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BEING AND NONBEING:
The Appropriation of the Greek Concept of to me on in Jewish Thought

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Being and Nonbeing:

The Appropriation of the Greek Concept of *to me on* in Jewish Thought

by

Martin T. Kavka

"Being and Nonbeing" is a historical contextualization of Emmanuel Levinas' claim that his thinking is a "meontology," centered around the concept of *to me on*, nonbeing. It argues that: a) meontology refers to the interweaving of nonbeing with being, and is thus not a whole-hearted rejection of ontology, and b) meontology opens up a thinking of the future, which medieval and modern Jewish philosophers have used to justify messianic anticipation.

The first two chapters defend Levinasian meontology. Although Levinas sees meontology as rooted in the Platonic notion of the good beyond being, Levinas never addresses the question of why Plato rejects this idea in later dialogues. Plato's *Sophist* supports reading *to me on* as the other being, not the transcendent other-than-being. Thus, Emil Fackenheim rightly associates meontology with the Hegelian dialectic that Levinas associates with violence. Levinas' misreading is saved by turning to Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, and delineating the relationship between being and nonbeing as a non-independent one, entailing an unnamable larger whole. The other being ineluctably refers to the other-than-being.

The next two chapters deal with the theme of nonbeing in Maimonides, Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Levinas. Maimonides deduces a teleological arc of existence from Greek accounts of *to me on*: nonbeing is recast as not-yet-being. The modernists highlight the ethical consequences of this teleology: the unveiling of the ethical core of the self which lies
in correlation with the divine achieves messianic redemption. In this meontological interpretation of messianic anticipation, the Messiah is every ethically responsible Jewish individual. However, in Maimonides, Rosenzweig, and to a lesser extent Cohen, ethics risks becoming merely an instrument of messianic anticipation; only in Levinas, for whom the revelation of teleology is written on the body of the Other, does ethics bear an intrinsic goodness.

The final chapter shows that the meontological slippage between the responsible Jew and the Messiah is found in a rabbinic text, Pesikta Rabbati 34, and that this text can be used to critique recent writings of Derrida.
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In the nine years that this topic has been in my mind in one form or another, I have had the benefit of having numerous professors, colleagues, and friends who have given me support. All of them have been my teachers, minimizing the errors in argument and tone in the pages that follow, and it will take me a lifetime to demonstrate my worthiness of the attention and care they have shown me.

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INTRODUCTION:
JEWISH THEOLOGY IN CRISIS?

The Problem

It is fashionable today to say that something is in crisis. A brief perusal of current discourses in academic culture and various media outlets might produce something like the following list of contested scenes: liberalism, America, Europe, the dot-com world, the Republican party, Hollywood, our children, health care, ethics, God. A cynic would say that this is a hysterical reaction on the part of a media-dominated culture that cries wolf in order to improve its market share. The cynic is to a great extent correct; yet the hysteria is not completely unjustified. This pattern is mirrored in contemporary Jewish theology. Its crisis has to do with the relation between Jewish texts and larger philosophical currents. This so-called “Athens-Jerusalem” problem was, in its infancy, a problem of Christianity. It is first mentioned in the third century CE, in the seventh chapter of the early Church father Tertullian’s de Praescriptione Haereticorum (On The Prescription Against Heretics). Although Tertullian credits Paul with posing the conflict in his command to the Colossians that “no one take you captive through philosophy and empty deception” (Col. 2:8), Tertullian is the first to pose it as a conflict between diametrically opposed poles and to codify it in geographical language: “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!”¹ Thus begins a long history of the fear of miscegenation, paralleled by rabbinic texts from the same time period which proscribe Greek wisdom. In the light of perennial worries about the relation between Jews and the state and the loss of Jewish identity to cosmopolitan values derived from the foundational texts of Western

philosophy, the "Athens-Jerusalem" problem became codified as the expression for the
conflict between faith and culture in Judaism as well.

But this split is not eternal. In a classic essay written more than twenty-five years ago,
Herbert Davidson\(^2\) details some of the religious motives why a Jewish intellectual in the
medieval period would have turned to Greek philosophy in order to gain a better
understanding of Judaism.\(^3\) A brief summary of his arguments, with specific reference to
the late twelfth-century writings of Moses Maimonides, is in order. First, the Hebrew
Bible commands knowledge of God. In the final four chapters of the Guide of the
Perplexed, Maimonides cites at least four verses as prooftexts for his concept of intellectual
worship (G 620–21, G 636): Deut. 4:35 (“You have been shown, in order to know that the
Lord is God”), Deut. 4:39 and Ps. 100:3 (“Know ... that the Lord is God”), and Jer. 9:23
(at that time read as “but let he who glories, glory in this: that he intellect (haskel) and know
me”). This command to knowledge was implicated in two other commands. The com-
mand to love God (Deut. 6:5) cannot, on this view, be obeyed without an understanding of
the nature of the object of love; otherwise, I would love only a figment of my imagination
and not God as he is (at least to the extent that understanding of God is possible). In this
regard, Maimonides writes that “one only loves God with the knowledge with which one
knows Him.”\(^4\) Secondly, the command to study Torah is at this time understood as the
commandment to study theological subjects, including \textit{ma'aseh bereshit}, the account of
creation. In the medieval period, this was extrapolated to a command to study physics and
metaphysics, as these are accounts of the ways God works in the created world.

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\(^2\) Herbert A. Davidson, "The Study of Philosophy as a Religious Obligation," in \textit{Religion in a Religious

\(^3\) There are historical motives as well. Two are the rise of the Jewish middle class in the Islamic world that
was in conversation with Arabic appropriations of Greek philosophy, and the need to defend the talmudic
tradition against the Karaite insistence that only the written Torah is the word of God.

\(^4\) Maimonides, \textit{Hilkhot Teshuvah} X:6, trans. Moses Hyamson, in \textit{A Maimonides Reader}, ed. Isadore
Twersky (West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1972), 85.
Maimonides connects this interpretation of the command to study with the command to love God when he writes in chapter III:28 of the *Guide* (G 512–13) that love of God “only becomes valid through the apprehension of the whole of being as it is and through the consideration of His wisdom as it is manifested in it,” and that this move outside of a legalistic view of Torah is justified by the rabbis themselves. In all of these spheres, the rationalization of Judaism becomes a means for working through elements of the tradition that are, on the surface, open to challenge: “Greek philosophy highlights, for the medieval thinker, elements in the Jewish religion that were vague and problematical, and then provides him with the means for clarifying those problematic elements.”

However, the instinct to work through theological problems with the aid of philosophical texts, which appears natural in the texts of the medieval philosophers, gains a more sinister tone in the texts of the Jewish philosophers of the modern period. This accusation that Jewish philosophical theology is no more than apologetics is directed at the venerable tradition that stretches from Moses Mendelssohn in the eighteenth century to Emmanuel Levinas and his students in the late twentieth. These German Jews and their French heirs are not only defending Judaism to culture at large, but also treating Judaism through the universalist discourse of the philosophical approaches dominant in the culture of their day. In the eighteenth century, Mendelssohn used a Leibnizian-Wolffian framework; in the nineteenth century, Samuel Hirsch used Hegel while Hermann Cohen used Leibniz, Kant, and Plato; in the twentieth century, Franz Rosenzweig used Schelling while Emmanuel Levinas used a Platonic interpretation of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. By using another culture’s tools to examine Judaism, the apologists risk a complete loss of the natural particularity of the Jewish tradition. In an age in which any threat to the vitality of Judaism appears to run even a slight risk of handing Hitler a

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5 Davidson, 54.

posthumous victory, this simply will not do. Thus, as Arthur Green wrote about the nature of American Jewish theology in 1994, "[s]haken to our root by the experience of the Holocaust, our religious language took the predictable route of self-preservation by turning inward, setting aside this universalist agenda as non-essential to our own survival." For this reason, Green chooses to reject this entire Mendelssohn-to-Levinas tradition in favor of a neo-Hasidic stance based in Eastern European traditions, favoring the broad contours of the individual's prayer and religious experience, and omitting all searches for justification in the philosophical tradition of Western Europe, tainted by its domination by Christians.

The post-Holocaust crisis of Jewish philosophy, then, should in Green's eyes lead to the dissolution of a tradition that extends back to the Hellenistic period and the writings of Philo in the first century CE.

On the one hand, Green is right to remind us that to turn to Jewish philosophy uncritically today is, to an extent, a forgetting of recent Jewish history. Nevertheless, Green's position also denies of an important strand of the Jewish tradition. Judaism is, among many other things, a religion of memory, of zakhor, in which the moments of the past are bound together in the present moment, with all of their tensions. Secular Jewish history, or the history of Jewish philosophy, is thus also always a sacred history that has not yet ended. Hence, to forget any moment of the past—even the ones that may be at odds with our individual values or ideologies—is to threaten the organic, sacred essence of Judaism.

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7 The phrase is Emil Fackenheim's, and can be found in several of his writings. One example is God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 84.


With respect to Jewish philosophy, then, it should be a question of retrieving an element of the Western European history of Jewish philosophy in a way that speaks to the particular needs (and the need for particularity) of the Jewish people. Only when it has been conclusively demonstrated that the universality of philosophy is a sham, and is of no aid to Jewish self-understanding, can one accept Green's view. Davidson (and the entire field of medieval Jewish thought) has given the confidence necessary to retrieve modern Jewish thought in such a way that it serves not as an apologetic tool, but as a tool for strengthening those aspects of Jewish theology that are open to challenge.

The Thesis and Two Corollaries

In this dissertation, I propose one avenue for such a retrieval: an exploration of “meontology,” the study of non-being (in Greek, ὁμοιότατον). I show that this term is important in the philosophies of Maimonides, Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Emmanuel Levinas—what I term “the Jewish meontological tradition,” although others might be added to this list. Further, I claim that the use of this Greek term for the purpose of Jewish theology, far from watering down the richness of Jewish life, expresses and clarifies it. By using the term “meontology” and/or words which are thematically associated with it ("privation," "not yet"), these thinkers argue for a teleological arc that covers all history and renders it radically open, unfinished, and ungraspable. The nature of human being is to not yet be, to be deprived of the stasis of being. In turn, this sets the stage for a view of the religious life as an ethical one, centered around messianic anticipation.

There are two corollaries to this main thesis. One is a claim about Levinas, or at least about current understandings of Levinas. Depending on one's view of the Jewishness of Derrida and deconstruction, Levinas (1906-1995) is arguably the most recent representative of the Western Jewish philosophical strand apparently rejected by Green. Trained under Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Levinas developed a phenomenology which
uncovered an ethical and precognitive stratum at the basis of experience. In an important interview with Richard Kearney which appeared in 1984, Levinas identified himself as part of the meontological tradition; he describes his ethical mode of thought as "a meontology which affirms a meaning beyond Being, a primary mode of non-Being (me on)." Levinas' phenomenology of bodily expression belies an always religious openness to the infinite which cannot be objectified in conceptual terms, which lies beyond that which is, exterior to the aegis of human knowing and willing. This is starkly opposed to Heideggerian phenomenology. In Levinas' opinion, Heideggerian thinking, focused on the resoluteness of the individual and enabling his or her will to power, cannot account for a real dimension of experience which attests to something which transcends the ego and puts it into question. While Heidegger's pagan or "Greek" stance does not intrinsically guarantee violent acts toward other persons, it does make possible an uncritical complicity with violent institutions; the question has been raised by Levinas, Adriaan Peperzak, and Richard Wolin as to whether Heidegger's flirtation with National Socialism might have been authorized by his own thinking. Within the discipline of modern Jewish thought, most interpreters of Levinas associate the critique of the "Greek" philosophical tradition with a valorization of the "Jew", and remain trapped within the Tertullian distinction. Levinas' readings of his phenomenology into various Talmudic passages have only exacerbated this tendency on the part of scholars to use his thought in the service of a continued formulation of Jewish identity as a radically hyper-Kantian ethical monotheism, in which divine revelation commands that the self render him- or herself "hostage" to the

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other person. Reading Levinas' philosophy within what I draw to be the meontological tradition of Jewish theology allows the reader to see it as a species of Greek as well as Jewish thought, and thereby sanctions a critique of the very notion of a gap, no matter how oblique, between Athens and Jerusalem. Furthermore, this kind of reading assists in explaining Levinas' constant endorsement of the potentially violent State, as long as it is open to skeptical voices within.\textsuperscript{12}

