case for the invalidity of Christianity upon his approach to reason and its proper use. Since Halevi argued that the Torah does not conflict with logic, and that the epistemic ground for religious belief should consist of well-founded and confirmed miraculous occurrences which prove divine intervention, so his critique of Christianity also relies on these two aspects of his employment of reason. In contrast with Abelard's dialogue, however, Halevi's treatment of Christianity is brief and largely dismissive; despite the respectful and conciliatory tone of the latter's fictional disputation, the Christian is given little say compared to Abelard's Jew. Up until the late twelfth century, Jewish polemic and apologetic were less commonly directed at Christianity, arguably because Jewish writers simply did not take Christianity very seriously until historical exigencies (of Jewish conversion to Christianity and social pressures that came with increased intercultural contact) motivated them to dedicate entire works to attacking the rival faith. Thus, we must infer Halevi's view of Christianity from a passing treatment of its representative in the dialogue.

In *The Kuzari*, Halevi's brief exposition of Christianity largely serves to set up the eventual presentation of the Rabbi's faith. The Christian appears before the Khazar king after the Philosopher is dismissed, and presents a brief but fairly accurate portrayal of Christian doctrine. The Christian accepts the Torah and the Jewish canon, of which “there can be no doubt as to their veracity,” and the miracles recorded therein which were demonstrated before

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“all nations” and masses of people—those supporting the Jewish faith by following Halevi's criteria for a true miracle claim. But then he adds that Christians believe in an additional revelation, namely the incarnation of God in form of the Messiah, who is unified in essence with other two members of the Godhead, “despite the fact that our terminology defines Him as a trinity.” Christ honored the people of Israel at first, but then they rejected him, and God's “desire” shifted to the apostles and the nations that followed them, which are “more worthy of the title Children of Israel.” Importantly, the Christian insists that his religion does not reject the Torah, despite adding to it the law of “Simon the apostle,” and he misquotes Matthew 5:17: “I have not come to negate any of the commandments give to the Children of Israel and their prophet Moses; I have rather come to add strength and fortitude to them.” Thus the Christian inadvertently lends support to the Jewish claim to truth even while he describes the new doctrines which his faith tacked onto it, which ultimately strengthens the Rabbi's position since his faith is the foundation for the other two religions, as their representatives freely admit in the dialogue. The Khazari later states to himself that “if the miracles that happened to the Children of Israel are the entire proof to any believer in the Bible that there is a God in the world, then I see that I have to ask the Jews [about their faith], for they are the descendants of the biblical Children of Israel.”

The Khazari's response to the Christian encapsulates the two-fold nature of Christianity's irrationality according to Halevi. First, he abruptly asserts the illogical nature of the Christian's claims: “Logic plays no part in your argument; if anything, logic dictates the exact opposite.” He does not say exactly what is logically incoherent about the Christian's beliefs, but given the

habit of denigrating the rationality of Christian dogma among Jewish polemicists, it is likely that he is referring to the doctrines of the Incarnation, virgin birth, and Trinity, which the Christian character had just laid out. This argument might appear on the surface to be self-contradictory, considering Halevi's suspicion about philosophy's ability to speak authoritatively on religious matters. But in Book V, the Rabbi claims to hold logic in high regard, and elsewhere he insists that the Torah does not require one to accept things contradicted by either “evidence or proofs.”  


Reason should not be the foundation for faith, but neither should faith clash with it. The Christians, however, do hold doctrines which seem to conflict with it, unlike Judaism which maintains a healthy but distant relationship with reason. In addition, the Khazari hints at an argument that is remarkably similar to the argument against religious indoctrination of the Philosopher in the *Collationes*: “What you suggest is totally foreign to me; I was not raised with these ideas. And so, I need to search more thoroughly until I find the truth.”  


He seems to be implying that the Christian believes in these doctrines only because of his upbringing and background, and since they seem to conflict with reason, the Khazari must move on to examine beliefs that are more likely to be true. This argument fits well with the Rabbi's later thought that “rational religions”—i.e., religions that do not have a divine origin—spread naturally and take root in societies over a period of time, instead of appearing suddenly to a mass of people, as in Judaism's beginning.  


Christianity certainly is not considered to be “rational” in the sense that philosophical religions are, but it shares the property of being created by humans rather than God, and so it cannot satisfy the Khazari’s search for right action before God.

The rest of the Khazari's response to the Christian follows on his initial claim that...
Christianity is intrinsically illogical. He proceeds to attack the perceived lack of empirical
evidence for Christianity, as well:

> When it comes to things illogical, the only way a person will be convinced is by seeing
something first-hand. When a person sees something with his own eyes, he has no choice
but to accept the phenomenon as true, despite its illogic. The individual is then forced to
reconcile what he saw with logic and work out some logical explanation for the
phenomenon. A good example of this is found with the empirical scientists. They develop
their theories based on logic and also dismiss various phenomena as being impossible
based on logic. But if you demonstrate to them empirically that something they had
previously dismissed actually exists, they are forced to revise their theories and find a
way to explain the new phenomenon based on the stars or nature. Because ultimately, you
cannot deny your eyes. In your case, however, you have not shown me any physical
evidence to substantiate your beliefs.\(^\text{187}\)

Halevi subordinates pure reason to empirical evidence as an independent ground for religious
truth, and so he advances this method for establishing the reliability of a religious doctrine that
seems to contradict reason. However, the Christian does not match up to even this criterion, since
he provides no reliable evidence for his beliefs, while also contradicting reason. Thus, he fails on
both types of “reason,” both intuitive and empirical. Interestingly, the Khazari's discussion with
the Muslim turns to the miracle claims made about the prophet Mohammed. The Khazari objects
to the Muslim's statement of faith, not because has no evidence for his beliefs, but since his
evidence does not hold up to the standard which Judaism is later shown to meet—that it appeared
before a multitude of people and thus was well confirmed.\(^\text{188}\) The Christian, in contrast, cannot
even make the claim to have \textit{any} evidence (or at least he is not allowed to present any). This may
have followed from a generally dismissive attitude among Jewish intellectuals toward the record
of the New Testament, as can be observed in the mentions of Jesus in the Talmud and \textit{Toledot}

\(^{187}\) Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 5; Hirshfeld translates “empirical scientists” as “natural philosophers”; a more
literal translation can be found in his edition; Judah Halevi, \textit{Book of the Kuzari}, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New

\(^{188}\) Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 7-8.
Furthermore, Halevi's rationale for adding in the empirical argument against Christianity may have been to cover for any apparent logical contradictions in Judaism which might appear later in the dialogue, or which the reader himself might have. If he had merely had the Khazari assert that Christianity was illogical and move on, he would have left himself open to an opponent using this same tactic against the Jewish position as represented by Halevi.

But instead, the Rabbi's position is ultimately vindicated by strong empirical evidence, which meets Halevi's criteria—it was experienced by a multitude and recorded for posterity in the reliable record of the Torah. The Khazari himself concurs with the Rabbi that there are no alternative explanations for what was clearly seen and experienced by many, and agrees that the Torah is a reliable source since it keeps such a detailed chronology which would have been exposed as a fraud eventually if it were one. As we have seen, the Torah is also generally presented as being in agreement with reason. But even when Judaism's agreement with reason is called into question, the Rabbi can always fall back on the empirical defense; for instance, when pushed on the problem of the apparent irrationality of God's anthropomorphism in the Torah, the Rabbi sheepishly admits that this is a problem for which he does not have an immediate solution, but he still insists that Jews must rely on the sensory evidence which was recorded in Scripture, and find a way to iron out the apparent contradiction with reason—just as the Khazari argued before the Christian.

Halevi further drives home his case for the superiority of Judaism with his infamous claim of racial supremacy of Jews over other peoples. The Rabbi argues that Jews are the “choicest of mankind” or the “heart of nations,” due to their nature as the chosen people of...
God.\textsuperscript{192} To demonstrate this claim, he inserts the prophetic faculty into Aristotelian biological hierarchy: the prophet is a kind of superman who occupies a higher rung above normal mankind, and this power of prophecy is found in the Jewish people—namely Moses.\textsuperscript{193} In the last chapter we saw how prophecy took precedence over philosophy; the Rabbi also links the superiority of divine knowledge gained through prophecy over speculative reason to a racial explanation for Greek philosophy's origins. The Greeks never “inherited Divine wisdom or Torah,” since they did not descend from Noah's son Shem, through whom alone true knowledge from God was transmitted to the “elite people”—i.e., Jews.\textsuperscript{194} Aristotle was forced to use his reason to guess at the nature of things since he was not “part of the nation that inherited a tradition of wisdom.” The most reliable source of knowledge, divine revelation, was given only to the Jews, and so their religion is the most reliable above all other paths of knowledge, even philosophy.

Therefore, Judaism is not only strongly supported by empirical evidence and is in nominal agreement with reason, but it also transcends and surpasses philosophical reason in its possession of revelation gained through prophetic experience. Needless to say, none of these elements are present in Christianity, but rather, the Christian has little to say for his faith beyond whatever doctrines he was raised by his community to believe, and he cannot defend his claims logically or empirically. His religion does not even possess a viable transmission of divine knowledge. Whatever reliable parts of his tradition that exist were borrowed from Judaism, and as the Khazari reasons, why not simply go to the source? Thus, Halevi's critique of Christianity is closely linked to his argument for the superiority of Judaism. The former religion is found wanting by the same standards that uphold the latter's validity. Despite the wide differences in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[192] Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 27; Book II, 36.
\item[193] Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 31-43.
\item[194] Halevi, \textit{The Kuzari}, Book I, 63-5.
\end{footnotes}

76
methodology of reason—and of course belief systems—between Abelard and Halevi, the essential strategy is still the same: establish the role of reason and its correct use, then demonstrate that one's own faith is justified by that type of reason and the opponent's faith is not. Just as Abelard shows that his version of reason ultimately supports Christianity and is inconsistent with Judaism, so Halevi attempts to demonstrate that the principles of evidence and logic which uphold Judaism do not do so for Christianity. This point is made relatively gently and with considerable subtlety in comparison with the next two dialogues we will examine, which make their charge of irrationality more openly and vigorously.