The second corollary of the main thesis is that there is a double-edged quality to Jewish messianic anticipation in the meontological tradition which I delineate. By Jewish messianism, I mean not only the general redemption of Israel and the world in the concrete sphere of historical and political reality\textsuperscript{13}, but more specifically the anticipation of a figure who serves as the conduit of divine agency on earth. The anointed figure, whether seen as king or priest or holy man, manifests divine kingship in his association with Mount Zion (Ps. 2:6), the residence of God (Is. 8:18). Thus, the anticipation of a messianic figure who brings peace and political autonomy to Israel is also the anticipation of God's nearness to the nation, mediated through the human figure of the Messiah. In the Jewish meontological tradition, messianism does not only express the intimacy between the divine and a singular political or religious leader, but the possibility for any person to attain this perfection through his or her teleological aim at human perfection. As Levinas writes in his first magnum opus, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, the radically other-centered ethics for which he argues has


\textsuperscript{13} For the distinction between the public and historical nature of Jewish messianism and the interior, spiritual nature of Christian messianism, cf. Gershom Scholem's "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism," trans. Michael Meyer in \textit{The Messianic Idea in Judaism} (New York: Schocken, 1971). While this distinction can easily be critiqued through an analysis of the historical context of the movement surrounding Jesus of Nazareth, it remains the case that this understanding of Christianity as more otherworldly than Judaism remains dominant in culture at large.
the effect of conserving the self (TI 305) and ensuring my own redemption in messianic triumph (TI 285). As a result, it is difficult to pin down exactly who the messianic agent is, since redemption is guaranteed by my own ethical action. In a radical sense, human agency ends up having messianic force. I trace this idea back to Cohen, to a lesser extent in Rosenzweig, and in a reading that proceeds highly against the grain of current scholarship, Maimonides. As Levinas formulates the view in one of his first talmudic readings, "to be myself is to be the Messiah."\(^1\) This "myself" [moi] is the ethical subject who takes on the responsibility for the suffering of others. In Levinas and Cohen, being the Messiah is synonymous with human perfection seen as moral action. There are less radical, yet still noteworthy, formulations of the association between human perfection and messianism in earlier strands of the tradition. In Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen*, written in 1172, Maimonides subtly tells the embattled Jews of Yemen, who are responding to the possibility of forced conversion to Islam, that devoting themselves to rational perfection will prepare the way for (and even constitute) the arrival of the Messiah—a parallel to the path to redemption detailed later in the *Guide*. And in a seventh-century rabbinic text, Pesikta Rabbati 34, the embattled Mourners of Zion (responding to the possibility of being ostracized by the majority of their community) argue that their ritualized stance of mourning will facilitate messianic redemption. Furthermore, they describe themselves in the same language in which they describe the messianic figure. These blurrings of the boundary between the anticipated Messiah and the messianic overtones of the human striving for perfection in meontological Jewish texts and/or philosophy are a heightened expression of the tradition's belief in the imminence of messianic advent.\(^2\) On one side, the openness of history associated with the interpretation of nonbeing in this tradition rationally justifies Jews' anticipation of a future messianic figure and/or age. On the other, the analysis of nonbeing


\(^2\) Cf. B. Baba Metzia 85b and S 363, 227.
in these thinkers leads to a delineation of the ethical aspect of the religious life in which the subject's ethical action is itself messianic.

The Argument

The first two chapters of the dissertation deal with what I call "the meontological conundrum," i.e. the problem of defining meontology. Contrary to what one might expect, this is not the problem of making sense of various propositions that are some variation on "nonbeing is X." Rather, this problem is historical. There are two senses of the word "meontology" in current philosophical parlance, and they are diametrically opposed to each other. There is the Levinasian sense, which as stated above, intends "nonbeing" to refer to that which is beyond being. On the other hand, Emil Fackenheim, in his 1961 lecture Metaphysics and Historicity describes meontology as a dialectical process, a circular movement of self-making in which the self is established by integrating its own past history into the projection of its future possibilities. This history of the self, its existential situation including the structures and persons among and with whom it lives, is thus used as fuel for the construction of identity. As a result, the Fackenheimian description of meontology involves a notion of otherness that is not beyond the realm of being—Fackenheim denies that his theology involves a notion of revelation\(^{16}\)—but a mysterious otherness within being. This otherness presents the self with another option for being, and risks losing the element of self-critique and self-questioning that is found at such hyperbolic levels in Levinas' conception of alterity. Although Levinas does not offer an explicit critique of Fackenheim\(^{17}\), one can say that Fackenheim's notion of otherness opens itself to a Levinas-

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\(^{17}\) Indeed, there is a paean to Fackenheim's God's Presence in History in Levinas' "Useless Suffering," in Entre nous, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 91–102 and 240–42.
ian critique. Fackenheim's language recalls that of the early Heidegger, and in a footnote to *Metaphysics and Historicity* (MH 221n. 23) writes that "the greatest attempt to explicate this kind of [meontological] logic is beyond all doubt Hegel's *Science of Logic.*" Yet for Hegel to be associated with meontology is anathema for Levinas. The logic of totality and the predilection to violence in its philosophy, to which Levinas is responding in his own work, is more apparent (at least to Levinas) in Hegel than even in Heidegger. Sideswipes to Hegel occur throughout *Totality and Infinity.* The singularity of the human subjectivity which Levinas seeks to wrest from the universality of the dominant strand of the philosophical tradition is fundamentally opposed to the Hegelian language of a consciousness that equates subject and substance, erases the possibility of there being anything exterior to the self, and seeks to render different human existences commensurable to each other and hence fungible.\(^{18}\) Hegel's philosophy is for Levinas, in my phrase, a heterophagy—a consumption of the other person. In short, meontology is completely anti-Hegelian for Levinas, but completely Hegelian for Fackenheim.

In order to judge this conflict, I turn to an early setting of the discussion of *to me on*, namely Plato's *Sophist*. In the interest of justifying the validity of Levinas' concept of meontology, I point out the validity of critiquing Levinas' self-understanding of his meontological position as rooted in Plato and rescue it by re-rooting it in Husserl. Levinas' concept of ethical subjectivity as orienting itself beyond being is explicitly (TI 103) rooted in Plato's claim in the sixth book of the *Republic* (509b) that the good, which lies beyond all being, is the cause of all truth. Yet for Levinas to make this argument relies upon an uncritical understanding of the theory of forms found in Plato's middle period, namely the argument that an object has a property \(X\) because it participates in the form of that property (e.g. "Nathan Lane is beautiful because he participates in the Form of Beauty, in Beauty-itself"). This argument is radically critiqued in the *Parmenides*, as Parmenides states that it

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\(^{18}\) Cf. TI 22, 217, 272; OB 103.
is impossible for an object to be what it is in this manner. An example: assume that both Nathan Lane and Norma Shearer share in Beauty-itself. They can either share in the entirety of the form, or each can possess a part of the form, as a sail is spread over a group of people (131b8). In the former scenario, then Beauty-itself is present in both persons, in which case there is no longer one Form of beauty, but two. In the latter scenario, Beauty-itself can no longer be incomposite and simplex, as Plato insists forms to be. The *Sophist* attempts to get past this impasse by delineating the ways in which the properties of an object are seen in the context of the network of interrelations between objects. Plato introduces the concept of nonbeing, here defined as otherness, in this light. An object X is what it is because it is not other objects. This notion of otherness is, in a loose sense, "horizontal," and is fully divorced from the more "vertical" transcendent connotation of nonbeing and otherness in Levinas' work.

Hence, it seems that Levinas' attempt to defend religion (and specifically Judaism) through a return to Plato is defeated on Platonic grounds. Here, I turn to the third of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in order to resolve this issue. There, Husserl argues that in a whole that contains elements that are related to each other reciprocally and are non-independent of each other, one can say that there is this whole as a larger framework, but that it is unnamable. Since Plato's *Sophist* is an account of the way in which being and nonbeing run together in the process of constructing meaning, one can conclude that the two are non-independent parts of a whole in the Husserlian sense. This authorizes a Levinasian move of positing another kind of nonbeing, a more "vertical" notion which

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19 When Levinas wrote the abstract of *Totality and Infinity* for submission of the book as a thesis for his Doctorat from the University of Paris, he described the project as a return to Platonism. The thesis summary appears at the end of Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, "The Platonism of Emmanuel Levinas," in his *Platonic Transformations: With and after Hegel, Heidegger and Levinas* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 113–21.

transcends the Platonic distinction between being and otherness, as a mysterious and unnamable whole. Thus, I show that Fackenheim’s concept of meontology is grounded in the Levinasian sense of the term.

The next two chapters trace the appropriation of the concept of nonbeing as in Greek thought from Maimonides through Levinas, showing how the concept of nonbeing is temporalized (for Maimonides, in the context of the Aristotelian-Plotinian framework which informs the Arabic philosophers he is reading) as not-yet-being. The third chapter is the central chapter of the dissertation: examining Maimonides’ use of nonbeing in the Guide and its influence upon Hermann Cohen’s writings, I trace the movement from the analysis of nonbeing toward the formulation of a messianic ethical teleology. From Aristotle, Maimonides associates nonbeing with privation of and potential for actuality; from Plotinus, Maimonides associates this cluster of concepts with matter. In addition, Maimonides takes over the Plotinian point that the distance between the poles of privation and the first cause awakens an intimate and erotic desire on the part of the embodied soul for this cause. The desire institutes teleology as an ethical norm. Maimonides’ echo of Plotinus here is literary; at Guide I:17-18, Maimonides passes from an analysis of privation to an analysis of the meaning of Biblical verbs meaning “to approach” or “to draw near.” In both texts, nonbeing as privation gives rise to the desire for its contrary and the elucidation of a discipline in which this desire can be fulfilled across the teleology of religious life. In Plotinus’ case, the discipline is Stoic. In that of Maimonides, it is one of intellectual perfection.

For Maimonides, this intellectual discipline is ineluctably intertwined with an ethical one. The desire for God is expressed in an imitatio Dei, in which God is defined as pure

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22 Plotinus, Enneads II.4, among other locations.

23 Ibid., III.5.
intellect *in actu*, who cannot be reified into the language of substance and attribute. (According to the Aristotelian-Plotinian framework, that which is pure actuality must be simplex and incomposite, i.e. without attributes.) Maimonides argues that we can only know God's attributes of action; we cannot imitate what God is, but we can imitate what God does. One might interpret this to mean that Maimonides argues that God has essential attributes, but they transcend the limits of human understanding. However, I argue that there are no hidden attributes of God in Maimonides. Rather, Maimonides argues that God cannot have any qualities whatsoever. God is nothing outside of God's acting, because God's acts are His essence, or in another phrase, His essence is the actuality of his life. Thus, there is no difference between intellectual perfection and practical perfection in Maimonides, and I show that the divine attributes of loving-kindness, righteousness and judgment are necessary corollaries of God's being an intellect *in actu.*\(^{24}\) The intellectual perfection that is the telos of the religious life is codified in Maimonides' other writings as the world-to-come, defined as the soul's participation in the "supernal fellowship ... with the existence of God the Creator."\(^{25}\) Messianic anticipation plays a key and instrumental role in this teleology, since the Messianic Era gives "powerful [assistance] for attaining the world-to-come."\(^{26}\) In Maimonides, ethics does not lead to a humanist messianic ideology; rather, the political stability of the Messianic Era provides a context in which the individual can reap the benefit of his/her intellectualist discipline and in so doing, sow the seeds of the world-to-come.

Cohen's concept of messianism, unlike Maimonides', is one of the political telos of a humanist ethical subjectivity. This is rooted in the fact that Cohen is not only appropriating the concept of nonbeing as privation from Maimonides, but also (as shown in his *Logik der


\(^{26}\) Ibid., 416.
reinen Erkenntnis) a concept of nonbeing as the infinitesimal from Democritean atomism and Leibnizian calculus. In the Logik, Cohen presents philosophy as a mode of calculus. In the same manner that the magnitude of an area of a surface is determined by being led through the integration of an infinite series of infinitesimals, the infinite origin (Ursprung) is determined as totality by taking a detour through the integration of an infinite series of relative nonbeings (spatiotemporal objects), each with their own conatus that propels thinking forward. Thinking for Cohen, albeit an infinite task, thereby aims at the complete interpenetration of the infinite and the finite. Because the methodology for the social sciences is the same as that for the natural sciences for Cohen—a systematic philosophy must be universally applicable—this framework can be lifted pari passu from logic into religion and ethics. In the ethical context, the good becomes determined through the integration of persons into a community and a state, a process which involves ensuring that no one in the community suffers in exclusion from the community, either due to poverty or intolerance. And referring to Maimonides' claim that God is the negation of all privation (both in a 1908 essay on ethics in Maimonides and in the posthumously published Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism), Cohen argues that since the infinite origin of this path of socio-ethical progress is God as Creator, this teleology is not only ethical but also messianic. Cohen demythologizes the messianic idea by defining the Messiah as the determination of an ethical totality, in which there is perfection on the part of a unified community which possesses knowledge of God and exercises it through humanitarian action.

Both Cohen and Maimonides postulate an essential intimacy between the human and God, between the nonbeing which is privation and the infinite which Cohen describes at some points (but not at others) as beyond being. The path toward perfection is an actualization of the individual's true essence, either intellect (as both Maimonides and Cohen state) or holy spirit (as Cohen writes in the Religion of Reason). It is a bringing into relief of something that is already present in me. Yet the individualist demeanor of this
path opens itself up to ethical critique. An apparent concern with the world is perhaps only a form of Stoic detachment, since it is only a means for the true goal of contemplation of God. Social action thereby becomes merely a stepping-stone on the path toward my own redemption. This is more obviously the case for Maimonides, for whom the messianic era has no value in and of itself, but merely as a political aid to the aim at the world-to-come. For Cohen, the point is shadier. On the one hand, the other person has an undeniable intrinsic value in his writings. There is an imperative to get to know the other person; the integration of the suffering other person into the world at large involves a relationship. On the other hand, there are sections in Cohen’s writings in which the value of the other person is merely instrumental (RR 109): “the knowledge of man becomes a means for the knowledge of God.” The problem could be best stated as follows. If the analysis of nonbeing leads to an argument that the otherness of the other person is correlated to or grounded in the otherness of God, in order to give a religious weight to a certain conception of the ethical life, then ethics becomes subservient to a theology which is predicated on the belief that the otherness of God is better than the otherness of the other person and which therefore aspires to leave behind the realm of the human.27

In the fourth chapter, the question of the value of the other person comes to the fore in a discussion of the role of meontology in Rosenzweig and Levinas. Both Rosenzweig and Levinas assume the temporalization of the concept of nonbeing delineated in the previous chapter. Their thought presents existence under the sign of the “not yet” and thus justifies a structure of messianic or eschatological anticipation. Rosenzweig’s presentation is based on the theory of the potencies of the world found in F. W. J. von Schelling’s Ages of the World, and claims that the world is fundamentally unfinished (as me on) until persons transform the world from the mere status of creature or substance to something endowed

27 This concern is informed by the writings of Martha Nussbaum, especially "Transcending Humanity," in Love’s Knowledge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 365–91, but also the critique of Stoicism found in The Therapy of Desire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
with subjectivity, something (S 241) "animated with a soul." Levinas' presentation is rooted in a phenomenology of sensibility or eros, in which the inability to cognize the thing or person which I sense inaugurates an "intentionality of search" and a futural dimension to existence (TI 258). Contrary to common interpretations of Levinas and Rosenzweig as kindred spirits, I draw a sharp distinction between their two methods. Rosenzweig is more Maimonidean; his analysis of the privation of the created world awakens a desire for the eternity which transcends it. It is this desire which is operative in his account of the ideal ethical behavior of the religious community; this has the effect of making love of neighbor completely utilitarian, and Rosenzweig's descriptions of the others whom I encounter in the religious community are too abstract to correspond to any structure of concrete life.

In contrast, Levinas' analysis of the created world offers both an account of the created objects of the world as deprived of fullness, as not-yet, and as vehicles of revelation which give evidence of transcendence. This is due, I claim, to Levinas' phenomenological heritage, and I outline the ways in which evidence for transcendence is contained within the phenomenality of the other person. Using arguments rooted in both Husserl's Ideas II and the lectures on time-consciousness, Levinas demonstrates that I cannot understand another person even on the simplest level without positing that the Other precedes me.\(^{28}\) My consciousness of my own corporeality is grounded in the prior bodily and spatial expression of others; likewise, consciousness cannot represent a sensuous intuition for itself without reproducing that intuition at later moments in time. Self-consciousness is not self-originating, but is predicated upon (or, to use a hyperbolic phrase of Levinas', "hostage to") there being others in the world. As a result, other persons in the world cannot be contained in any concept of my consciousness. They are infinite, transcend me, and call my self-sufficiency into question. For Levinas, this inaugurates ethics in such a manner

that the neighbor is seen, in part, as intrinsically good, as intimately linked with the infinite creator that is its origin. It is true that Levinas does not completely escape instrumentalizing the other person, for the I is interested in maintaining itself, although it realizes that it cannot do so without acting ethically. But Levinas' analysis of nonbeing is closer to the Cohenian model, because it sees the infinite as always already imbricated in the material realm which according to the Aristotelian-Plotinian context exists as privation, and because it sees the expression of this fact in the ethical sphere as messianic anticipation.

I argue in the third and fourth chapters that Jewish philosophers in both the medieval and modern periods turn to the problem of nonbeing in order to justify the centrality of messianic anticipation to Jewish life. Nevertheless, I am all too aware that this may appear to some readers as yet another example of an alleged modernist tendency to impose philosophy upon Judaism. The messianic idea that is rationally justifiable does not necessarily have to bear a resemblance to any of the variants of the messianic idea in the Jewish tradition. Philosophy may only serve to dilute the tradition into something palatable to the dominant non-Jewish culture. For the sake of contesting this impression, I show that this philosophical understanding of messianism is not foreign to the tradition. In the last chapter I turn to the rabbinic text mentioned earlier, Pesikta Rabbati 34, and its treatment of the Mourners of Zion. I argue that the messianic posture of this sect, insofar as it straddles positions of awaiting redemption and asserting the sect's own redemptive power, is meontological, since it speaks to the belonging-together of the infinite and the finite which is the result of the analyses of Cohen and Levinas. Phenomenologically speaking, this text displays a reduction (epoché) of the messianic idea which abstracts the concept from the presuppositions of the tradition, even though this text is a Jewish expression of the messianic idea. In Pesikta Rabbati 34, the messianic idea is viewed subjectively, in terms of the believer's intentional relation to the idea. Finally, I use this point to argue against recent anti-meontological writings of Jacques Derrida (SM 148, 59) which claim that the
authentically messianic—i.e. a phenomenologically reduced and thereby completely abstract messianism—is not found and cannot possibly be found in any of the Western monotheisms. With this example, I bring the tradition of meontological Jewish theology, which in the modern period supposedly has only apologetic force, to bear on a classical Jewish text for decidedly non-apologetic ends.
CHAPTER 1

THE MEONTOLOGICAL CONUNDRUM:
A Survey of Twentieth-Century Resolutions of the
Athens-Jerusalem Conflict

Any argument that a theory of meontology can throw a wrench in the apparently
unending Athens/Jerusalem problem naturally must begin with a survey of how this
conflict is currently sedimented in philosophy. For even the two approaches to the conflict
which I see to take both sides of the conflict seriously, both of which either explicitly use
the term "meontology" or a closely-related style of argumentation in order to bring the con-
lict to resolution, contradict each other. I term the first of these two approaches critical.
According to this type of thinking, whose representatives here are the Russian-French
existentialist Lev Shestov and the Lithuanian-French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas,
the faith that defines "Jerusalem" is not only a valid approach to answering the perennial
questions raise by "Athens," but is perhaps the best approach to these questions
themselves. They show that "Athens" necessarily announces a realm beyond the order of
being and the rationally necessary laws that constitute it. A rigorous "Athens" commands
faith.¹ I do not use the term "critical" here in a highly technical Kantian sense; both
Shestov and Levinas cite Dostoyevsky as a primary influence, and there is certainly no love
lost between Shestov and Kant. Here it broadly points to a family resemblance between
Shestov, Levinas, and the critical program announced in the second preface to the Critique
of Pure Reason which seeks to hollow out a space within philosophy for faith through a
limitation of philosophy's proper aegis.

The other honest approach to the conflict is dialectical. According to this side, here
represented by the German-American political philosopher Leo Strauss and the German-

¹ Pace Gillian Rose in Mourning Becomes the Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Much of my account of critical meontology emphasizes the place of the subject in Shestov and Levinas in order to counter her reading of Levinas as the proponent of a "Buddhist Judaism" (37). This completely ignores the question of the very Athenian nature of his path of thinking.
Canadian philosopher Emil Fackenheim, the conflict does not admit of an easy peace. Nevertheless, in taking each pole to the maximum of its strength, philosophy and politics can use the tensions of agreement and disagreement between Athens and Jerusalem to fuel an uneasy peace: a fulfilling and deep account of religious existence which speaks to the hesitance of millennial times. This model of "Jerusalem" is a Jerusalem that attentively passes through Athens, but not in order to be swallowed up therein. Rather, in a building up of Athens—the very antithesis of a hollowing out—the vulnerabilities of Jerusalem are eliminated, and Jewish practice can truly become completely valid. Faith is here the height of dialectic.

Critical meontological thinking sees meontology as beyond the ontological order, while dialectical meontological thinking sees meontology as constantly oscillating à la Hegel between ontology and its other. One of the two has to be wrong, no? Meontology cannot both hollow out and build up Athens; it is logically impossible. Someone has to be using the term in an unreflective manner. The conundrum arising from this Auseinandersetzung threatens both sides' resolutions of the conflict. It hints at the distressing possibility that there is no resolution of the crisis-filled relationship between faith and philosophy—and, by extension, that Judaism can never make itself understood by culture. This distress will propel the move in the next chapter to the locus classicus of meontological thinking: the theory of non-being put forth in Plato's Sophist.

It is true that Shestov and Strauss barely touch on ontological questions in their discussions of the conflict; out of the four authors under discussion, only Fackenheim and Levinas specifically use the term “meontology.” Yet I include Shestov and Strauss for important reasons. It is Shestov whose work is suffused with the hope for a space beyond being in which all individuals are completely free; in addition, his critique of Husserl makes a type of phenomenological argument which is, in my opinion, at the heart of Levinas' thinking. Thus, even if Shestov never uses the term—and even if his own arguments about the nature of being at times become self-contradictory—he takes a place of primacy
here for the ways in which his arguments are repeated and sharpened by Levinas.
Fackenheim, for his part, admits to being a Straussian on the Athens/Jerusalem issue on
several occasions. I argue below that Fackenheim's focus on the Holocaust and his
development of tikkun and teshuvah (mending and repentance) as rubrics for post-Shoah
Jewish existence arise from concerns which are strictly Straussian.

Critical Meontology: Lev Shestov

In the twentieth century, the influence of the Kierkegaardian and Dostoyevskian
critiques of reason and its universality that silences the individual's voice opened the
possibility for a type of faith which would be fully cognizant of rationalist philosophy, and
more importantly, the pitfalls into which philosophy continually falls. The description of
this faith in terms of the Athens-Jerusalem conflict is first hazarded by Lev Shestov (1866-
1938) in his posthumous magnum opus Athens and Jerusalem. I describe this only as an
attempt since Shestov's strengths lie in his critiques of the rationalist systems of Spinoza,
Hegel, and Kant; his accounts of faith are frustratingly vague, described only in terms of a
struggle-filled revolt against the chains of reason (AJ 66-67). Nicolai Berdyaev was
absolutely correct in his evaluation of Shestov that “his positive philosophy ... could be
fitted onto half a sheet of paper.” 2 Nevertheless, Berdyaev also evaluated this positive
philosophy as “poor,” and one fears that Shestov's fade into philosophical obscurity in
English-speaking circles since the late 1960's is rooted in a broad agreement on this matter.

But although Shestov is certainly a problematic thinker 3, Berdyaev misunderstands the

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2 Nikolaj Berdyaev, "Lev Shesov i Kierkegard," in Sovremennye zapiski 62 (1936), 376, quoted in Martine
van Goubergen, "Concerning Lev Shesov's Conception of Ethics," Studies in East European Thought 48

3 Not only is Shesov's positive philosophy critiqued, but his views of other philosophers are critiqued as
well. Maurice Natanson shows how Shesov misunderstands key elements of Husserlian phenomenology
in his Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973),
176-78, 199-201. Levinas charges him with a misunderstanding of historical perspectives in his review of
Shesov's Kierkegaard and Existential Philsophy (Revue des Etudes Juives 101:139-141). Finally, James
C. S. Wernham, in Two Russian Thinkers: An Essay in Berdyaev and Shesov (Toronto: University of
Toronto Press, 1968), 70, charges him with a fundamental conflation of Leibniz and Spinoza on the crucial
issue of contingent truths. Nevertheless, a rehabilitation of Shesov to be necessary, and not impossible if
grounds of Shestov's vagueness. For Shestov, positive philosophy is faith, and faith is a struggle precisely because it involves a transcending of the given world in an epistemological shift (AJ 101) from "corporeal vision" to a "spiritual vision" which is "no longer vision in the proper sense." Shestov's language here is rooted in Plato and Plotinus: the opposition between corporeal eyes and spiritual eyes is borrowed from a phrase of Socrates at Symposium 219a. But Shestov dismisses the erotic context of Socrates' statement and exchanges it for a Plotinian framework in which the spirituality of the mind's eye represents a participative union with the very light which corporeal vision seeks as more than the simple transcendental condition of vision (the light which is the medium of the act of seeing).