III. Peter Alfonsi, Dialogue against the Jews

The attack on Judaism in Alfonsi's Dialogue is far more potent and direct, due to the simple fact that Alfonsi's purpose in writing the dialogue was purely polemical, with no other major concerns or interests—unlike in Abelard's work. As discussed in the last chapter, Alfonsi was interested in justifying his conversion to Christianity, and so he set down his reasons in a two-pronged effort to show the inherent irrationality of contemporary Jewish religion and the compatibility of Christianity with reason. While his tone and focus are far bolder, the basic strategy remains the same as in Abelard and Halevi's work: to demonstrate Judaism's incompatibility with the rational standards that he holds. As we have seen, Alfonsi believed strongly in the authority of philosophical reason and empirical science, and thought that the exegesis of Scripture should follow reason's lead. Therefore, these are the very grounds upon which he attacks Judaism in his Dialogue.

In the first titulus of the Dialogue, Alfonsi engages in an all-out assault on the post-
biblical tradition of the oral law—primarily the Talmud—which forms the bulk of his anti-Jewish argumentation. Alfonsi uses two distinct methods to illustrate Judaism's irrationality: he shows that the “teaching of the sages” contradicts conclusions which are necessitated by logical reasoning—particularly with regards to the issue of anthropomorphic features of God—and that the sages had absurd notions about the natural world since they had no accurate knowledge of science. These two tactics lead to the conclusion that post-biblical Judaism relies on a mistaken and defective authority, and so it is a false religion.

Alfonsi first attacks the supposed Talmudic “teaching” on the bodily features of God, which John Tolan identifies as the tradition of Shi’ur Qomah (measurement of the body of God). At the end of the prologue, Peter asserts that “your [Moses] teachers … claim that God has a form and a body, and they attribute such things to his ineffable majesty as it is wicked to believe and absurd to hear, seeing that they are not based on reason.” Moses then starts the next titulus with a request that they pursue a deeper investigation of this claim and show where the Jewish sages specifically made this claim, and Peter obliges. He mentions a passage in the “Benedictions” (Berachot) of the Talmud, in which the Jewish sages “have said that God has a head and arms and wears a little box tied by a band on the hair [i.e., a phylactery].” This contradicts reason, since if God has a body, then he is bound by physical dimensions, which is “unsuitable,” and if he must wear something that is external to himself by necessity, this too is unsuitable. Alfonsi relies on the assumption that his reader will accept that ascribing physicality to God violates reason and is not a proper way to think of the divine. However, this is far from an uncommon view among religious thinkers; even Halevi realized the need to engage with the

196 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 46.
197 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 48-50.
problem of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Torah, despite his reservations about reason, so Alfonsi likely expected his audience to accept his position.\textsuperscript{198} This argument also strongly reflects a popular argument in Jewish polemics against the Incarnation that the notion that God is bound to a body is degrading to his status—perhaps Alfonsi was influenced by such ideas during his time as a Jew. In any case, Alfonsi used this apparent absurdity in the Talmud to prove the supposedly dysfunctional nature of Jewish tradition. Peter asks how the prophet Moses revealed the secret of God's phylactery to the sages, since he himself did not record this.\textsuperscript{199}

\textbf{Moses:} Through the tradition of the ancients, it came finally to the attention of our sages.

\textbf{Peter:} Your argument wanders to the refuge of an irrational conclusion, since you will be able to ground every falsehood on the tradition of the ancients. Nevertheless, it is unworthy of support because you ascribe to your sages what perhaps they themselves reject, since they themselves attest that they have not received this through Moses by the report of the ancients, but that they themselves invented such things in the course of explaining the verses.\textsuperscript{200}

A little farther down, they continue:

\textbf{Peter:} Tell me, I beg you, do you know how much this tale is denigrated by reason, even apart from the fact that it was asserted a little while ago without an authority?

\textbf{Moses:} I see the destruction of authority in both [reason and the lack of scriptural support].

Thus, the oral tradition not only invented irrational stories about God, but did so without the support of the proper authority of the written tradition. One relying on this “chain of foolish explanation, which lacks the aid of both reason and scripture” can accept any absurd belief as

\textsuperscript{198} Tolan notes that a number of Jewish and other thinkers rejected the doctrine of God's anthropomorphic features; \textit{Petrus Alfonsi}, 24.

\textsuperscript{199} The account of God's appearance to Moses is in Exodus 33:12-23. The text raises some difficulty for the believer who rejects the physicality of God but accepts the authority of Scripture, due to the implication in this passage that God has some sort of corporeal form.

\textsuperscript{200} Alfonsi, \textit{Dialogue}, 51-2.
To further demonstrate the ignorance of the Talmudic writers, Peter goes on to make arguments “from nature.” For example, against the notion that the presence of God exists in the west, Peter proves that the earth has no true west or east point, since it is a sphere and not flat—which apparently the sages did not know. He also demonstrates the notion of God having emotions conflicts with medical science, since emotions come from the humors which are physical, entailing that God is made of the elements. Later in the chapter, Peter mathematically analyzes the legend of the “keys of Korah” recorded in the Talmud, showing it to be impossible, and performs the same critical process on several other stories to prove their absurdity. In the third titulus, he refutes the Jewish belief in the earthly resurrection on the basis of the natural implications of an eternal, revivified physical existence. His purpose here is to destroy the credibility of Jewish tradition by revealing that it is intrinsically contradictory to science, the authority of which he believes his readers will accept and respect (and value more highly than the word of religious authorities). Since some parts of the Talmud were flawed, the entirety of Jewish oral tradition was suspect:

Are not these the most foolish things? If we lay out all the things which your sages have written down similar to things like these, we would fill up many books with tales of nonsense, just as they have. Here, however, we have mentioned just a few things so that either their wisdom or their foolishness would be evident to all. Certainly this is what I said to you before, that the words of your sages seem to be nothing but the words of little boys making jokes in school, or of women telling old wives' tales in the streets. But pray tell me, O Moses, do you judge that the law of such men should be received, or their

201 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 50.
202 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 52-63. Alfonsi runs through several lengthy arguments to demonstrate the earth's spherical quality, attempting to exhibit a strong grasp of scientific knowledge.
203 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 66.
204 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 91-5.
205 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 131-5.
206 Resnick, introduction to Dialogue, 32.
authority accepted?  

A skeptical reader could certainly use similar arguments against writings in the Torah as well as the Talmud—after all, the notions of God's corporeality in the Talmud were directly inspired by certain passages in Exodus which refer to his body. Interpreted literally, these parts of Scripture would suggest the unreliability of the entire Jewish canon, which Alfonsi, as a Christian convert, certainly did not want. Recall that Peter, in response to Moses' objection that the scriptures also contain references to God's body, maintains that the correct interpretation of Scripture requires it to be in accord with reason, so if a literal reading leads one to an illogical conclusion, another method must be applied. The Jewish sages, however, fail to do so, since they lack understanding of what is an irrational conclusion:

The sayings of the [biblical] prophets are obscure, and they are not sufficiently clear to all. For this reason, when we find things such as this [anthropomorphism of God] in the prophets, which, when accepted literally, cause us to depart from the path of reason, we interpret them as allegories, so that we may return to the narrow path of reason. Now necessity compels us to do this, since reason cannot support the text otherwise. Your sages, however, have not known God as was necessary [i.e., logically coherent], and for this reason, explicating the sayings of the prophets in a superficial way, they erred against him. Therefore, on account of this instance and on account of many others like this, I said above that I understand the sayings of the prophets as a sound sense requires.

Thus, Peter contrasts the literalistic, materially-based exegetical method of Jews with the sound one of Christians, the latter relying on an allegorical and spiritual interpretation when necessitated by reason. This model of Jewish versus Christian ways of reading Scripture is hardly new, and it had a long life in the history of anti-Jewish polemic. Alfonsi took it a step further by adding to it a requirement for philosophical consistency, leading the reader to the conclusion that Jewish tradition is not only driven by literalism but also irrationalism. He links

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207 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 95-6.
208 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 71-2.
the two flaws in Jewish tradition very tightly together; in his list of the chapter headings in the prologue, he claims that the first *titulus* will show “that the Jews understand the words of the prophets according to the flesh and explain them falsely.”\(^\text{209}\) Thus, Alfonsi carried the stereotypical Christian view of Jewish thought into his philosophical worldview.

Peter performs a similar analysis of exegetical method with regard to scientific knowledge: when Moses asks Peter why he thinks the Jews “err” in believing in the coming earthly resurrection, he replies:

> You yourselves claim that this miracle is extraordinary [*preter usum*—lit. “beyond practice”]. Whatever occurs, however, beyond the customary [order of nature] should not be believed without an authority or argument, before it happens. Therefore, I determine that [you] believe an error that you cannot prove with any authority.\(^\text{210}\)

Peter's argument is this: when a doctrine proposes something that goes against how we know nature normally operates—in other words, a miracle—we need some form of support from authority (Scripture) in order to establish its veracity. Note that Alfonsi is making a distinction between the custom of nature and logical necessity, as the former does not place the same level of obligation on our exegesis as the latter. God *can* act against nature's customary behavior, but we should only believe that he has or will do so if we have strong support from Scripture, which, Peter argues, the Jews do not have for their beliefs. Interestingly, Alfonsi was not the only polemicist with this argument; later Jewish writers utilized similar reasoning to argue against Christian miracle claims that seemed to contradict nature (such as the virgin birth).\(^\text{211}\)

In contrast, Christian exegesis is not fundamentally literal, and so it is free to obey reason when interpreting the scriptures. Furthermore, Christian doctrines are in agreement with reason,

\(^{209}\) Alfonsi, *Dialogue*, 42.
\(^{210}\) Alfonsi, *Dialogue*, 120.
and even may be proven by it. Peter defends the doctrine of the Trinity in this way by linking the three persons of the Godhead to his attributes “substance, wisdom, and will,” which can be discovered by reason (and which are of course supported by Scripture).212 And unlike Jewish doctrines which run contrary to nature, the virgin birth is plausible since the event of a human being created without a parent has precedent in creation, and the doctrine is well supported by scriptural authority, despite it being “an amazing and difficult thing.”213 In defense of the Incarnation, Peter argues that “no reason prevents it from having had to occur”—it is logically possible—and we can further understand how only one person in the Godhead could become incarnate in material form by reasoning via analogy to nature: a flame has brightness, heat, and substance, but sometimes we can get heat without brightness, and vice versa.214 Thus, Christian beliefs are sound, since they are consistent with reason, supported by Scripture, and are at least possibly compatible with nature (and if they are not, Alfonsi can still fall back on the scriptural defense). Jewish beliefs, however, fail all of these tests.

Alfonsi represents the more forceful end of anti-Jewish polemic in the twelfth century. Blending rational and scientific angles of attack, and picking a target that few Christians knew of at the time (post-biblical Jewish literature) he was able to publicly vindicate himself for converting away from his ancestral faith by arguing that he was motivated by intellectual reasons, and not out of a desire for material advancement. At the same time, he could display his knowledge of Jewish tradition and thought, thus precluding any claim by former fellow Jews that he acted out of ignorance. He insists on his rational motivations so strongly, that he dedicates an

212 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 164-5; Alfonsi's view of the Trinity here is actually rather unusual, Resnick argues in n.1.
213 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 177.
214 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 185-6.
entire *titulus* of the work to attacking Islam: Moses asks why he did not convert to that religion, since he had already heavily absorbed Arabic learning and language, and it is a religion supposedly based on reason.215 Peter responds that Islamic law is not in fact rational, but influenced by paganism and established by Mohammed's greed and lust. Thus, Alfonsi's central argument is simply that he converted to Christianity because it is rational, and rejected Judaism and Islam because they are irrational.

Alfonsi's model of reason in Judaism and Christianity fits far more neatly into Abulafia's category of “christianized” reason. His message that Jews are hindered from seeing the truth by their ignorance and lack of reason comes through extremely loudly. There is none of the subtle suggestion and polite mood of Abelard's work. Peter lays down the rules for reason, logical and scientific, and the proper form of exegesis, and Moses meekly accepts his arguments. At the same time, we must keep in mind the context of Alfonsi's conversion, which may have influenced him to appeal to Christian ideas of reason which were developing in northern Europe at the time. Such possible influences would suggest that Alfonsi was not as much of a major actor in the scholastic drive towards fusing Christianity and reason, and he drew as much from his Jewish background as from his Christian contemporaries. Indeed, the same blunt and directed dialectical style of his argumentation was shared by many of the later Jewish polemicists, particularly another Sephardic intellectual who wrote his anti-missionary polemic more than half a century later: Joseph Kimhi.

IV. Joseph Kimhi, The Book of the Covenant

At the end of the *titulus* containing Alfonsi's assault on rabbinic tradition, Peter prays for Moses that “divine mercy snatch you away from their [Jewish] execrable precepts and counsels, just as it snatched me away.”216 This suggests that part of Alfonsi's motive in writing his dialogue was to lead other Jews away to the 'truth', and judging from the harsh style and stated goals of Kimhi's *Covenant*, one may surmise that the Church was successful in bringing many more Jews into the fold by the late twelfth century. The *Covenant* is intended to combat polemic and missionizing from Christians and apostates, as Kimhi explicitly states in the introduction:

I have observed that the children of the impudent among our people [i.e., Christians] have audaciously proclaimed all manner of falsehood and nonsense. Their foolishness and stupidity have completely misled them and their ignorance has enticed them into misinterpreting the words of the living God, the words of the prophets, and to apply them in an improper fashion to the matter of Jesus the Nazarene. They have explained them senselessly and have turned away from the truth.217

Kimhi's contempt for Christian teaching is displayed openly and without hesitation or nuance, far from the decisive but civil attitude toward Christians in *The Kuzari*, and far closer to Alfonsi's tone—yet even more aggressive. Along with the didactic model of dialogue, some of his methods for establishing the falsehood of Christian theology are quite similar to that of Alfonsi, particularly in the implication that Christian tradition relied on irrationality and ignorance, just as Alfonsi argued of Jewish tradition. Kimhi also drew upon “common sense” notions of reason when arguing against those doctrines, much in the same vein as in *The Polemic of Nestor Priest* and as the Jew in Odo of Tournai's dialogue. This approach was arguably an instance of the popular view of Christian beliefs as foolish and illogical among Jewish polemicists. Daniel Lasker argues they construed the main distinction between the two religions as the former's

adherence to reason and the latter's intrinsic irrationality. Kimhi's work is an ideal model of this approach to anti-Christian polemic as one of the first aggressive and complete attacks on Christianity grounded on the basis of rational critique.

Kimhi spent the bulk of his work refuting Christian doctrines and arguments from Scripture, while repeatedly berating the min (apostate) for his irrationality and stupidity for failing to accord with Kimhi's standards of reason and rational exegesis. These verbal attacks are worthy of note in their own right, due to their frequency and acridity; consider his opening salvo on the “children of the impudent among our people”—which was a common reference to Christians according to Frank Talmage, but could also refer to Jewish apostates—and their “foolishness” and “ignorance” which draw them into “misinterpreting the words of the living God” and of the “prophets.” Kimhi attempts to demolish any sort of respect for Christian tradition, as Alfonsi did for Judaism, calling into question Christian exegetical and doctrinal validity from the start by suggesting that Christians are illogical (“foolish”) and ignorant. This criticism escalates to a very personal level—the ma'amín (faithful) exclaims, “How you have erred from the path of reason!” Furthermore, there is some hint that Kimhi was aware of the tensions between the use of reason and faith within the Christian community from the min's statement, “whoever wishes to have faith should not scrutinize the words of Jesus even though they be acceptable to reason.”

In contrast, Kimhi's conception of the relationship between rationality and faith is a dependency of the latter on the former—particularly in the realm of his expertise, exegesis.

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218 Lasker, Jewish Philosophical Polemics, 25.
221 Kimhi, The Covenant, 32.
Much like Alfonsi, Kimhi claims that one should not interpret Scripture in a manner that conflicts with reason: those who read christological meaning into Scripture have “strayed from the path of reason.”222 “Scripture speaks to a mature man, one who knows how to scrutinize his faith so he will not err,” thereby implying that Christian exegesis is not only irrational but childish.223 In responding to the min's argument that God can change his mind, using scriptures which imply that God changed his mind224, the ma'amim argues:

It is true that all this is found in Scripture, but Scripture speaks to those who are intelligent and are capable of understanding it. The fact is that God did not really change his mind, but it is the way of Scripture to speak in ordinary human language. Thus Scripture says, eyes of God, ears of God, mouth of God, hand of God, face of God, foot of God. All of this is expressed metaphorically so that people might know something about Him by conceiving of Him as a human being, although the difference between them and Him is great indeed.225

Contrary to the Christian notion that Jews interpret Scripture only literally, Kimhi is perfectly content with an allegorical reading if it is required by reason. In direct response to the charge of Jewish literalism, the ma'amim firmly states that “The Torah is not [to be taken] altogether literally or altogether figuratively,” and that statements which appear to be illogical must be read the latter way.226 Thus, reason must guide our understanding of Scripture, and therefore our beliefs. Christians, however, do the reverse, and allow questionable doctrines to force a wrong interpretation. The ma'amim argues that Christian doctrines such as the virgin birth, due to their non-rational nature, should be explicitly clear in Scripture—yet Christians rely on misreadings and bad translations by Jerome to weakly support them.227 Kimhi placed a special emphasis on

222 Kimhi, The Covenant, 53.
224 This was likely an attempt to undermine the Christian notion that God had made a new covenant with the Church while rejecting the old covenant with the people of Israel.
225 Kimhi, The Covenant, 42.
226 Kimhi, The Covenant, 47.
grammar in the context of Scripture, which can be seen as another kind of reasoning by which he judges Christianity. The corruptions of the Vulgate have led Christians astray, he claims; for instance, he explains that the flaw in reading a prediction of Christ's birth in Isaiah 7:14 comes from the mistranslation of *'almah* as “virgin” and not its correct meaning, “young woman.”

In his more direct assaults on the rationality of Christian doctrines, Kimhi relies on philosophical reason to criticize the Incarnation. The *ma'amín* argues that if Jesus' soul was simply God, then he incarnated in an animal since it had no rational soul. Against the Trinity, he argues that the ideas of God's independence and simplicity contradict with the idea that he is more than one, since the latter entails a superfluous addition to him. In another place, however, he relies more directly on an appeal to common sense on what is 'proper' for God: the Incarnation implies that God “needlessly entered the womb of a woman, the filthy, foul bowels of a female, compelling the living God to be born of a woman, a child without knowledge or understanding,” and lived a normal human existence with all of its corporeality and uncleanness. He cannot accept this since “my reason does not allow me to diminish the greatness of God.”

Thus, Kimhi drew from both logical reasoning and conceptions derived from folk reason as forms of rationality, blending them slightly together into a unified standard of rationality that disproved Christian doctrine.

Kimhi followed the same path as the other polemicists we have examined in establishing a model of reason—and then displaying the enemy faith's incompatibility with it. The *Covenant* can therefore be reliably located within this popular method of Jewish-Christian polemicists of...
the twelfth century, as Kimhi deviates little from the standard form while increasing the
rhetorical pressure. This dialogue and others, such as that of Jacob ben Reuben, heralded the
beginning of vigorous anti-Christian literature such as the *Nizzahon Vetus* and Hasdai Crescas' *Refutation of Christian Principles*, while also reflecting the trend towards rational critique in
Christian polemics. Indeed, Kimhi's work was a direct response to such attacks, and he drew on
his own background of Sephardic intellectualism to combat the rising tide of polemical and
social pressure.