The quote from Plotinus here (Enneads 6.7.41) is central for Shestov:

Thought seems to have been given as an aid to the more divine, but weaker, beings, as an eye to the blind. But the eye itself need not see Being since it is itself the light; what must take the light through the eye needs the light because of its blindness.

What Berdyaev saw as Shestov's weakness is thus the result of Shestov's Plotinian conviction that faith has no needs of the eyes which philosophy—even religious or existential philosophy—uses. For Shestov, the magnitude of faith is expressed by its unpredictability. Following Kierkegaard on this point, Shestov proclaims Abraham to be the exemplar of a faith which proceeds forward (AJ 397) "without calculating, without seeing anything beforehand, without even knowing where [one is] going." How could this be expressed in

Shestov's intuitions are unpacked with Levinasian and Derridean arguments. The rehabilitation is necessary for historical reasons. It is notable that Shestov was the first to introduce Husserl to Francophone philosophy; the publication of "Memento Mori" in 1926 significantly predates Levinas' 1930 doctoral dissertation on Husserl. I therefore emphasize the "virtually" in Richard Cohen's claim that Levinas in 1930 was "introducing phenomenology to France virtually for the first time." [Richard Cohen, "Foreword to the Second Edition," in Emmanuel Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, 2nd ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), xix.] Furthermore, it is especially notable that almost a century before Derrida's Species of Marx, Shestov's first book (Shakespeare and His Critic Brandes) offers a meditation on Hamlet's "The time is out of joint" which is in the spirit of Derrida's later appeals for a phenomenologically reduced religious consciousness. Although this text is only available in Russian, Shestov himself summarizes the text with specific reference to the Hamlet passage in "In Memory of a Great Philosopher: Edmund Husserl," trans. George L. Kline, in Shestov, Speculation and Revelation (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), 271.
any kind of philosophical language beyond the hints that appear in the moods of despair and anguish? Shestov is trying to give voice to the ineffable, and this has been the scourge of all philosophers throughout history, even Plato. Shestov knows this, citing the fall of Platonism at the moment when Plato attempted to turn the Socratic elenchos into a positive doctrine: a fissured opened up between the "primordial, infinite and supernatural fullness and beauty of being" which had been opened up by his reflections, and the ineffable which simply and enigmatically remained ineffable. In this situation, then, positive philosophy will necessarily lose out. Even half a page would be a grand achievement! The spiritual eyes' disdain of being qua object of sight—after all, being the light, they have no need of such dichotomization—is, in my opinion, a standard example of the critical-metontological notion of meontology as beyond the ontological order of being, a concept more fully unpacked in the thought of Levinas.

The kernel of Shestov's critique of rationalist philosophy is his assertion (AJ 385) that the philosophers' "great offense is that, as soon as they realize that they have not found the absolute, they are willing to recognize as absolute one of the products of human activity, such as science, the state, morality, religion, etc." This goes a step further than the Kantian critique of speculative reason, for the speculators do not realize that they have missed out on the absolute. Shestov charges Kant with repeating speculation on another level, in the very act of submitting everything to reason, and most importantly, reason's law of necessity, the law that there be necessity. For Shestov, this is the ultimately constraining law, the law which puts even "Parmenides in chains," as the first section of Athens & Jerusalem is titled. This bears shades of Kierkegaard: it is the universality of the law of necessity that places the singular individual in the shackles of the category of the general (parallel to the Levinasian concept of totality), thereby inhibiting the individual's freedom to have faith in anything that would transcend necessity and to be transfigured by that very faith. Science quashes the individual. It therefore misses out on truth insofar as, according to Shestov, an individual's existential experience constitutes what truth is for that individual: "science
cannot give us truth ... for truth lies in the singular, uncontrollable, incomprehensible, and contingent."\(^4\)

Much of *Athens & Jerusalem* is taken up with critiques of the place of reason in Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. These are obviously representatives of “Athens” for Shestov. Yet interestingly enough, there are philosophers who do not represent “Athens” in Shestov’s eyes: Plato and Plotinus. It is Aristotle and the Stoics (especially Epictetus) who cause the Platonic and Neoplatonic struggle for freedom to lie in ruins for the remainder of the history of philosophy. Thus Shestov himself goes against many interpretations of his thought. Bernard Martin writes that (AJ 36) “Man, Shestov concludes, must choose: Athens or Jerusalem. He cannot have both.” Martine van Goubergen expresses a popular view of Shestov as simply the non-literary equivalent of Dostoevsky’s rejection of the proposition that two times two is four in *Notes from the Underground*. Shestov himself announces in his own introduction to *Athens and Jerusalem* that he will cease history’s stubborn refusal to insert an “or” between Athens and Jerusalem (AJ 47). Yet if Plato and Plotinus have epistemological benefits that lead Shestov in the end to place them on the “Jerusalem” side of the divide, while even Shestov’s beloved Kierkegaard has problems that place him in part on the side of “Athens”, then readers must draw two conclusions. First, Shestov has indeed rehabilitated the “and” in “Athens and Jerusalem” in a unique way, one which involves displaying “Jerusalem” as a species of Athenian thinking, a cousin once removed of Platonism and Neoplatonism. Second, this brings Shestov closer to the classical Kantian notion of critique than Shestov himself realizes, since Shestov is not making a leap from rationality to irrationality in the rejection of eternal truths, but is rather choosing one set of eternal truths over against another which may overthrow the *scientific* rationalism rooted in an Aristotelian perception of the particular, but not reason or philosophy *per se*. The type of reason which Shestov

chooses has the effect of limiting the sphere of speculation within the set of choices that the individual makes in his or her religious life—a Kantian strategy with markedly non-Kantian results, since speculation is limited to playing the role of referee in the religious philosopher’s prophetic struggle against reason. I will now recapitulate this argument in greater detail.

In dwelling on the theme of necessity which has constrained thinking ever since Aristotle noted at *Metaphysics* 1015a that “necessity does not allow itself to be persuaded,” Shestov notes that while Aristotle is more than willing to bow down before necessity, as bitter as this may be, Plato had more courage on this matter (AJ 77-9, 100). Shestov’s first Platonic slogan in the “Parmenides in chains” section of *Athens and Jerusalem* is from *Theaetetus* 196d—“we must stop at nothing; suppose we try being quite shameless.” Plato is a warrior for Shestov: not so much in the rather systematic (but unsuccessful) attempt to define knowledge that characterizes the *Theaetetus*, but rather in the very conceptualization of the Forms themselves and their place in the life of the philosopher. The Platonic philosopher is for Shestov rigorously opposed to science, and receives “his inspiration from the fantastic” (AJ 103) through the practice of the rehearsal of death which Socrates defines as the essence of philosophy at *Phaedo* 64a. Shestov proclaims the *meletē thanatou* as the essence of Platonic thinking; Platonism becomes (AJ 104) “a philosophy that is no longer science and no longer even knowledge.”

But then, what can philosophy be? Philosophy becomes an act—the modality of which lies somewhere between knowledge, faith, and hope—based on the argument that since the moment of death is closest to spiritual vision, it is therefore only in death that revelation and truth can be heard. Death is ultimately important. Again, this reflects a Plotinian reading of Plato, one which not only places value in that which is beyond life and reason, but also which defines philosophy as “that which is most important,” a formula which serves as the epigram to Shestov’s essay on Husserl in *Potestas Clavium*.5 In the process, philosophy

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5 Shestov, "Memento Mori (On Edmund Husserl’s Theory of Knowledge)," in *Potestas Clavium*, trans.
is transformed into a prophetic struggle. It is prophetic because it is inherently future-oriented and receives its wisdom from that which is beyond. It is a struggle because of the gap between this beyond and my corporeal eyes which constrain my vision of it. At one point, Shestov is clear about the ontological aspects of this approach to philosophy: the travel to the place where death reigns and is the source of all truth is a travel “to the most distant boundaries of being” (AJ 112), where the spiritual eye does not see what is but (AJ 104) “becomes what is.” Curiously, this attaining of Being-itself is a forsaking of human being in the here and now; being is attained through the rehearsal of nonbeing in the most simplistic sense, the nothingness associated with death. The being of the corporeal eyes is extirpated.

Shestov is aware that his own conclusions are necessarily proleptic since he is still alive. Yet this does not dampen his hope for the eye transplant that brings salvation.

It may be that, behind the difficulties and the horrors of death, there is hidden something that we need much more than the facilities and pleasantries of daily life. . . . But if one becomes intimate with death, if one passes through the needle’s eye of final and terrible solitude, of forsakenness and despair, then one may perhaps succeed in recovering the sacred “by my will,” the primordial and powerful jubere [commanding] that we have exchanged for the weak, automatic and soothing parere [obeying]. We must overcome fear, summon up all our courage, go toward death and try our luck with her. Ordinary thought, the thought of the man who obeys and recoils before threats, gives us nothing. (AJ 112-13)

The chiasmatic overturning of the life/death relationship, in which death is renamed as the life of powerful freedom and daily life becomes death by comparison, could not be clearer. This intimacy with death is redemptive. We hold out hope for “participation” (AJ 119) and “communion” (AJ 120) in true reality, instead of the vision of the illusions of the phenomenal world which can only leave us starving to death in their chains. We hold out hope for the “creative power” (AJ 124) that is truly the domain of the divine mind. The water of apotheosis involves a simultaneous remembering and forgetting. One remembers the primordial beauty and fullness of being, while forgetting to see as the corporeal eyes see.

Nevertheless, the turn to Plato and Plotinus in Shestov is ultimately unsatisfying. Shestov shoots his own project in the foot when he describes this forgetting as "necessary" (AJ 121), thus reinscribing the very universality into his project from which he had sought to inoculate it. In a bizarrely circular logic, corporeal eyes and the begging of the question of necessity appear as the transcendental condition at every moment of their own forgetting. The struggle here exemplarily shows itself—the intimacy with death turns into the death which Shestov associates with reason. It thus appears as if an inquest into the cause of Shestov's death in philosophic circles points to a vaccine against necessity which somehow transmogrified itself into a deadly parasite. The coroner would undoubtedly have found the words "Made in Athens" on the bottle containing the serum. But what other cause of death could there have been? Even (AJ 116) "Plato did not succeed in bringing back to men what he has found beyond the limits of all possible knowledge," for thermatizing that which lies beyond being only ruins its transcendence. "When he tried to show men what he had seen, the thing changed itself mysteriously under his eyes into its contrary." The absolute became yet another object for knowledge once it was brought down from the heights.

Why should any philosopher want to die so tragically? Why should any philosopher want to dare to scale the heights ever again? Isn't it easier just to take the Aristotelian approach to epistemology and "bless our knowledge" (AJ 96) and its categories? This is what philosophy ended up doing, after all. The two central chapters of Athens and Jerusalem are spent in an excoriation of modern philosophy and the medieval rationalism for succumbing to death so easily. Spinoza places necessity over and above God in his assertion that God could not created the world in any other manner; moreover, he rejects death completely, holding wisdom to be a "meditation on life" and interpreting spiritual vision as simply the best possible perception (AJ 105), "in a certain sense only the corporeal eyes par excellence." Kant thermatizes ethics as practical reason, places it under the stamp of necessity, and thus gives his readers a model of faith which (AJ 160) "is reason itself but under another name." "Duty is only Necessity diluted and weakened" (AJ
427). Hegel falls into error in his reading of the Fall, since he refuses to see the serpent as deceiving Adam, but rather as instituting philosophical practice. In the Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Hegel writes that “the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil —of the knowledge that is of reason out of itself—is the universal principle of philosophy for all later times.” For Shestov, this symbolizes a shift away from the world under the power of God to a world under the power of the serpent and reason. “From the moments the gods left the world, the tree of knowledge forever hid the tree of life” (AJ 177)—it is the tree of life that would have made us like God since it represents those things that were under the power of God, whereas the tree of knowledge in fact only represents the dominion of the serpent, whom philosophers continue to obey.