**V. Final Considerations**

It should now be clear that, despite the many variations in method, style, and form of
argumentation that were used in making the accusation of irrationality, all of these writers still
engaged in the same basic formula: assert reason's role and proper use, contrast it with the
opposing camp's beliefs to demonstrate their falsehood, and demonstrate its agreement with the
home camp's beliefs. I have already suggested that the source of the common appeal to reason
may have lain either in the direct influence of Christian polemicists on Jewish writers, or in the
shared intellectual sphere of both Jews and Christians. In the case of the charge of irrationality,
there is just as much ambiguity when we consider possible influences. It is certainly true that
much of the heightened tension that we see in Kimhi's work can easily be chalked up to a
reaction to Christian pressure. Yet, at the same time, Jews had already begun regarding
Christianity as irrational in addition to being false, as we have seen in Halevi's work (which was
written roughly thirty years prior). Was the Jewish charge of irrationality a response to
“christianized reason,” as Kimhi's work seems to be, or part of an internally motivated attempt at
self-definition, which is more likely the case in Halevi—or perhaps both?

The answer may perhaps be found in Abulafia's model for the adoption of reason in Christianity. Part of the motivation behind “christianization” was the scholastic drive for a unified worldview—a need to bring together all the paths to truth which ultimately came from God, both that of human reason and divine revelation. At the time of the twelfth-century renaissance, when the world outside of Christendom was becoming more known, Christian intellectuals developed a “universalistic construct of humanity based on reason,” by which those faithful within the boundaries of the Church were characterized against those who would not or could not accept Christianity. Despite the multiplicity of nuances and additional factors which spurred their creation, Abelard and Alfonsi’s dialogues are instances in which a definition of reason went hand-in-hand with branding those outside the Church as being against that understanding of reason. So it was also with Jewish polemicists, who were members of a group that was increasingly thrust into close contact with another culture which regarded them with contempt at best, and which held beliefs that Jews had traditionally rejected. Given these factors, along with their strong intellectual background, it is not hard to see why Sephardic Jews found it easy to regard Christians in the same light as Christians came to see them. Regardless of what its essential cause was, the perception of irrationality was quite mutual. Aided by polemics like these, Jews and Christians could safely disregard one another as serious intellectual (and spiritual) threats.

On a more detailed level, it is worthwhile to ask how well the various polemicists knew one another's work, if at all. A number of curious similarities appear across the texts we have discussed, some of which almost seem like direct responses to the views expressed by another

writer. Consider the disregard Abelard's character of the Philosopher has for the Jew's plea that his people are guided by love of God; zeal is well and good, but the intentions behind it are what matter. Halevi, on the other hand, suggests that proper intentions are a good start, but that the right way of serving God matters even more. The indoctrination argument—that the opposing religionists are only following the beliefs of their parents—is made in a veiled manner by both writers, Abelard voicing it through the Philosopher and Halevi through the Khazari. Abelard's Philosopher complains that Jews rely on miraculous signs for belief, while Halevi implicitly defends the notion that miracles can constitute good evidence. Halevi's rabbi character holds that the notion of God having anthropomorphic attributes was intended as a sign for Israel, which seems like a reversal (in the form of apologetic) of Alfonsi's charge that Jewish tradition is irrational due to its teaching of God's physicality. More surprisingly, Alfonsi and Kimhi seem to agree a great deal on reason guiding one's interpretation of Scripture. While it is unlikely that these instances are evidence of direct crosspollination, they may very well point to the possibility that these men were familiar with arguments circulating on the other side, or at least the general intellectual trends in both communities and the shared space between them. In Kimhi's case this is immensely clear, as he is directly responding to Christian arguments. But in the case of the other dialogues, it must be recalled that interaction, both congenial and confrontational, between intellectuals of both sides was not unheard of during and after the twelfth century. It is not hard to imagine that some tropes from either side (or shared between both sides) may have

232 Abelard, Collationes, 18.
234 Abelard, Collationes, 69.
influenced more than one writer.

Finally, the charge of irrationality was aided by a personification of the opposing faith. The Jew, the Christian, Moses, and even the *min* all play a role in the literary construction of polemical dialogue by acting as the target and accepting or agreeing with the protagonist's charge. The structure of the dialogue and its characters plays a significant part in conveying the writer's argument, and so we must turn to a brief examination of the various methods of personification employed in these works.
Many medieval polemics were not written as dialogues. Treatises or summae, in which the author spoke directly to the reader and communicated his intentions openly, abounded on both sides of the religious divide. The decision to write a dialogue rather than a treatise was significant, as dialogue transformed the flat, rigid style of a tract, which spoke directly to the reader, into a two-dimensional setting, in which the focus is not as clearly directed toward the audience, but at the speakers within the world of the dialogue. The characters are not trying to convince the reader, they are trying to convince each other. In employing this genre, the author could present his case in a far more nuanced and comprehensive manner, allowing him to offer counterpoints to predicted rebuttals, grant simulated assent to his arguments, and, most importantly, portray the characters of the dialogue in a way that allowed him to paint an image in the reader's mind of the relationship between the two religions. This use of dialogue to drive the polemical point home was evidently self-conscious, at least for some writers: Alfonsi states in the prologue to his work that “I have arranged the entire book as a dialogue, so that the reader's mind may more quickly achieve an understanding,” and then goes on to describe the characters of the dialogue.237

As we have seen from Alfonsi, Kimhi, and others, polemical dialogues tended to fall into the category of a one-on-one disputation with a didactic tone. The relationship between the characters that represent the author's own faith and the opposing faith resembles that of a teacher and a student, with the former correcting the latter's errors and instructing the right method of

237 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 41.
reasoning and reading Scripture. This format was useful for its rhetorical value, since the author could portray his own religious culture as superior in its intellectual capacity and consistency with reason, and that of the imagined opponent as inferior and prone to error. The two characters are actors on a stage, playing out this relationship while giving voice to the author's arguments. This method of dialogue was well suited for the aggressive and agonistic attitudes of most polemicists. On the other hand, we have seen another, rarer kind of model used by Abelard and Halevi to communicate their rather more manifold and nuanced messages. We can distinguish easily between the two types of dialogue merely by observing the difference in numbers of characters: the didactic style only has two figures which stand for right and wrong opinions, while the open disputative style has three or more. The aim of the latter style of dialogue is to evince a complex set of truths or positions which intersect the two major axes that dominate these works—the encounter between Judaism and Christianity and the encounter between reason and faith. This goal allows for a greater degree of freedom in how characters are portrayed. The opponent character(s) may voice statements that help to elucidate the truth, even when they ultimately stand for a false belief system. Conversely, the didactic style is more intended to superimpose the author's views on reason in religion onto the conflict between the religions, by portraying one faith as compatible with reason and the other as incompatible with it. The authors who used the open disputative style still used it to extract the same general conclusion of self as rational and other as irrational, but in a more complex manner that worked out the problems that stemmed from the use of reason in both religions.

Personification of the two religions, in the form of self and other characters in these dialogues, was an integral part of how the author conveyed his message. It allowed him to define
and project an image of the opposing faith onto the persona of the enemy disputant, while doing the equivalent for his own faith. In the didactic style, the opponent is irrational, misguided, confused, and/or seeking aid from his intellectual superior, the self-character, who is confidently rational, intelligent, knowledgeable about nature, philosophy, and Scripture, and who guides the opponent to rational and religious truth. For the open disputative style, personification was more multifaceted, with the self and other characters working collectively toward truth, with varying degrees of confidence and rationality—sometimes the self character becomes more of a teacher, sometimes he is put more on the defensive. This form of dialogue also saw the addition of a third major participant in the debate, who generally represented reason or independent judgment. This persona allowed the author to mold his self and other characters into the shape that met his ends; through interrogation and interaction with the independent judge, the ultimate rationality of the self and irrationality of the other could emerge. It is worthwhile to examine these two kinds of personification—the self and other, and the rational judge—as means of conveying the authors' central messages concerning Judaism versus Christianity, and reason and faith.

The motivation for this method of personification lies in two pressures on polemical authors who relied on reason: first, the necessity of appealing to a common authority held by both religions, which became especially important in dialogues which were intended to speak indirectly to the opposing camp (e.g., Kimhi's work, which was written as a field guide for responding to Christian arguments). Personification allowed the author to conceptualize the acceptance of reason as an authority in a real setting, as the other openly or tacitly assents to the self's methodology and proposed role for the use of reason. Second, the projection of irrationalism and wrong-headedness onto the other allowed the author to work out the tensions
which arose from the use of reason in religious matters, and which were part of a debate which was still current in the intellectual cultures of both religions. Jeremy Cohen notes the drive among Christian clergy to project their own religious and doctrinal insecurities onto an “inverted other” while Christendom was increasingly becoming aware of cultures, both outside and within its borders, which did not share its fundamental worldview.238 In the twelfth century, the conflicts within the Church over the ontology of the Eucharist had only recently been resolved.

Meanwhile, Peter Abelard suffered condemnations of his peers over the very wide berth he gave to viewpoints which opposed orthodoxy and the confidence he placed in human reason. These examples serve to illustrate that attitudes toward reason were still very much ambivalent at this time. The same can be said for Sephardic Jews, for whom the experience of the Karaite and rationalist Kalam controversies were still fresh; Halevi’s work began as a reply to Karaite arguments.239 Polemicists who valued or were interested in reason could work to resolve this issue by conflating the image of a faith that was widely despised and rejected by members of their own community with what they considered to be an improper attitude toward reason. At the same time, they could use the character of the self to depict reason as an ally with the true faith—their own. Finally, some of these thinkers could personify reason itself to unravel the internal tensions, by having that persona ultimately agree with the character representing the true religion.

In the next two sections, we will briefly look at how the four major polemicists of this study personified their faith and the opposing religion to impart their message, and then we will further examine the depiction of reason as a character in the open disputative style of dialogues.

of Abelard and Halevi. While the goal of personification was largely the same in both styles, these dialogues tended to portray characters in a more realistic and three-dimensional light, consonant with the more reflective and (ostensibly) open-minded pursuit of truth in those works. In the didactic style of dialogue, however, characters were largely flat portrayals intended to hammer home the author's strictly polemical message. Finally, the third personification of reason could act as an independent judge of the characters of the dialogue and the religious systems they represented, reflecting the authors' goal of distinguishing between right and wrong religion using reason as a guide.

I. Personification of the Self and the Other

Personification of religions in twelfth-century dialogue was not reducible to one simplistic model. Different authors employed varying degrees of complexity and authenticity in their portrayals of the faith of their opponents and themselves. One possible way of interpreting the perception of Jews in the medieval Christian mind is presented by Steven Kruger in his book *The Spectral Jew*, in which he argues that the persistent representation of the Jew in Christian imagination resulted from a drive for self-definition. The Jew reminds Christians of what they are not, a past non-self that embodies the negation of the Christian message. Hence Jews are material and carnal while Christians are spiritual; Jews interpret Scripture literally while Christians do so figuratively; Jews rejected the grace offered through Christ and cling desperately to the impotent old law, while Christians have entered into the new covenant with God. The Jew is thus a relic of the past, “stuck in useless antiquity” to paraphrase Augustine's

words, a representative of the old age of the law. Yet the Jew must be continually resurrected in the Christian mind in the continuing tradition of *Adversus Judaeos* literature, despite the limited contact with real Jews. Kruger describes this process of resurrecting an imagined Jew as a “conjuring up” in order to “conjure away,” repeatedly bringing back the old persona in order to defeat and dissipate it. He links this mechanism to polemical dialogue:

In one of the most common genres of medieval interreligious polemic, the Christian-Jewish debate, the Jewish body is conjured up primarily through the voice of a Jewish spokesman whose positions are evoked in order to be put to rest. While the claim of the dialogue form is that Jewish and Christian disputants are given equal opportunities to make their case, in such Christian-authored works of debate, Jewish positions are given expression largely as questions about or objections to Christian doctrine that the Christian author or interlocutor can easily dismiss. Thus, for instance, the “dialogue” in Peter Damian's letter consists of brief, formulaic “Jewish” questions to which Peter gives much fuller responses in his own voice. The Jewish spokesman (of course, a creation of Peter's) has no opportunity for rebuttal.

Kruger's observations about dialogue are a good starting point, but several further points are worth mentioning regarding Kruger's thesis in consideration of the dialogues we have examined. First, in the didactic style the self is also given an idealized, unreal image to strengthen the process of “conjuring away” the imagined opponent's position. While Alfonsi's Moses character is a conjured up Jewish persona, drawn from Alfonsi's own past self-identity (as Kruger notes), the character of Peter is a shining exemplar of good reason and truth with no weakness (in contrast to Moses' perpetual failings). If the Jew can be said to be a spectre, then the Christian becomes like a statue—an invincible image of perfect reason and perfect faith, completely and solidly real, in contrast to the incorporeal image of the Jew whose weak forays avail him nothing against the bulwark of the Christian's arguments. Of course, *real* disputation is never this one-

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sided, but it was an essential tool of the didactic style of dialogue to convey the author's argument as invincible.

Second, this conjuration of imagined images of both self and other was not limited to Christian polemic. As we have seen, Jewish writers like Kimhi could raise a spectre of Christian belief just as well in their retort to the Church. Of course, the image of the Christian other was linked to lived experience more than the image of the Jewish other. The *min* of Kimhi's dialogue was directly based on real arguments against Judaism by Christians and converted Jews, while the “Jew” in Christian dialogues had a more mythic and unreal quality. Yet we should not overemphasize this point for Jewish polemics only; many Christian dialogues, such those of Gilbert Crispin and Odo of Tournai, were likely based also on real disputations with real Jews, and represented, to a limited degree, real Jewish arguments. Polemicists of both religions presented the opposing side as an image from their own imaginations, yet one that still had some grounding in contemporary interaction between the two communities.

Third, the emergence of reason as another factor in interreligious debate created another aspect of this process of conjuration and imagination. As noted above, the self needs to be presented as purely rational, or coming into agreement with rational standards, but the image of the other also needs to have some degree of acceptance of the author's model of reason. With so much emphasis placed on dialectical reasoning, these authors needed to convince the reader that they could make a convincing case against a hostile and capable opponent. Therefore, they generated a persona of the other side who would resist their arguments, while ultimately accepting their methods and reasoning.

Of course, the style of dialogue affected how the characters would be portrayed. Kruger's
model of conjuration fits the didactic style far more readily than the open disputative style. In the latter, the personifications of Judaism or Christianity tend to be more authentic and are given a wider latitude of freedom, particularly in the *Collationes*. The didactic format is far more one-dimensional in its portrayal of the opponent, who acts as a passive target of the author's powerful argumentation, and whose own objections are easily dismissed.

Abelard's Jew is an excellent example of the more authentic form of personification of the other. As in most Christian polemical dialogues, the Jew represents the old law of the past, defunct covenant, a “hermeneutical” or “virtual” Jew who stands for a bygone era in the Christian vision of history.\(^{244}\) The Jew himself admits as much, as he states that he should have the first discussion with the Philosopher since he holds the antecedent law, and Jews were the first to start worshipping God.\(^{245}\) The Christian, he says, will be able to make up for his deficiencies, since the former religionist holds the “two horns” of both testaments—here the Christian perspective bleeds through unmitigated. Yet at the same time, the dialogue grants the Jew a seemingly fair hearing, and allows him speak with a fairly genuine voice for his side. The Jew complains that his people have suffered the most for God, and that the oppression they endure at the hands of Christians and Muslims proves their loyalty to God and his law.\(^{246}\) He is given the opportunity to defend his faith against the rational critiques of the Philosopher, by accepting that faith should be in accord with reason and arguing that Judaism is indeed in compatible with it. Why did Abelard choose to write this relatively sincere representation of Judaism and give it such latitude? Hans Liebeschutz has argued that Abelard made the Jew convincing as an opponent in order to further his aims, but the character was still a fabrication of

\(^{244}\) Kruger, *The Spectral Jew*, xx.
\(^{245}\) Abelard, *Collationes*, 10.
Christian imagination. It is certainly true that this character exists largely to demonstrate Jewish incompatibility with reason, and his authentic appearance helps to portray this case convincingly. The Jew's arguments and statements are still largely based on a Christian perspective. Yet it is possible that Abelard felt some sympathy for Jews and their plight, given his own persecutions and hardships, which he recorded in his *Historia calamitatum*. It is also worth keeping in mind the view of scholars such as Constant J. Mews and Jason Taliadoros, who emphasize Abelard's goal of promoting rational and open dialogue in religion; the Jew must seem authentic to convey a sense of a real, honest disputation, unlike the wind-up portrayals of the Jewish position in many other Christian polemics. Abelard's personification of the Christian further demonstrates his open-ended method, since the character is not a stalwart, impervious vision of true religion that is more common in the didactic style. The Christian hesitates when confronted with the Philosopher's insistence on reason guiding faith, and makes arguments that lead nowhere, before finally coming into full agreement with reason. Thus, while one of Abelard's main goals was to ultimately show Christianity in a positive light, he also needed to portray a credible vision of the dialectical method in disputation with multiple participants, in order to prove that reason could safely guide faith.

Halevi also represented the Christian of his dialogue fairly accurately. While the Christian is summoned and almost immediately dismissed in the Khazari's search for true religion, he must still be a convincing image of his religion in order to further Halevi's goal of establishing the distinction between man-made religions and that which had divine origin. Halevi wanted to portray Christianity as a faith, consisting of irrational beliefs, that depended on its natural

248 Marenbon, introduction to *Collationes*, xx.
dissemination through society and being unthinkingly passed down from generation to
generation, and compare it Judaism, a religion which had a reliable tradition of divine
intervention and prophecy and which was amenable to the logical reasoning of philosophers.
Without an accurate statement of faith on the part of the Christian, the power of such a message
would be severely reduced. At the same time, the Rabbi is represented, not as an impervious
disputant, but an honest man of faith who holds the truth and is willing to defend it; he humbly
responds to the Khazari's many demands and questions, instead of commandeering the debate
and dictating his views. These two personifications of Christianity and Judaism fit well within
the setting which Halevi chose: the legend of the Khazar king, a courtly environment in which
the search for truth is paramount and the king's decision is not expressly determined at the start
of the dialogue. In such a context, it was necessary for Halevi to characterize the participants in
the debate fairly, so as to convince the reader that the Rabbi's case was ultimately the right one.

Near the opposite end of the spectrum of polemical style, Alfonsi's dialogue portrays his
Jewish character in a far more condescending tone. Moses and Peter are student and teacher, the
former subordinate to the latter in the search for truth—which Peter has already found, but
Moses has not (yet). Nevertheless, Moses is a sincere seeker, and not merely an impersonal
spectre of Judaism; he approaches Peter to find out why he has apostatized, and Peter
acknowledges Moses' desire to find out the truth and agrees to answer his questions. 249 Moses
further asks Peter to rely on the Hebraica veritas, since otherwise he will not accept his
scriptural arguments, to which Peter agrees. These early interactions in the dialogue indicate
Alfonsi's motivation for personifying the Jew and Christian in a didactic setting; by portraying
Moses as a student, he can make it appear as though the Jew has an opportunity to pursue an

249 Alfonsi, Dialogue, 43-5.
interrogation of his Christian “teacher” and request limitations on the discussion in order to aid his learning. Simultaneously, the Christian is placed in the role of superior, even as he accommodates the Jew's requests. There is less nuance here than in the open disputative dialogues, since the illusion of a level playing field is not necessary. Moses can raise his objections, but he cannot express his own thoughts with confidence like the Jew in Abelard's dialogue. Peter is invulnerable to refutation—he is, after all, the master—unlike the Abelard's Christian who is more prone to self-reflection, and is even capable of erring. We must also realize how the dimension of conversion affected Alfonsi's presentation of Moses and Peter—who are literally two versions of the same man at different periods of his life. Like Abelard's Jew, who stood for the past age of the old law, Moses represents a past age of the old self. Kruger notes how Alfonsi preserved the core of his old self under the layer of the new, which is an essential feature of a convert identity. Alfonsi resurrected this old self and subordinated it to the new one in order to defeat it before his audience; yet this process could be troublesome, since he was virtually keeping his past self alive and even giving it a distinct voice. The fact that he chose to perform such a risky act suggests how enticing the power of such a rhetorical device could be to an author attempting to convince the reader of the comprehensiveness of his case.