Death manages to strike even at Nietzsche, who lies behind Shestov’s aphoristic style in In Job’s Balances, and Kierkegaard, who is at the source of the emphasis on the singular in the final chapter of Athens and Jerusalem. The Nietzschean doctrines of the will to power and the eternal return describe precisely the realm beyond good and evil where Shestov wants to take philosophy, and Shestov gives them the same structural importance which grace possesses in Lutheranism (AJ 207). The relation of complete otherness between Nietzschean concepts and fallen traditional philosophy are described by Shestov “as if he had suddenly been transported, like Moses, to that peak where ‘he speaks with God face to face.’... he discovered that there, face to face with the primordial mystery, ‘law and reason have nothing to do.’” The theory of the eternal return especially is the symbol of “redemption from the past” (AJ 216) which allows Shestov to describe Nietzsche as in line with Biblical thinking. Yet Shestov is equally insistent that Nietzsche has fallen into the trap of reason which renders his teachings self-refuting. If the eternal return is marked by the desire to sublimate everything to the creative will 7, then it repeats

6 Quoted at AJ 164-65.

the universality of the law of necessity. The very movement of the eternal return which Nietzsche describes in *Beyond Good and Evil*—in which my memory states "This I have done" and pride responds by saying "This I cannot have done"—thence inaugurating a moment of triumphalist forgetting of the past in the creation of a radically new future—is themselves dependent upon a moment in which the content of the memory is necessary. This is admittedly a rather puzzling reading of Nietzsche here. Yet Shestov argues (AJ 217) that when the eternal return is universalized,

this would mean that when memory says to a man, "you have done this," no discussion, no protest, is any longer possible, for the memory reproduces exactly the past to which eternal existence in truth is guaranteed. To put it differently, he must renounce the will to power and adopt the attitude of the common man who accepts everything that fate brings him, or even the attitude of the sage who not only accepts everything but sees in this disposition "to bear both faces of fortune with equanimity" a virtue and considers this virtue his supreme good. It is impossible to escape the stone that calls itself "it was," and "redemption" becomes a word devoid of meaning.

In other words, Nietzsche does not simply try his luck with death in order to escape necessity, but his intimate relationship with death goes overboard. He is powerless to resist the authority of the past and its eternal truths and thereby comes face to face not with God, but with necessity itself in the guise of reason-death itself. And necessity is as victorious over Nietzsche as it was over Aristotle. The repetition of corporeal vision in the eternal return ironically ends up affirming only the knowledge of one thing, which I believe to be best expressed by Friar Lawrence in the final scene of *Romeo and Juliet*: "a greater power than we can contradict/hath thwarted our intents."

Kierkegaard is similarly seduced by necessity in *Fear and Trembling*, according to Shestov, and is thereby unable to follow his own project to its proposed conclusions. Although Abraham qua knight of faith certainly lies outside of the universal insofar as Kierkegaard describes him, since the faith of Abraham is not bound by the laws of reason and ethics, but is impervious to them and is rather a faith by virtue of the absurd. Yet

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Shestov poses difficult questions to Kierkegaard on the nature of the ethical which is supposedly suspended in Abraham's faith. One can distinguish three distinct moments in Shestov's critique. First, Kierkegaard's rejection of the Hegelian system is supposedly rooted in Biblical values. Yet if he describes the world of the spirit as the place where "an eternal divine order rules" (AJ 240), then Kierkegaard has completely misunderstood the Bible, which does not paint God as immutable (AJ 253). After all, Abraham was able to change God's mind on the issue of Sodom and Gomorrah. And according to Shestov's interpretation of the close of the Book of Job, God does not simply give Job other children, or bring back Job's children, but exercises His ability to abrogate history completely insofar as He makes it the case that they were never killed in the first place. The biblical notion of God is incommensurable with the notion of eternity, and Kierkegaard, according to Shestov, has only dragged the rational law of necessity into Biblical interpretation. Second, Kierkegaard's account of the Akedah centers on Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son merely qua the result of a faith qua mere obedience (AJ 253): "Abraham's faith, for Kierkegaard, is not God's gift, it is his own dessert." But Shestov correctly sees (AJ 253) Kierkegaard's focus on Abraham's faith as a species of obligation as a reinscription of Kant's categorical imperative.\(^\text{10}\) Third, Shestov sees in the very terms "knight of resignation" and "knight of faith" an aura of nobility which is foreign to the very experience of faith as Kierkegaard has described it in Fear and Trembling. "To one who has dedicated himself to faith there remains only 'horror,'" and to describe it as knightly, noble, or other just language which is bound up with the order of the beautiful can only have a consoling effect which Kierkegaard himself assigns to the very universal order which Abraham's faith transcends. The singular, the essential aspect of faith, makes faith for Shestov (AJ 245) "only ugliness and misery."

Yet in spite of the failings of modern idealism and existentialism, there are two other

\(^{10}\) And if Ronald Green's thesis in Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) is correct, this is Kierkegaard's intent.
residents of "Athens" who provide a more stable ground for attaining the escape from the law of necessity that dictates what is and is not possible. In a move which will surprise readers of Levinas only in its absence of any surprise, Shestov hints at a way of thinking that, if codified, would center on Cartesian rationalism and a modified phenomenology. Shestov sees Descartes as setting the ground for a hollowed-out philosophy that makes Biblical thinking possible in the Cartesian principle that "since every ground of the true and the good depends on His omnipotence, I would not be able to say that God cannot bring it about that there be a mountain without a valley or that one and two not make three."\textsuperscript{11} This is scandalous: "we are obliged to confess that the greatest rationalist of modern times broke with the ancient philosophy and took the road opened up by Tertullian and Peter Damian." Yet Shestov should realize that this is not the road taken by Tertullian; Descartes does not suddenly become an irrationalist, since Descartes' claim depends upon arguments made in the Third Meditation about the transcendental conditions for the possibility of truth. What Shestov is endorsing is an Athens-Jerusalem resolution that focusses on those places where Athens reaches its limits and still seeks that which it cannot give to itself.

Both in Athen and Jerusalem and Potestas Clavium, Shestov is highly critical of Husserl, because the horror of singular experience disappears underneath the apodictic judgments made by the rigorous science of phenomenology. Nevertheless, we know that it is Husserl who implored Shestov to read Kierkegaard\textsuperscript{12}, and his criticisms of Husserl are tempered by equal, if not greater, amounts of praise. This is not simply due to the fact that Husserl argues the case for necessity better than his predecessors but also apparently because it is the route which Husserl closes off as philosophical options which prove so tempting to Shestov.\textsuperscript{13} The relevant passage in Athen and Jerusalem begins as follows

\textsuperscript{11} Quoted at AJ 311, from a letter to Arnauld dated 29 July 1648.

\textsuperscript{12} Shestov, "In Memory of a Great Philosopher," 272.

\textsuperscript{13} Shestov, "Memento Mori," 292-293, points out that Husserl's opposition between the historical notion of "philosophy" as merely a wisdom tradition and true philosophy qua rigorous science is in line with his own thinking. Although each of them obviously privileges different sides of the opposition, Husserl's
(AJ 432): “Phenomenology, the faithful disciples of Husserl declare, ignores the difference between *homo dormiens* and *homo vigilans*. This is true. It does ignore this difference, and herein lies the source of its power and persuasive force.” Shestov's narrative of phenomenology is thus a narrative of what phenomenology *represses*, the sleeping consciousness which does not bestow sense onto objects.\(^{14}\) Shestov’s response to Husserl is a recovery of that repressed object.\(^{15}\)

The Shestovian response is still, however, definitely phenomenological; yet as a phenomenology of *homo dormiens* as opposed to *homo vigilans* it is phenomenology otherwise. The response hazarded in *Athens and Jerusalem* (AJ 432–33) is a rather unwieldy condensation\(^{16}\) of the argument from the close of the fifth section of “Memento Mori” in *Potestas Clavium*, and it is to that essay that I now turn. The phenomenology of *homo dormiens* takes dream-states as its object of description in order to demonstrate that “nature itself plunges us from time to time into states whose 'evidence' is very different from that which serves as the basis for Husserl's theory of knowledge.”\(^{17}\) There is a logic to dreams that consoles the dreamer and tells her that the contradictory elements of her dream\(^{18}\) are not contradictions in the least. This mode of evidence, however, suddenly disappears by another evidence which tells us, *still while dreaming*, that we are only imagin-

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\(^{16}\) Also cf. “In Memory of a Great Philosopher,” 289.

\(^{17}\) Shestov, “Memento Mori,” 325.

\(^{18}\) Shestov's examples are dreaming that one is the emperor of China without being ethnically Chinese or knowing a word of the language, and dreaming of a one-dimensional sphere.
ing and must awaken. Shestov concludes from this that the separation of wakefulness and sleep in classical phenomenology is incoherent: "If we say that we are sleeping and that our evidence is the evidence of a sleeper, i.e., a deceptive evidence, the statement that we are sleeping is also false." The phenomenology of the dream reveals the breakup of consciousness, which suddenly has become riven in two, into a false consciousness (that of the dreamer) and a true meta-consciousness (that which tells us that the dream is a dream). This bifurcation of the self—which I shall show to be the hallmark of Levinasian thinking both in this chapter and in chapter 4—is the essence of selfhood shown by a phenomenology of dreams. For I would not be able to recognize the evidence of sleep while being asleep, if my sleep did not have some phenomenological similarity to wakefulness, if my sleep were not an intentional modification of my wakefulness. This is a standard argument from a possible experience to its necessary transcendental condition: because it is possible to recognize the absurdity of dreams as absurd, they must have within them a natural evidence which allows them to be recognized as such by a consciousness on the verge of waking. Our dreams while asleep are not evidence against phenomenology, but for altering the purview of phenomenology to allow for varied different kinds of evidence which is not granted by the law of necessity. The contradiction found in dreams—I am and am not asleep when I dream—demonstrates that reason is not sovereign, and points to a vigilant recognition of exteriority that can allow us to revolt against "the order of the enchanted kingdom in which we are destined to be born and end our ephemeral existence."

This analysis is not anti-Husserlian, although Shestov could not possibly have known this at the time of the writing of his essays on Husserl. Maurice Natanson was the first to argue that Shestov's comments on Husserl would not have been nearly so critical if Shestov would have been able to read the more existentially-flavored Crisis, which was not

\[19\] Shestov, "Memento Mori," 327.

\[20\] Ibid., 358.
published until 1954. Furthermore, the research of James Hart into the Husserlian Nachlass has incontrovertibly demonstrated that for the late Husserl, the distinction between wakefulness and sleep collapses. The conclusion that sleep is an intentional modification of wakefulness leads to a Husserlian emphasis on the phenomenon of “primal presencing” (first introduced in the Analyses of Passive Synthesis), the extratemporal flux which serves as the ground of the self’s internal time-consciousness and thereby introduces a nonegological exterior moment into the nature of the ego. Both Shestov and the late Husserl are arguing for a mode of philosophical thought that is oriented around an attunement to this moment of otherness—a philosophy that, in hollowing out the epistemological claims of “Athens”, takes it to a point where it cannot but allow the validity of “Jerusalem.”

Critical Meontology: Emmanuel Levinas

One would expect that a survey of the Levinasian approach to the Athens/Jerusalem conflict would begin with an account of Levinas’ Talmudic commentaries. This is by now the traditional approach of the secondary literature. I do not take this approach here. This does not reflect any decision made in advance for Athens over and above Jerusalem; rather, it reflects a need to add to the secondary literature and, more importantly, the impossibility of understanding the Talmudic readings outside of Levinas’ more immediate phenomenological context. At times, Levinas’ inability to treat issues of redaction disturbs his readings. For example, if the dominant characteristic of Judaism is the Israelites’

21 Natanson, 199-201.


response of “doing [the commands revealed by YHWH from atop Mt. Sinai] before hearing” (na’aseh ve-nishma’) of Ex. 24:7, and if this perversion of “Athenian” rational deliberation is a secret of the angels as Levinas claims in his reading of B. Shabbat 8824, then this is not necessarily a good thing. The very next page of the tractate goes into great detail about why the Torah is meant for humans and not angels, and portrays the Ministering Angels as imps who have a tension-filled relationship with humans, both competing for God’s attention.25 Thus, for persons to take on any angelic secret would itself be a risky departure from Torah as divine revelation to human beings. Furthermore, while the Talmudic readings indeed show a commensurability between Jewish texts and Levinas’ phenomenological arguments, this only speaks to the right to faith. To make the stronger statement that Levinasian phenomenology requires or commands faith as a logical decision, it is necessary to remain within the phenomenological arguments for which they argue. For these reasons, the Talmudic commentaries remain a lacuna here.