At the very bottom of the ranking of authentic personifications rests Kimhi's Covenant. Even when considered within the context of the didactic formula (which was already extremely unrealistic as a setting for interreligious debate), Kimhi's rendition of a dialogue is extremely lacking in nuance and subtlety compared to the other dialogues examined here. The min is little more than a target dummy which Kimhi bombards with his arguments for the reader's benefit.

251 Kruger, The Spectral Jew, 123.
The min is barely a character at all, and there is hardly a human element to his voice; he is more of an automaton, repeating arguments which Kimhi wants to destroy. There is no affirmation or gradual acceptance of the ma'amim's position on the part of the min, just confounded silence when one of his claims is shot down. The min rarely responds to anything Kimhi says, but rather he dumbfoundedly stumbles on to another claim when Kimhi has finished demolishing the last one. His acceptance of the ma'amim's reasoning is more or less silent, as he does not raise much in the way of further objections to the ma'amim's rebuttals, and so Kimhi implies that he has been thoroughly defeated. This stripped down format is useful for Kimhi's practical objective to provide a guide for disputation with Christians and converted Jews. As with all the other dialogues, the aims of the author drive the type and degree of authenticity of his characters. For Abelard and Halevi, a genuine characterization is useful to portray an open-ended search for truth, while for Alfonsi and especially Kimhi, characters are strictly tools to convey the force and strength of the author's position. Both types of personification are guided largely by necessity and convenience, and not driven much by literary objectives or genuine sympathy (although some authors may have been affected by such tendencies as well).

One final point must be observed regarding the personification of religions: in rendering their characters, these authors drew upon traditional conceptions of the opposing faith which had pervaded their community for generations. For Christians, the notion that the Jews stubbornly resisted the truth of Christian revelation, and clung to literalism and materialism in their obeisance to the old law, had endured in the Christian imagination for more than a millennium. Both Abelard and Alfonsi drew from this conception, and hinted at it in their portrayal of Jewish characters: the former by having the Jew actively advocate for the “old law,” and the latter by
representing Judaism with his old self prior to conversion, subtly paralleling Christian salvation history. On the Jewish side, the stupidity of Christian beliefs was a concept that predated even the notion of Christian irrationality, as it can be arguably linked to the counter-narrative attacks on Christ's ministry in the Talmud and the Toledot Yeshu. For example, the references in the Babylonian Talmud to Jesus of Nazareth as a faulty or misled disciple and teacher could easily have colored a Jewish polemicist's perspective on Christian doctrine. Viewed from the perspective of la longue durée, preconceptions like these are just as important as any other factor in personification. Despite the fact that the escalation of rationalist polemic was a twelfth-century phenomenon, Jews were already well prepared to consider Christians as having failed the test of reason, while Christians had already been seeing Jews as foolish and carnal for centuries. It was not a large leap to further argue that the other side was irrational with regards to philosophical and scientific reason.

II. Personification of Reason

Within the open disputative setting of polemical dialogue that Abelard and Halevi employed, another character emerged as a feature of the relatively deeper complexity of those works in conjunction with the extensive examination of reason's proper status that these authors pursued. The appearance of a third character who represents reason itself adds an entirely new dimension to the interreligious debate. Reason, personified, is not necessarily sympathetic to either side of the debate at the outset, and so can act as independent judge of how each religion conforms to its precepts. At the same time, the author could use the character of reason to voice his own view on reason and philosophy, thereby giving his own position the status of authority.

Schäfer, Jesus in the Talmud, chap. 2-4.
In the *Collationes*, the Philosopher declares his independent judgment from the beginning:

It was due to me … that we began this [debate], because it is the task of philosophers to investigate the truth by reasoning and in all things to follow the lead of reason, not people's opinions…. I made up my mind to study carefully the various faiths into which the world is now divided. When I had examined them all and compared them, I would follow the one most consonant with reason. So I turned my attention to the teaching of both the Jews and the Christians and, on considering the faith, the laws, and the reasoning of both, I came to the conclusion that the Jews were stupid, and the Christians mad. 253

The Philosopher appeals to Abelard to act as an impartial judge in the debate due to his erudition, but throughout the work it is clearly the Philosopher whose arguments move most of the conversation. The Jew and Christian debate with him and not each other, and so it is through his critiques that the Jew is shown to be ultimately incapable of defending his beliefs via reason, while the Christian is led to agree with the Philosopher's rationalistic agenda after the latter's persistent goading. The role of the Philosopher, as Mews and Taliadoros argue, is to elicit truth from different positions. 254 Abelard can thus lead the reader to a final synthesis that reflects the effective nature of his method of open disputation about reason and faith. This does not necessarily mean that the Philosopher speaks directly for Abelard (although his real opinion may bleed through occasionally), but rather that the Philosopher, like the Jew and the Christian, are tools for Abelard to express his ultimate message to the reader.

This is not the first time that the personification of Philosophy as a guide appeared in Christian literary dialogue: Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* features a discussion between the female character *Philosophia* and Boethius himself. In conversation, *Philosophia* employs an amalgamation of Stoic and Christian reason to retrain Boethius' thoughts away from his suffering

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and onto God and the good. In much the same way, the Philosopher acts as a kind of mentor to
the Jew and Christian, directing them towards a confrontation with, or a surrender to, reason.
Given the immense popularity of Boethius in the Middle Ages, and that Abelard quotes
extensively from Boethius, it is not a stretch to imagine that Abelard directly based his character
on Boethius’ female version.

Who is the Philosopher meant to be literally? Jean Jolivet has suggested that he is an
Arabic philosopher. The Jew makes a reference to “your father Ishmael,” suggesting that the
Philosopher is circumcised and possibly a Muslim—perhaps a member of the rationalist Kalam
school.\(^{255}\) Others, such as Mews, disagree, and argue instead that the Philosopher is an imagined
representation of pre-Christian pagan philosophy which Abelard intended to use as a way of
pursuing his open-ended dialectical approach to rationalizing Christian theology—what Mews
calls the “enigma of dialogue.”\(^{256}\) This latter interpretation fits well with the self-conception that
the Philosopher himself promotes: he is a representative of the natural law which precedes the
old law, both in the context of the debate and also as a historical exemplar, in that those righteous
people who came before Moses were justified by natural law. He makes it clear at the end of his
dialogue with the Jew that his expectation was for the Jew to convince him to abandon the way
of “our philosophers” and follow the Mosaic law over natural law.\(^{257}\) Additionally, the Christian
identifies the Philosopher as a follower of the ancient pagan philosophers after the latter
character praises the Church for having converted them.\(^{258}\) Therefore, the Philosopher is a
modern follower of ancient pagan philosophers, and so a model of secular thought—not anti-

\(^{255}\) Marenbon, introduction to Collationes, li; Abelard, Collationes 39, n.98; Jean Jolivet, “Abélard et le
\(^{256}\) Mews, “Peter Abelard,” 41-2.
\(^{257}\) Abelard, Collationes, 60.
\(^{258}\) Abelard, Collationes, 69-70.
religious, but neither for any religion.

With this interpretation of the Philosopher's persona in mind, one ought to recall Kruger's model of the conjuration of a spectral figure. Just as Abelard participated to some degree in the tradition of conjuring up the figure of the Jew from a past age of salvation history, and placing him in the present context of debate in order to demonstrate his failings, so too did he invent another character from the imagined pre-Christian past. As the Jew is a representation of the age of the old law, the Philosopher represents the age of natural law; a symbol of the long dead school of pagan thinkers who did not have access to revelation, but used their reason instead. Abelard saw reason as a pathway to God alongside revelation, and so he may have represented revelation and reason in this dialogue in order to illustrate how a combination of both could lead to the truth. Once they establish the proper relationship between reason and religious authority, the Christian and Philosopher engage in a long discussion of the highest good—the ultimate goal of the Philosopher's search for a rational religion.

The character named the Philosopher in Halevi's dialogue plays a rather different role. Recall that Halevi is interested in comparing Judaism, a faith that originated from divine intervention and which is epistemically based on strong empirical evidence of the miraculous, with natural religions that have no divine origin. The Philosopher represents a kind of rational religion, as he defends the notion of inventing one's own religion when one has attained purity in one's soul and intentions from philosophical meditation which brings union with the Active Intellect. The Khazari rejects this method as inferior to the way of the prophets, since the philosophers do not have revelation from God, and therefore philosophy cannot give him what

he seeks—the right way of serving God. The Philosopher's role here is much like that of the Christian and the Muslim: to act as a representative of a competing belief system and a target of refutation. Yet the philosopher's ideas linger on throughout the dialogue between the Khazari and the Rabbi, as Alex Novikoff notes, since, out of all the three early disputants in the dialogue, they provide the greatest challenge to Halevi's position. One of Halevi's main goals was to resolve the apparent contradictions between Judaism and Aristotelian philosophy by subordinating the latter to the former, and so the Rabbi continually responds to questions raised by the Khazari on speculative philosophy and logic—the entirety of Book V is dedicated to discussing the philosophical and religious approaches to God.

In fact, the role of an independent representative of reason is played by the Khazari himself. The king is the impartial observer who seeks to find a religion that will show him God's will—a very close parallel to the Philosopher of the Collationes who wishes to find a religion that is compatible with reason so he can learn from it the highest good. The king challenges and questions the Rabbi throughout the dialogue, often relying on logical and philosophical arguments; at one point, he even bluntly asks the Rabbi why he does not accept Greek thought. Ultimately, the Khazar accepts the Rabbi's arguments and converts at the beginning of the second book. The independent judge is won over completely to the author's camp, to an even greater degree than in Abelard's dialogue. This fictional conversion is all the more significant since the Khazari begins his debate with the Rabbi with a very unsympathetic attitude towards Judaism. Halevi could thus use the critical judge of The Kuzari as a convincing objector

261 Novikoff, “Reason and Natural Law,” 119.
263 Halevi, The Kuzari, Book I, 63.
to his arguments, and thereby lend more credibility to his case for Judaism, as well as to his approach to arguing for the faith.

In both the works of Abelard and Halevi, a figure which stands for reason itself, or reasoned judgment, is employed by the authors to give their theses greater weight. As their preferred form of reason was invoked as an authority in determining the respective validity of the religious doctrines of the author and his opponents, so did some form of personified reasoning act as a final authority in deciding the cases made by the self and other characters. The personification of reason was a characteristic distinctive of the open disputative style of polemical dialogue, and was not very common, since the great bulk of dialogues of the twelfth century were largely in the didactic format. The latter kind of dialogue lacked the more introspective nature and complex structure which a third character elicited in the former.

III. Other Considerations

Either of these two models—the disputative and open-ended of Abelard and Halevi, and the didactic and directed, represented by Alfonsi and Kimhi—were the method of these polemical writers for personifying aspects of the debate between Judaism and Christianity, and playing out and resolving the tensions between reason and faith. Additionally, these two styles of dialogue could also allow them to conceptualize a model for interreligious disputation. As Mews and Taliadoros note, Abelard's desire for open dialogue may have been one of the major motivations for his creation of the Collationes, and one may extend this observation to the other authors; for instance, Kimhi's motive was to provide a field manual for disputation, so his style of dialogue was well suited to a real world debate setting—at least how he envisioned it. The
author not only imagined the characters as reflections of his perception of the entire religion, but also idealized the setting of the debate itself in the manner that facilitated his aims. This would become more relevant in the thirteenth and later centuries, when real debates and disputation occurred with increased frequency.  

This also leads us to ask another question: just how well did these authors know the other side, and did they base these dialogues on real interreligious interaction or debates? Abelard encouraged the study of Hebrew, and did have some contact with Jews in France. Alfonso certainly knew both sides intimately due to his life as a convert. Halevi may have had interactions with Christians as well, since he lived in Toledo during the early to mid-twelfth century, when both Christian and Muslim cultures were clashing on the Iberian peninsula. His representation of Christian doctrine is surprisingly accurate, which strongly suggests that he had had some significant contact with members of that faith. The same goes for Kimhi, who was obviously familiar enough with Christian arguments that he had direct interaction with Christians—especially Jewish converts to Christianity. The twelfth century saw an increase in contact between Jews (particularly Sephardic Jews) and Christians overall, and especially at the intellectual level. Some of these interactions were religious debates, as we can see from Gilbert Crispin and Odo of Tournai's dialogues, while there was also some genuine collaboration in scholarly endeavors, such as the transmission of Hebrew learning and Arabic philosophy in France by Sephardic Jews. Even if some of these polemicists did not directly interface with

264 For the three most prominent public disputation of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, see Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982). The disputation of Barcelona and Tortosa will be briefly covered in the conclusion.
265 Marenbon, introduction to *Collationes*, xlvi-xlvii.
266 Korobkin, introduction to *The Kuzari*, xxxi.
scholars on the other side, the context of the wider intellectual culture of their times is reflected in their work.
Conclusion

Impact, Influence, and Implications of Reason in Jewish-Christian Dialogues

In this survey of Jewish and Christian polemical dialogue from the twelfth century, we have seen how concerns over the use of reason came to take an important role in dialogue between the two great faiths. Christians, driven by an increasing interest in rationalizing their faith, saw in Judaism the prime example of a religion that clashed with reason, which therefore provided a target for their condemnation of irrationality in religious doctrine. Sephardic Jews, who were intimately familiar with philosophical tradition and rationalist theology, brought their intellectual inheritance with them when they faced down their old rival in literary debate. All of these authors envisioned a different use for reason in the sphere of religion: Abelard saw it as a guide by which to differentiate between right and wrong authorities; Halevi cautiously saw its philosophical form as a potential threat to the purity of Jewish tradition, but that it was still necessary in the form of logic and empiricism; Alfonsi and Kimhi saw it as a necessary standard for doctrine and scriptural interpretation. Despite their divergent attitudes toward reason, they all saw in it some type of authority required for the coherency of religious debate, without which there would not be much common ground upon which to argue. Not one author in this study completely rejected reason or tried to rely only on scriptural arguments. Even those who made heavy use of the latter thought that reason should direct one's understanding of Scripture. This shared desire for conformity with some type of secular reason is remarkable, as it offers us a vision of how powerfully driven medieval thinkers in the twelfth century were to systematize their faith with fields of knowledge outside of religion—theology still remaining the dominant
sphere of intellectual activity. The ancient debate between the elder and younger religions was transformed by these men who passionately studied philosophy and reason, and who found it necessary to bring those subjects with them into the arena. They adamantly appealed to their preferred type of reasoning as an absolute authority in this debate, while using this appeal as a foundation for the argument that their faith was securely supported by reason and the faith of their adversary was in irreconcilable conflict with it. The format of their chosen genre enabled them to portray themselves, their opponents, and sometimes reason itself in a fashion that facilitated that argument.

Furthermore, some dialogues present an interesting reflection of real world debates and disputation between Christians and Jews. While accurate and faithful portrayals of real discussions were rare, if not nonexistent, some dialogues were in fact based on real occurrences. Were dialogues, and particularly the ones we have examined in this study, actually relevant to or affected real discussions between Jewish and Christian thinkers? It is, of course, impossible answer this question with a great degree of certainty, but it is still worthy of further consideration. Real intellectual interaction and disputation did occur, but whether these and other polemical dialogues contain any genuine reflections of that exchange is difficult to ascertain.\textsuperscript{268} Influence of polemical dialogues in the reverse direction is far more likely to have occurred, however; some of the official disputations which began in the thirteenth century were possibly affected by certain polemics as Christian persecution and missionary activity increased. These disputation were hardly sincere attempts at exchange, but rather were lopsided attempts to place pressure on Jewish interlocutors.\textsuperscript{269} On the Jewish side, polemics were generally intended to be

\textsuperscript{269} Rémi Brague, \textit{The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity},
guides for responding to Christians and Jewish converts, so their real world relevance is more starkly obvious, although there is not enough evidence of such real discussion and debate to support this conclusion.

Even if twelfth-century literary dialogues did not necessarily have a strong impact on real dialogue, it is still worthwhile to consider the effects that they may have had on thinkers within the authors' own respective community, and the direction that dialogue and polemic took after the twelfth century. These two sets of factors can suggest the plausible effects of reason-based argumentation in polemic that arose in the twelfth century on dialogue in the centuries following, even if we cannot know what direct causation existed for certain, if any. With reference to the four dialogues discussed here, there was a disappointing and somewhat weak reception of most of them in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries (at least given the evidence we have).

Abelard's *Collationes* received very little attention compared to his other works, and the only record we have of a response to his work consists of a short piece accompanying one of the manuscripts of his dialogue, known as the *Exortacio*.270 The author (or possibly two authors) of this piece seems to have utterly disregarded the *Collationes* for the goal set out at the beginning of the work to discover the highest good, and instead he offered an alternative work by Augustine. The reason for this rejection is that the dialogue takes place with a pagan philosopher and a Jew; one rather ought to consult the Church father, rather than heeding the words of the “paganum philosophantem et ebreum iudaizantem.”271 From this critique, we might conclude that Abelard's relatively open-ended and sympathetic approach towards interreligious dialogue

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did not have much of an impact, as this individual regarded dialogue with outsiders to the faith as a pointless exercise for reaching the truth. Neither does this response suggest any interest in the more polemical side of Abelard's work either. As John Marenbon notes, he likely did not read much of the *Collationes* except to obtain a basic understanding of the work’s theme. Of course we can’t know if this was the only reaction readers had to Abelard's dialogue, but given the low amount of extant manuscript copies, it is safe to say it did not have much of an impact on his contemporaries or later thinkers.

Peter Alfonsi’s *Dialogue against the Jews* fared much better, partially due to the interest in its record of Arabic scientific knowledge, its detailed account of Islamic beliefs, and Alfonsi's knowledge of Talmudic material. John Tolan argues it was the “preeminent anti-Jewish text of the Middle Ages” due to the consistently high number of surviving copies dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. In the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Alfonsi's work was influential on the organizer of the Tortosa Disputation in 1413-14, Geronimo. Interestingly, the use of logic in this live disputation seems to have been an issue; Hyam Maccoby notes the way in which Christians seem to have advanced to an intellectually aggressive stance (in contrast with the Barcelona Disputation, where the friars did not engage their opponents with such philosophical force). Geronimo used scholastic arguments against the Jewish scholars gathered there, who in turn complained to the pope that they were “not experienced in methods of syllogism and logic, with which Geronimo, who was an expert in them, had already begun; with Jewish topics of thought being all derived from tradition.”

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275 Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 171; from the Jewish account of the disputation.
self-declaration of ignorance in reasoning before a Christian audience is reminiscent of Anna Sapir Abulafia's notion of the christianization of reason—only now seemingly embraced by those outside of Christian “reason.” While a direct link to the literary dialogues of Alfonsi and other polemicists of the twelfth century is not clear here, we can still see a strong shift towards the adoption of reason as a rhetorical device in real settings, and no longer only in polemics intended largely for a friendly audience. This impact seems strong enough that even Jews in debate are playing into a conception of irrational ignorance, the only areas of Jewish expertise being their “tradition.” In this instance, we can catch a glimpse of how the tone, if not the specific content, of literary dialogues could come to be reflected in their real world equivalents.