To my knowledge, the word “meontology” appears only on four occasions in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas. Two of these can be found in the classic 1981 interview with Richard Kearney which has appeared in a variety of collections.26 Here, the word is used both to describe ethical action (“ethics is not derived from an ontology of nature; it is its opposite, a meontology which affirms a meaning beyond Being, a primary mode of non-Being [me-on]”) and an anti-idealist notion of subjectivity (“traditional ontological versions of subjectivity have nothing to do with the meontological version of subjectivity that I put forward in Autrement qu’être”).27 A third occurrence dates from 1968, seems to


27 Quotations are from this interview as it appears in Kearney (1984) 61 and 63; Cohen 25 and 27; Kearney
contradict the meaning of meontology in the Kearney interview, and I delay analysis of it until the close of Chapter 4. The fourth and most complete occurrence of “meontology” amplifies the Kearney interview, and is found in Otherwise than Being itself (OB 102):

It is in a responsibility that is justified by no prior commitment, in the responsibility for another—in an ethical situation—that the me-ontological and metalogical structure of this anarchy takes form, undoing the logos in which the apology by which consciousness always regains its self-control, and commands, is inserted. This passion is absolute in that it takes hold without any a priori.

It is not immediately apparent that from three isolated quotes from a highly prolific writer, one can immediately conclude that “meontology” is a blanket term for Levinasian thinking. Because Levinas does not begin to use the word “meontology” until 1968, one might conclude that it might only speak to various structures analyzed in the later writings typified by Otherwise than Being, writings that may come after some kind of turn in Levinas’ thinking. Nevertheless, the themes of these later passages speak to constant concerns of Levinas’ writings. The anti-apriorism of the quotation from Otherwise than Being above builds upon the analysis of the immediate manifestation of the face in Totality and Infinity and “Freedom and Command.” Even the language of anarchy—not to be found in the early Levinas, and which appears especially foreign when accompanied by its associated philosophemes of persecution, obsession, and the ultra-passivity of hostage (OB 101, 114) is not in absolute opposition to the generally pacific tone of Totality and Infinity. If arche is


28 The quotation is from “A Man-God?”, Entre nous (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 55:

Through this solicitation of the beggar, and of the homeless without a place to lay his head—at the mercy of the bidding of the one who welcomes—humility disturbs absolutely; it is not of the world. Humility and poverty are a bearing within being—an ontological (or meontological) mode—and not a social condition. [emphasis mine]

Because Levinas here describes meontology as within the order of being, the 1981 quotation that meontology is related to that which lies beyond being appears to contradict this statement.

29 Edith Wyschogrod reports that, in a 1982 conversation between herself and Levinas, he denied that there was any such Kehre between his earlier and later writings. “He remarked with un clin d’œil (a wink), ‘Je ne suis pas Heidegger.’” Cf. Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), ix.
a synonym for consciousness in the later Levinas (OB 99-100), then anarchy can only be a name for the interrupted consciousness that has recognized the singularity of the Other in her face qua manifestation of the infinite (TI 199). And this can be violent: the idea of infinity which goes "over and beyond adequation" and beyond the Heidegger's putative claim to understand Being\(^3\) "breaks forth as essential violence" (TI 27), and thus already there are hints that as soon as I recognize the face, I am taken hostage.\(^3\) In the first quotation from the Kearney interview above, Levinas appears to define meontology as any attestation to a beyond-being, and this is certainly in line with the elucidation of a philosophy of the infinite in the early writings. Finally, the anti-idealist notion of the self, described as "meontological" in the second quotation above from the Kearney interview, bears much in common with the analysis of the self in writings as early as the 1947 *Existence and Existents*. It is to the meontological elements in this early work that I now turn, not simply because *Existence and Existents* is an exemplary case of how Levinas limits Athens in order to make room for Jerusalem, but also because they bear a thematic resemblance with the Shestovian critique of Husserl, oriented around the phenomenology of the area which lies between sleep and wakefulness. This area serves as a clue to a different kind of ontology—one which is not even deserving of the name—than that disclosed by the Heideggerean analysis of anxiety. In short, the argument of *Existence and

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\(^3\) The issue of the ambiguous and, in part, violent nature of the face is by now quite broadly attested to in the secondary literature. Cf. Robert Bernasconi, "The Violence of the Face," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 23:6 (1997), 81-93, esp. 84-85; Peter Atterton, "Levinas and the Language of Peace," *Philosophy Today* 36:1 (1992), 59-70; Jill Robbins, "Visage, Figure. Speech and Murder in Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*," in *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Much of this issue has to do with a murky distinction which Levinas only hints at: that between ontic violence which is a force, and essential violence which abjures it.

In addition, I admit that in my quoting of TI 27, I have sloughed over an imprecision in Levinas' early writings which I find maddening, that in which the phrases "surplus of being" (TI 27), "real being" (cf. "Reality and Its Shadow," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 13), "above being" (TI 297), and "beyond being" (e.g. TI 301) all seem to have the same referent. This also speaks to the puzzling quotation from *Entre nous* (cf. n. 28 supra), and I shall return to this issue at the close of Chapter 4.
Existents, as presented below, is as follows:

A. Because forced labor discloses a fatigue that is my fatigue of existence itself, selfhood is essentially dipolar, composed of a Heidggerean I that transcends itself in projecting its possibilities, and an “excedent” prior self that burdens and lags behind the I in “lassitude.”

B. This lagging-behind leads to a conception of the relationship between the self and the world which is constituted by distance and the desire to bridge this distance, not by immediate “givenness.”

C. Because lassitude is an essential aspect of existence and can never be eliminated from selfhood, effort must always appear in stops and fits.

D. Effort can appear in this manner if and only if time is punctiform.

E. The ephemerality of the punctiform instant precludes sating the self’s desire to extirpate fatigue. Only the absolute Otherness of messianic salvation can fulfill this hope.

F. Because desire is an essential aspect of selfhood, the object of this desire must be really possible in the Kantian sense, and messianic hope (and the religious practice in which this hope is exercised) is therefore authorized.

This analysis goes along with Heidegger to a certain degree. In “Martin Heidegger and Ontology,” Levinas admirably summarizes the first book of Heidegger’s Being and Time:

Being, for Dasein, is the understanding of being. To understand being is to exist in such a manner that “existence itself is at stake.” “Existence itself is at stake” is “Being-in-the-world.” “Being in the world is to transcend oneself.” The whole paradox of this structure, in which existence in view of itself presents itself as essentially ecstatic, is the very paradox of existence and time.

In Existence and Existents, Levinas still agrees with the first three sentences of the above passage. The essence of human Dasein is still existence in a world which is disclosed to it in a certain manner. However, whereas Heidegger understands Being-in-the-world as a

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certain way of understanding one's possibilities, one's ability to "do this or that." Levinas' phenomenological explorations—which, grounded in the experience of a Vichy labor camp, performs a key eidetic variation on Heideggerean action—point to ways in which we can understand being through modes of existence which are not precisely ones in which we do any "this or that", in which we come to understand the limitations of one's possibilities in a more nuanced manner than the existential limit of absolute nonbeing qua death. Levinas moves from Heidegger's freely-appropriated death to his own concept of an enforced dying. The different picture of being which comes from these ontic clues reveals a fundamental disagreement with Heidegger on the issues of temporality and of the ecstatic essence of existence.

For Levinas, the phenomenological elements of enforced labor—indolence or dilatoriness, fatigue, and insomnia—reveal that time is not (EE 23) "a continual birth, understood as a distinct operation by which an existent takes over its existence," such as that in which the resolute Dasein can always be ready for future moments of anxiety. Rather, time is given as discontinuous, unflowing and always punctiform, a series of stop-and-go lurching instants which the self can only make continuous through the struggle of effort. But the struggle of effort itself, insofar as it is a struggle, reveals an ability to give up, to withdraw from the world and let dying take over. The two possibilities for selfhood show that the self is double: the ability to withdraw shows that the self can be

33 Ibid.


35 Cf. Martin Heidegger, Being and Time §59.


37 The language of struggle, which pervades Existence and Existents, bears more than a family resemblance to Shestov's declaration in "In Memory of a Great Philosopher" (289) that "I said to Husserl, philosophy is not a Besinnung [sense-bestowing] ... but a struggle."
absorbed by the world, objectified by it, while the self who succeeds in effort remains separate from the world of mere objects. In struggle, these two possibilities coalesce into one, and this structure remains constant throughout Levinas’ writings: the doubleness of the “on s’est” (EE 28) in which the individual is both the subject of the world and an object in it reappears as the separated “psychism” (TI 54) that relates to the exterior (TI 220), and the hostage who wills his or her own ethical responsibility to the captor (OB 104).

To unpack this further: The doubleness of the self is part and parcel of the phenomenology of forced labor. The possibility of indolence—the perpetual delay of action which ordinarily goes by the name of “laziness”—shows that action does not progress straightforwardly from the body. Rather, the action must jump across some sort of synaptic gap of effort before it can be exercised. The will to act does not always hit its target; rather, in indolence and fatigue it falls back into the self which, viewed through this lens, acts as an anchoring weight that inhibits the effort of the self which acts. Thus, the Dasein which projects not only possesses its possibility in understanding, but also possesses itself as a companion, partner, or shadow (EE 28) that burdens it, and often successfully burdens it into a pure inwardness. Thus, even in the desire to delay the movements of its essential existence, the falling back into the self reveals that the “relationship” with existence is unavoidable. I indeed exist as being-in-the-world, but I also exist as the accusative (OB 85) object of my effort to act. In successful action, the gap between the subject-I and the object-self can be bridged so that the doubleness does not show itself. Yet in the hesitation to act, the momentary impossibility of action shows that selfhood is essentially a duality between an outward willing I of Heideggerean transcendence and an inward burdensome self who is “excendent” (EE 15) who lies to the side of (but not above) the general order of existence. As “a being fatigued by the future” (EE 29), the self that struggles with great effort to exist does not resolutely anticipate the future from a sea of pacific inner strength, but fitfully oscillates between transcendent and excendent movements, “lunages out of fatigue and falls back upon it” (EE 31). The notion of subjectivity here is complex without
being dialectical: the fatigued self, the bare existent which precedes existing, thus lags behind the self that projects the telos of its effort. The subject is "out of joint" with itself (EE 35, in an allusion to *Hamlet*), tied around itself in a knot or torsion (OB 25).

The schizoid subject correlates to a similarly schizoid notion of time (EE 68), in which what is present for the fatigued self lags behind what is present for the projecting self. Every successful effort of transcendence transcends the equally essential possibility of the self's fatigue, and more importantly, depends upon fatigue as the condition of its possibility. This is not to say that when we act, we are always first tired. No. But fatigue serves as a phenomenological clue which shows that the self is always dual—it cannot be the case that I suddenly gain a companion in weariness. (The "Hi there. Come here often?" aspect of such a scenario is patently ridiculous.) The shadow self must always be with me, although I can only see it in the phenomenological examination of indolence as indolence-of-being and of fatigue as fatigue-of-future. These privative phenomena reveal that the ontological study of the self is never a study of any single being (*to on*). Thus, if effort in fatigue is a situation in which the bare-existent/shadow-self catches up to the self that projects itself in Being-in-the-world, then all action must depend upon a similar duality between transcendence and excendence, of a similar movement in which the prior existent catches up to existence.\(^{38}\) This movement of catch-up, in which the shadow-self loses its anonymous and burdensome character but finds its voice and proclaims itself as the alienated self that it fundamentally is, is what Levinas names (EE 82, OB 54) "hypostasis." This is the positing of a *here* which seems to be ontologically prior to the Heideggerean *Da* in which consciousness lives; I already make my space before the world is given to me.

Yet we wonder whether "ontologically prior" is a precise phrase. For the *Da* can never satisfy the existent's desire to begin existing and catch up to its effort for more than a

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\(^{38}\) Isn't this already aprioristic? Only in *ordo essendi*; not in the empirical *ordo cognoscendi* which conditions the very *ordo essendi* which we throw back upon the empirical situation, thereby covering up the true path of discovery. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5n.
passing instant. In Heideggerean language, the Da of existence can never be fully
disclosed. The self that conditions the I's projecting of possibilities knows, because of the
unveiling of the primordial phenomenon of lag-time, that the objects and situations which
are supposedly immediately given according to traditional phenomenology, e.g. as tools,
are rather given as awaiting our nearness (EE 47). “Objects are destined for me; they are
for me” (EE 39)—this much is classical. But because I am lagging behind the ecstatic
possession of the object, of existence, this for-me converts itself into my desire for the
object which I do not yet possess. (There can be no phenomenology of desire, such as that
which inaugurates Totality and Infinity, without the concept of the dual present, lagging
behind itself, that authorizes desire. Otherwise, Totality and Infinity has no response to the
reader who believes that s/he has no metaphysical desires. Existence and Existents
demonstrates that all of our desires are metaphysical whether we know it or not, because
we are not unified selves.) While it is indeed the case that this desire cannot be thought
without the Heideggerean pre-ontological understanding of the object (what Levinas terms
“a possession of the desirable prior to the desire”), it is more primordially the case that
neither can it be thought without “a time ahead of me”—teleology.