Dialogue, as a polemical genre, did not fade out after the twelfth century for Christian writers. One work is of particular interest for its similarity to the open disputative style of dialogue of Abelard and Halevi which was discussed in chapter three: the Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men by Ramon Llull, a Catalan Dominican missionary living in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Llull's reasons for writing his dialogue were a convergence of his missionary efforts to Muslims and Jews, and his complex system of spiritual reasoning known as the “Art,” which is a kind of “rational ordering of knowledge” that enabled Llull to demonstrate Christian doctrines from “necessary reasons.” The dialogue is very reminiscent of The Kuzari, and scholars have speculated whether The Kuzari was the named Arabic Book of the Gentile which Llull claims to have been imitating; Anthony Bonner even suggests that Abelard's Collationes was the model the older Book of the Gentile, as the latter may also have been written


277 Bonner, introduction to Selected Works, 69-70.
The dialogue takes place in a garden between a gentile seeking salvation and three wise men representing the three Abrahamic faiths. The wise men set out to guide him on the true path towards redemption by debating the relative merits of each one's religion, using trees which bear the various virtues of Llull's Art, all under the direction of Lady Intelligence. At the end of the long dialogue, the Gentile's decision is left open-ended, and the three wise men leave, promising to later debate one another and finally reach a decision on which religion is true. This style of reflective, inconclusive debate, ostensibly driven by a mutual desire for the truth, fits well into the open disputative style of dialogue. The characters of Llull's dialogue are on even more equal footing intellectually and rationally with each other in contrast with Abelard's personification of the Jew and the Christian. But the use of reason (or rather Llull's own distinctive version of it) was ultimately intended to bring about conversion of Jews and Muslims, not truly to reach some independent conclusion through dialectical, dispassionate debate. Reason was still a tool in the hands of the polemicist, whose goal was the defeat of rival religions or the conversion of their members.

For Jews, reason-based dialogues do not seem to have been as successful in the Middle Ages, but the rhetoric of reason grew even more powerful in the hands of polemicists who wrote treatises. *The Kuzari* had some reception in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries among Jewish intellectuals in Provence and Spain. Two translations of the work into Hebrew were made, one by Ibn Tibbon, but the work was overshadowed by Maimonides' monumental *Guide for the Perplexed* in the Jewish intellectual world. Interest in *The Kuzari* spiked much later in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but remained relatively dormant during the period of escalating

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tensions between Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages, and so likely did not influence Jewish-Christian debate much, if at all. This is not surprising, as the bulk of the work is self-reflective Jewish philosophy, not interreligious discussion. Kimhi's *Book of the Covenant* likely had more of an effect, given its intended use as a guide in direct disputation with Jewish apostates and Christians. However, the only extant manuscript that we have of it is from a collection of Jewish polemical texts published in 1710, the *Melhemet Hova*, which suggests a fairly low reception rate in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, Jacob ben Reuben's *Wars of the Lord* has more surviving manuscripts, which indicates that literary dialogue may have been influential on Jewish readers, even if Kimhi's text was not. Indeed, real debate likely took place not only at Christian behest, but driven by Jews themselves. David Berger has remarked on the increasingly aggressive attitudes of Franco-German Jews against Christian beliefs in the thirteenth century, as can be seen in some polemical treatises such as the Ashkenazic *Nizzahon Vetus*. In his seminal *Refutation of Christian Principles*, Hasdai Crescas proceeds to an abrupt and unmitigated attack on core Christian doctrines using philosophical and logical arguments, while maintaining a civil tone throughout. The fact that this work was written only two years before the Disputation of Tortosa suggests that even in the Late Middle Ages, when Jewish communities in Spain were faltering before the onslaught of mendicant missionizing in conjunction with increasing pressures from Church and state, there still was a powerful element of resistance in the form of reason-based argumentation and polemic at work in the Jewish intellectual sphere.

Perhaps the best example of reason at work in a real live debate from the Jewish side is

280 Talmage, introduction to *The Covenant*, 18-19.
the account of the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263, the *Vikuah*, by R. ben Nahman (Nahmanides). 283 The main Christian participant of the debate, a Jewish convert named Pablo Christiani, was primarily interested in arguing for the prefiguration of Christ in the Talmud, a new tactic which Dominican missionaries were interested in employing since the Church’s attack on the Talmud ca. 1240. However, Nahmanides sometimes took the initiative with his own arguments in the debate instead of passively responding to attacks by Christiani. Some of Nahmanides’ arguments included reason-based attacks on Christian doctrines (at least as he claims in his account). At one point, he turned to the king of Aragon, James I, who was present at the debate, and made an appeal:

> No, the real point of difference between Jews and Christians lies in what you say about the fundamental matter of the deity; a doctrine [the Incarnation] which is distasteful indeed. You, our lord King, are a Christian and the son of a Christian, and you have listened all your life to priests who have filled your brain and the marrow of your bones with this doctrine, and it has settled with you, because of that accustomed habit. But the doctrine in which you believe, and which is the foundation of your faith, cannot be accepted by reason, and nature affords no ground for it, nor have the prophets ever expressed it…. The mind of a Jew, or any other person, cannot tolerate this; and you speak your words entirely in vain, for this is the root of our controversy. 284

This quotation beautifully encapsulates virtually all the themes that this study has uncovered: the appeal to reason (and knowledge of nature), the implication that the opponent religion is somehow intrinsically irrational while the speaker's faith is grounded in right thinking, the argument from indoctrination which we saw in both Abelard and Halevi's dialogues. Nahmanides employed this condensed version of the implementation of reason which we have seen in literary contexts, but now in an open air setting, before hostile disputants. His appeal reveals the apparent power of reason to act as an independent authority, since Nahmanides seems to have thought that

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283 Nahmanides, “Vikuah,” in *Judaism on Trial*, 102-146.
284 Nahmanides, “Vikuah,” 119-120.
appealing to it would be a convincing argument to make before the Christian king (the attitude he adopted towards his fellow participants in the debate was rather more condescending and dismissive). If this is not evidence of direct influence from the polemical dialogues of the past century, then at least it illustrates the overall intellectual ferment of the time, a common pool of ideas which influenced debaters and polemicists in both centuries.

While far more research into real world contact and intellectual exchange between the various writers and thinkers who participated in this great debate needs to be done in order to determine a plausible chain of influence, we can conclude that, to varying degrees, the form and process that twelfth-century polemicists used in adopting reason in their dialogue literature became engrained in relations between the two faiths for the remainder of the Middle Ages.

Dialogue between Christianity and Judaism in the modern era has arguably progressed far from its medieval roots of polemic and forced disputation. Efforts toward mutual understanding and reconciliation between members of both faiths seem to have prevailed over the more inimical form of interreligious communication which we have seen in the dialogues covered in this study. The Catholic Church has officially taken steps toward opening a genuine conversation with its ancient sibling, as announced by the Vatican II Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965:

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.... Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.285

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285 Paul VI, "Nostra Aetate," , accessed March 30, 2013,
This emphasis on “fraternal dialogues,” and a concomitant de-emphasis on the older sort of disputation that was directed toward the goals of refutation and conversion, seems to suggest that the polemical era of dialogue is largely past. The mention of “biblical and theological studies” alongside dialogue as a source of understanding—a line reminiscent of the twelfth-century interest among Christian scholars in the Hebraica veritas—suggests that the philosophical and rational elements of religious thought play some role in this type of discourse between the faiths. Reason now serves a new purpose—the drive for a fuller and better understanding of the other side of the religious divide—instead of merely being a tool in the hands of a polemicist as we have seen in some of the more aggressive examples of medieval dialogue. Perhaps we might consider Peter Abelard's work as an early, albeit imperfect, vision of this more reflective, respectful sort of dialogue.

Yet the use of reason in an interreligious context, now freed from the grasp of polemicists and allied to the new form of dialogue, can lead to certain difficulties. Reason dictates that two contradictory religious positions cannot both be correct, the protestations of mystics and pluralists notwithstanding. If dialogue should serve to improve mutual understanding, one must ask what role reason can play when it places such necessary limits on one side's acceptance of the other's doctrines. W. T. Dickens, in his article on modern dialogue between the Abrahamic traditions, critiques the sort of approach towards interreligious cooperation promoted by pluralists such as John Hick, a position which assumes an ultimate purpose and meaning behind all world religions and precludes the possibility of serious and irreconcilable disagreement on

that basis. Dickens argues that this view violates the integrity of the individual traditions, many of whom disagree on fundamentals—the “differences among the world’s major living religions [which] are sufficiently radical, in some instances, to go all the way down.” Instead, he proposes some possible models for mutually beneficial dialogue among religions, which take into account a sober acceptance of the reality that total agreement may never be achieved. One such model he identifies as the Socratic type of dialogue, in which both “participants understand themselves as engaged in the pursuit of truth.” We might again think of the dialogues of Abelard and, to a lesser extent, Halevi. The goal of this sort of open-ended dialogue, as it was initially presented in these authors’ texts, was to reach a truth independent of each of the participants' particular views. While these dialogues certainly fail to satisfy the modern drive for mutual understanding, due to their polemical impetus, they can still give us some indication of what such a dialogue might look like.

However, Dickens suggests some potential problems with this model, particularly on the issue of authority: “Another difficulty with using the Socratic model is its assumption that one of the participants or parties gets to play the role of Socrates, who in Plato’s dialogues gently, although forcefully, controls the course of the conversation. Interreligious dialogue must be much more democratic than that.” We have seen this tendency clearly exhibited in polemical dialogue. The Philosopher of the Collationes is not really an impartial guide, but ultimately more of a rhetorical puppet for Abelard to present his views on Judaism and Christianity's respective compatibility with reason (even though he had a more subtle method of doing so than in the

didactic style of dialogue). But for our modern purposes, one solution might be offered:
independent reason, the use of which is agreed upon by both parties, could serve as a common
guide in this model of dialogue, much like the Philosopher does in Abelard's dialogue—but this
time, without the furtive intent of its author.

Unlike the dialogue writers of the past, who inserted a false sense of contingency into
their works while manipulating the discussion toward a predetermined goal, modern dialogue
could become a genuine reflection of what the medieval polemicists only used as a rhetorical
device. A genuine, collaborative search for ultimate truth through dialogue, even if it can only go
so far without the participants having to part ways, requires a foundation that both sides can
accept—as the twelfth-century polemicists realized in their own context. In addition to the
scriptures which Christians and Jews both hold dear, reason can act as a common authority; only
this time reason will not to serve the rhetorical purposes of one side, but bring both groups into a
fuller knowledge of each other and of the divine. The descendants of both traditions may find an
escape from the enmity of the past by taking refuge together in the palace of reason.


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