Yet this is no ordinary teleology; it is radically unextirpable. Levinas asserts (EE 46)
that “we are separated from objects by a distance, which can indeed be traversed, but re-
mains a distance.” The argument for the first clause of this is the by-now familiar pheno-
menon of lassitude, discovered in the analysis of fatigue; the argument for the last clause is
less clear, since one might pose the question of whether lassitude could ever possibly be
conquered by a kind of resoluteness. This question, however, forgets the punctiform
structure of time which the phenomenology of forced labor revealed. Time’s essential
structure is one of discrete instants, ephemeral moments of successful effort that are
interstices between moments of falling back into fatigue. Levinas’ notion of time is thus, to
our eyes, Augustinian\footnote{and Husserlian; cf. Chapter 4.} insofar as the present is always ephemeral; successful effort is
always a heterogeneous and singular instant. Thus, once the intention has traversed to the object, this success immediately fails and cannot perdure within the temporal order. The existent's fundamental separation from the world, her “psychism”, cannot be dialectically recaptured in an ontological understanding of Being. (It also authorizes the historical possibility of the grandeur of identity being “submerged by the night” [EE 58] of the il y a, the anonymous being which discloses the phenomenon of indolence. Only in a discontinuous time, in which the past is not gathered into the present, can society recoil from progress.) In the oblivion of the instant, the il y a makes itself known as a constant and essential possibility of the world (EE 64): “being has no outlets.” Thus, the desire of the indolent I for a pure beginning can never be sated; all hope is thus necessarily hope for (EE 91) “the Messiah, or salvation.” Thus the phenomenological examination of fatigued and indolent Dasein is shown to rationally allow messianic hope. Being announces itself as merely doxic, subordinate to that which is beyond being (epokeina tes ousias). Knowledge has made room for faith.

Messianic salvation cannot be really possible unless there are already structures of experience in which the Other can appear in the same. These structures are guaranteed by the punctiformity of time. If the I is to reappear in successive instants, then somehow (EE 92) “its death in the empty interval will have been the condition for a new birth.” In the passage of time, in each lurching forward, the I is resurrected across the gap that exists between instants. The passage of time is thus a miraculous response to the salvific hope

40 I have omitted a detailed discussion of the il y a in part because it is usually seen in the literature as the phenomenological highlight of Existence and Existsents, often more so than the phenomenon of lassitude which, in our opinion, is the “foundation” (with scarequotes) of Levinas’ messianic thinking. For admirable accounts of the il y a, cf. Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics, 7-11; Simon Critchley, Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature (New York: Routledge, 1997), 55-60; and Philip Blond, “Emmanuel Levinas: God and Phenomenology,” in Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology (New York: Routledge, 1997), 210-11, but not 217-220, which mistakenly confuses the correlation of the il y a and the Other with an identity between the two.

41 Thus, contra a recent essay by John Milbank, the phenomenological evidence for resurrection does not need to point to a claim of a singular historical resurrection in 33 CE. Rather, the cycle of death and resurrection which this narrative symbolizes is more primordially woven into the very structure of
of the indolent I of the il y a, what Levinas in *Time and the Other* calls "a liberation from itself." Each present instant is exigent—not merely insofar as it issues an exacting demand for a subsequent instant, but also insofar as the present speaks to the ex-agere within subjectivity, the way in which the object-self is driven out of itself (but not above itself). Exactly so. It is exigency that constitutes subjectivity, an exigency of some otherness to come and guarantee future instants by "unravelling the knot" (EE 93) of the intertwined I and the definitive self that the I cannot avoid in its projections of possibilities. In the passage of time, otherness appears in the same insofar as the resurrected I "re-commences as other" (EE 93), insofar as this instant has no relation whatsoever to the previous one. However, this alterity is not dialectically produced by the ego. If this were to be the case, the self and the I would be able to recognize themselves in each other (as Hegel's opposites do in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). If this mutual participation were to occur, then lassitude itself would end as a possibility for Dasein. I would successfully project a possibility a moment after my birth—latching onto a breast or a synthetic substitute thereof—and that would be the end of the narrative. The fact that forced labor has certain psychological effects demonstrates, in Levinas' view, that the ego cannot save itself. Rather, any alleged act of self-redemption is instead only a self-nearing to those structures in which alterity comes to it. Naturally, the Other can only arrive insofar as s/he remains distant—for alterity to arrive completely, to become present-at-hand and toollike, would cancel its otherness (EE 95): the "absence of the other is precisely her presence qua other." It must relate to the future in such a manner that is true to the futural essence of fatigue, in which the future can never be recuperated by the present due to the self's lassitude. This openness to the e-

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43 The Lingis translation reads "his" here; of course, the French possessive pronoun does not resolve this issue. I refuse to speculate as to whether the Other is essentially feminine; the question is a mere Hitchcockian MacGuffin. For heterosexual men, the erotic Other will be feminine; others' mileage will vary without committing an injustice to alterity.
ternality of the future (as opposed to a static eternity that might arrive at some futural point) is messianic anticipation. This is not only the case according to the language of Existence and Existents; Totality and Infinity explicitly regards its project as a securing of “messianic triumph” (TI 285), an exchange of bellicose historical Weltanschauungen for “the eschatology of messianic peace” (TI 22),\(^4\) while Otherwise than Being posits (OB 152) a prophetic “mission towards one another in the glory of the Infinite.”

Levinas presents two possible paths of becoming endowed with or affected by alterity, one of private eros between a lover and the beloved, and the maintenance of asymmetrical I-Thou relationships within the social realm. The former inaugurates time either in the birth of children or in the wager that a student taught in the ways of wisdom will live longer than an ignorant person. The latter buys time in delaying the death of the Other through various modes of sacrifice, which do not exclude—and this is patent—avuncular relationships towards children. Eros in general is a relationship with alterity, since “in the proximity of another the distance is wholly maintained,” which leads to a Platonic mania for the other. The theme of proximity is taken up again in the writings of the 1970’s, in which it is more precisely defined as the immediate sensibility of contact with the Other in his singularity.\(^5\)

The touch of sensibility—associated with the caress in Totality and Infinity (TI 257)—escapes representation; nothing is given except this skin, this face—it cannot be turned into a universal by the operations of consciousness. The contact made in the touch of one person cannot be converted into the touch of an entire audience. (When politicians or rock stars shake a row of hands, there is no caress, and they make no contact.) This is grounded in a

\(^4\) In the Kearney interview, Levinas rejects the word “eschatology” on the grounds that it posits a final moment, an end that would reinsert a teleology and a consciousness into anticipation. And even in EE, it is the notion of “end” which is most closely associated with the Heideggerian climate that Levinas wants to leave. In the 1972 essay “Meaning and Sense,” however, Levinas implies a differentiation between eschatology tout court and an “eschatology without hope for oneself” which seems to be near to the notion of the eschatology which uproots the self from the universality of the historical order. Cf. Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” trans. Alphonso Lingis, Adriaan T. Peperzak and Simon Critchley, in Basic Philosophical Writings, 50.

phenomenology of the sexual encounter which I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 4, but which I will summarize briefly now: the desire to have sex with a person more than once demonstrates that a representation of the beloved in which he would become a fungible being like others, a member of a class ("he’s not my type"), never comes to pass. In the erotic encounter, the beloved "slips away" (TI 257), never to be fused with me. The essential delay of this encounter manifests itself in a further delay: the inauguration of a new series of passing instants in the life of the child.

Levinasian meontology is thus a process of awakening to the inability to be a subject, coupled with the need to tarry with the Other in the fruitless yet manic search for the stability that comes with the sense that one is not at the mercy of the world. Trapped within my own interiority, I have no basis a conclusion that other individuals share my bifurcation. Beginning from my radical aloneness discovered in the privacy of labor or eros, the others whom I encounter in the social realm appear to me only as unified selves, and thus as completely different from myself: the Other of the social realm "is what I am not" (EE 95) and hence transcends me in a way that I am unable to transcend myself. As such, whether in the guise of the destitute or the powerful, as Levinas makes clear here, the Other is able to command me. As transcendent, this alterity cannot be murdered even if this murder is my greatest desire: the force of this command is of a higher order than my desire to kill.

Yet I have good reason to obey this command; in delaying the death of the Other, I buy time, I trade futures of Time Incorporated, I trade myself for the future of time incorporated in the Other's flesh (TI 242): "The mortal will can escape violence by driving violence and murder from the world, that is, by profiting from time to delay always further the hours of expiration." Temporal profit, irreducible to an economic model, is the motive for my

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46 In the section entitled "Transcendence Is Not Negativity" in Totality and Infinity (TI 40-42), negativity is used in a different manner than this passage from Existence and Existent. In TI, negativity is meant entirely in the Hegelian sense of a determinate negation; in EE, the negative relationship between the Other and the self is absolutely negative.
breaking with the feeling of lassitude. This is not a profit which I can capitalize on, however; rather the break with real lassitude must be performed by a move to a correlate lassitude, in which I still feel the exterior binding upon me. The correlate lassitude is an ethical lassitude; the I is not bound over to the self of the on s’est, rather, it is bound over to the Other. Once the Other has been located as the arena in which I buy future instants and I use my freedom in order to abjure it in responsibility for the Other (the postponement of her death) in a “positing of the self as a deposing of the ego” (OB 58), my being hostage to myself in real lassitude expresses itself on the ethical stratum as my being hostage to the Other. But this state of being hostage is not mere phenomenology; the phenomenological analysis exacts its own imperatives upon me, and I must correlate my life to the truth of phenomenology. Thus, as a hostage bound to myself, out of joint or “out of phase” (OB 115) with myself, I am consumed by guilt, remorse, and “gnaw away” at those vestiges of identity which still remain in the way of life that I have chosen (or, more precisely, that has chosen me). Therefore, it is not the case that I find myself free and then abjure it; rather these are simultaneous strata—irreducible to a single to on—within Levinas' phenomenology of selfhood that appear as “a torsion and a restlessness” within the self (OB 107), the recurrence of “identity in breaking up the limits of identity.”

In this manner, I have converted my lassitude into a transcending of the structures of ego-ness (the structures of general selfhood). In substituting myself for the Other, I have begun the process of recommencing as Other (EE 91), of achieving the escape from the condemnation of real lassitude and the evil of the il y a by being ‘transported ‘elsewhere’ by the movement of the caress, freed from the vice-grip of ‘oneself,’” in finding “a dimension and future.” But I have not found this dimension and future for my fungible ego—the elsewhere to which I have been transported (without leaving myself) is the land of the Other, beyond my own interior being. In ethical substitution, that which lies beyond being comes to pass.

This Levinasian narrative has omitted certain essential elements, notably his philosophy
of language. But the above is sufficient for noting that the meontological announcing of the beyond being correlates to the formulation of a meontological subjectivity organized around responsibility. It is prudent, however, to make some observations on an ambiguity in the Levinasian notion of nonbeing (and I anticipate our return to Levinas by accenting the theme of ambiguity). On one hand, Levinas argues in the Kearney interview that the ethical announcement of a beyond being is also the announcement of a primary mode of nonbeing. This is supposedly based in the arguments of Otherwise than Being, and one can cite here a passage in which substitution announces that “being is transcended” (OB 117). On the other hand, one also notes on the opening page of the first chapter of this same text that the beyond being would seem to transcend both being and nonbeing (OB 3): “being and not-being illuminate one another, and unfold a speculative dialectic which is a determination of being... Being’s essence dominates not-being itself.” What is beyond essence is here not a primary mode of nonbeing but “an excluded middle between being and non-being” (OB 29).47 Even if we interpret the “not-being” of OB 3 as only not-being in the ordinary sense, as death (certainly the primary meaning authorized by the context of the passage), the language of “excluded middle” at OB 29 is still confusing. Here it seems that even the word “meontology” can be recuperated in a dialectical move. (We will see exactly how this is possible in the analysis below of Fackenheim.) How can there be a meontology between being and nonbeing, between ontology and meontology? How did two meontologies suddenly come on the scene? Where was nonbeing’s shadow hiding out? We note here the traces of an ambiguity that we see in the early writings as well, namely the ambiguity between negation in its dialectic and absolute senses. When Levinas writes that “Transcendence Is Not Negativity” (TI 40) or that (OB 9) “negativity, still correlate with being, will not be enough to signify the other than being,” the type of negation at work here is thoroughly dialectical, always posterior to an originary self. Nonbeing understood in this

47 Cf. similar language at OB 14, 45, and 181.
sense is not-I, and depends upon a previous consciousness that knows itself through a sort of Fichtean intellectual intuition: "If any ~A is to be posited, an A must be posited."48 This dialectical sort of negation is predicated upon a theory of consciousness which Levinas associates with the egology that reduces the singular to the general. Thus, for Levinas, there can be no such thing as a dialectical meontology. Yet the dialectical type of negation does not reveal nonbeing in its primary mode. It is in anarchic responsibility that meontological structures of existence and subjectivity are shown—here all ties with being and its putative others are absolutely abjured. The "other than being" is a nonbeing beyond (and hence more fundamental than) the "not-being" mentioned in the opening pages of Otherwise than Being.

Again, we stress that as Shestov is no irrationalist, neither is Levinas. The critical meontology of both thinkers is rooted in the philosophical techniques of what is supposedly ontology. Yet in the move to certain philosophical arguments—the idea of infinity in Descartes for Shestov (and Levinas), the phenomenology of lassitude in Levinas (hinted at in the move from wakefulness to sleep in Shestov)—these ontologies reveal themselves to be inadequate, and in need of some sort of faith as a supplement that authorizes their completion.

Dialectical Meontology: Leo Strauss and Emil Fackenheim

It may seem odd to describe Leo Strauss as a dialectical thinker. There is a marked aversion for Hegel in Strauss' writings, since Strauss saw Hegel's absolute system as an announcement of the decline of the West.49 Yet Emil Fackenheim hints, in the course of reminiscences of Strauss, that a revival of a certain kind of Hegel would do justice to


Straussian viewpoints. Strauss himself, although "an opponent of Hegel, ... was bound to admire his philosophical Rechtschaffenheit." And Fackenheim's Hegel, of course, is as far removed as possible from the Straussian portrait of Hegel who marks the end of philosophy by taking it to its absolute pinnacle. Fackenheim's Hegel is not the Hegel of the Phenomenology of Spirit who announces the achievement of das absolute Wissen. Rather, it is a "post-Hegelian Hegel," the Hegel of the Lectures on the History of Philosophy who claims that the incommensurability between the finite and infinite aspects of human being can never be sublated and will always lead to a struggle within consciousness. This reading of Hegel would preclude a notion of the absolute that would discard concrete historical structures into the rotting landfill of history. In short, Fackenheim is writing a Straussian Jewish philosophy that is centered around Strauss' great omission, Hegel. In one of the many overviews of his philosophical method, "A Reply to My Critics" in Fackenheim: German Philosophy and Jewish Thought, Fackenheim closes his text with a footnote that hearkens the reader to compare his thinking with Strauss': "The reader who wishes to compare the views reached, or hinted at, in the last several sections, with those of Leo Strauss are referred back to ... Strauss' own 'Progress or Return?'" Since it is in these concluding sections of "A Reply" that Fackenheim offers his own cryptic solution to the Athens/Jerusalem problem, one can conclude that Fackenheim reads himself as a Straussian on this issue. It now remains to turn to the Straussian resolution of the Athens/

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52 In his introduction to JPCM, Kenneth Hart Green claims that the fact that Fackenheim made several published statements of fealty to Strauss is (2) "astonishing," and takes the position that viewing Strauss as a Jewish thinker is a novum in North American circles. Cf. David Novak, ed. Leo Strauss and Judaism: Jerusalem and Athens Revisited (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).

53 Fackenheim, "A Reply to my Critics," 300 n.10.
Jerusalem problem, and then to see how it reappears in Fackenheim’s own approach to history (most cogently expressed in “Metaphysics and Historicity”\textsuperscript{54}), and finally to the application of this approach in Fackenheim’s magnum opus To Mend The World.

The nature of Strauss’ resolution is by no means agreed upon within the secondary literature. Indeed, the existence of such a resolution is hardly agreed upon (although when claims that Strauss made a decision are made, it is for Athens).\textsuperscript{55} The gamut of responses runs from Emil Fackenheim’s statement “if Strauss turns to Athens— [it is] only ultimately”\textsuperscript{56} to Susan Orr’s “if he tips the scales at all, it is toward Jerusalem” in her microscopic paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of Strauss’ most sustained essay on this topic, “Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections.”\textsuperscript{57} We argue here that both Fackenheim and Orr are correct, that Strauss tips the scales in both directions, in order to heighten the stakes of the theologico-political “crisis of modernity” and the Straussian project of a new search for wisdom inaugurated by this crisis. This seems more accurate than to say that the scales are not tipped at all, since the richness of both Jerusalem and Athens are placed in such stunning relief that the choice becomes undecidable and maddening, almost Derridean.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{54} This 1961 Aquinas lecture was originally published as Fackenheim’s first book (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1961), but has recently been collected with other essays on German idealist thought under a title (The God Within) of a book of slightly differing scope which was first announced in the preface and footnotes to The Religious Dimension of Hegel’s Thought. Page references will be to the more recent edition.

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. the Stanley Rosen articles cited in Green, JPCM 50 n.6. Green himself concludes (48) that Strauss’ perpetual urging his audience to return to the sources of that culture “meant in Strauss’ mind that we need especially to turn to the Hebrew Bible.” This would seem to be no better than Rosen’s arguments—for example, it completely ignores the complicated essence of Strauss’ legacy as expressed in Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy—and does not adequately deal with the admirable middle road that Green associates with Harry V. Jaffa (cf. JPCM 50 n.6).

\textsuperscript{56} Fackenheim, “What Is Jewish Philosophy?”, 182.

\textsuperscript{57} Susan Orr, Jerusalem and Athens: Reason and Revelation in the Work of Leu Strauss (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 158. Strauss’ “Jerusalem and Athens” originally appeared as The City College Papers 6 (1967), and was reprinted in Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy, as an appendix to Orr’s book, and in JPCM. Page references to this article in this text will be to its JPCM appearance.

\textsuperscript{58} For another comparison of Derrida and Strauss (a compelling one which demonstrates how Derrida is in some ways the model of a “conservative” thinker in the American sense, yet ends up charging Derrida with performing that synthesis of reason and revelation which can only destroy both), cf. Catherine Zuckert, Postmodern Platos (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 125, 155, 200-2, 261, 267-69, 272-74. Derrida’s only remark on Strauss of which I am aware, in "Politics of Friendship" (trans. Gabriel
Strauss' first post-war explication of the Athens-Jerusalem problem was in a series of three lectures given at the University of Chicago's Hillel House in 1952, and then published posthumously as "Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization" and "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy," and has now been presented as one article entitled "Progress or Return?" in Kenneth Hart Green's recent edition of Strauss' writings in modern Jewish thought (JPCM 87-136). This essay rests on the thesis that the essence of Western civilization is the conflict between its two sources, Greek philosophy and the Bible. This conflict has not ceased; as a result, one must become open to the question of whether this conflict is indeed a bad thing which must be conquered. For past attempts at overcoming the problem by synthesizing Greek philosophy and the Bible either in the solution of the so-called "Jewish problem" or in Hegelian reason have failed. Spinoza's assimilationist solution to the Jewish problem, in Strauss' eyes, not only negated the suffering of Jews in history to the ash-heap of the past, as something merely contingent, but also failed to stop that suffering in spite of the Aufhebung (this word, of course, being used in hindsight) of ethnicity which it attempted to inaugurate (JPCM 91). And as Strauss makes clear later in his career, in a section of the preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion (JPCM 142-44) which marks an amplification of Strauss' remarks in "Progress or Return?" at JPCM 92-93—and as events in Israel since Strauss' death have incontrovertibly demonstrated—Zionism has not solved the Jewish problem.


either. Political Zionism, being "merely formal or poor"60 could not succeed without embracing the Jewish language and history which stood outside its political purview, and thus was dialectically determined to pass into cultural Zionism. Cultural Zionism stood outside the originary concept of revelation which grounded Jewish culture, and thus necessarily passed over into religious Zionism once it became self-reflective. But religious Zionism sees the Jewish problem as humanly insoluble, because this solution can only occur with the onset of the messianic age, and to view the establishment of the state of Israel as the inauguration of the messianic age is heresy. Hence, Strauss writes (JPCM 143): "in the religious sense, and perhaps not only in the religious sense, the state of Israel is a part of the galut" and continues by noting that the chosenness of the Jewish people is most apparent insofar as "the Jewish problem is the most manifest symbol of the human problem insofar as it is a social or political problem."61 Here already, then, the dialectical turns of Jerusalem in the twentieth century suddenly find Judaism as an instantiation of the universal values of "Athens."

Yet the human problem is also a philosophical problem, specifically one of moral philosophy. Strauss alleges (JPCM 103) that a switch to anthropocentrism and rights-theory in modern thought from the premodern theocentric and duty-based system62 has caused a privileging of freedom over and above virtue. This shift, when placed in the

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60 Strauss, "Why We Remain Jews," JPCM 319.

61 For all of Strauss' conservatism, then, it is liberals who can find the most to use in Strauss' dialectic historical view of Zionist history. The necessary collapse of Zionism into another concrete example of messianic hope—its inability to reach completion—is the single best argument against the Likud party's accommodation of the religious factions which gave it power in the election of Benjamin Netanyahu, an accommodation doomed from the outset. Legislating (as opposed to allowing and recognizing) teshuvah, whether by closing Jerusalem streets on Shabbat—or, worse, cracking down on protesters during a peaceful demonstration against street-closing rules in Tel Aviv during the 1998 gay pride rally—is so behind the curve of history that it is perhaps best described as fatigued.

62 Michael Morgan raises the point in "Leo Strauss and the Possibility of Jewish Philosophy" that this shift is only the first thing which one could disagree with in the Straussian description of the difference between modern and premodern notions of right action. Morgan, Dilemmas in Modern Jewish Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 166 n. 12. (This essay is virtually identical with "Teaching Leo Strauss as a Jewish and General Philosopher," in Jewish Philosophy and the Academy, eds. Emil Fackenheim and Raphael Jospe [Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996], cf. 187 n. 12.)
context of a technical society which sees its technical-historical situation as freely chosen and which thus sees no need to choose resistance, has proven to have murderous consequences (JPCM 104) in the example of the “theologico-political predicament” of Weimar Germany, as described in the opening to the preface to Spinoza’s Critique of Religion (JPCM 137-141). This “crisis of modernity” suggests to Strauss that what is needed (JPCM 104) is a return to “Western civilization in its premodern integrity.” Because both the Bible and Greek philosophy lie at the source of the West, this exhortation is the cornerstone of Strauss’ thinking qua retrieval of both Jerusalem and Athens.

The circumstances leading to Strauss’ clarion call for thinking are not simply post-Weimar (and hence post-Holocaust), but also more generally postmodern. In “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy,” Strauss both urges and performs the formulation of a Husserlian rigorous science which not only reaps the benefits of Heidegger’s historical understanding of the world, but also escapes the pitfalls of the Heideggerean “visionary” view that the end of history is at hand.63 Yet because this formulation of a new mode of thought is one that returns to “Athenian” rigorous science and the Weltanschauungsphilosophie which allows for the freedom of appropriating the worldview of “Jerusalem”, with each side constantly critiquing the other and using the “essential character of that conflict” in order to reach a still yet more rigorous science, such return is difficult to say the least. It is not even easily decidable as progress or return; hence the question mark at the end of Strauss’ lecture of that name, as opposed to the declarative titles of “Jerusalem and Athens” or “Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy.”

A rigorous Husserlianism must pass through the historical analysis of Heidegger; but such an analysis cannot be done well without passing back through the Husserlian moment, to guard historical analysis from falling into the relativistic traps of a Diltheyan naturalism. This notion of the way to truth as a dialectic approach between the extremes of rationalism

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63 The most important word in the title of this essay is the fifth.
and historicism\textsuperscript{64} insures that the human problem in its absoluteness will be insoluble, that the dispensation of Being will not be heard as it is in Heidegger. Strauss' phenomenology is therefore non-ontological; its notion of science is fundamentally attuned to the realization\textsuperscript{65} that "Being is mysterious." These three words—the essence of the postmodernism which suffuses Strauss' writings—lie behind not only Strauss' Heidegger-Husserl mediation, but also between his Athens-Jerusalem mediation. Although one should be loath to analogize "Husserl-Heidegger" to "Athens-Jerusalem," one can make a limited analogy and claim that as Strauss wants to purify both Heidegger and Husserl through his dialectical passes in and out of the extremes, so are Athens and Jerusalem purified through other Straussian dialectical passes in which neither Athens nor Jerusalem are hollowed out.

This latter purification takes place at various sites in the Straussian corpus, yet two stand out: his qualified defense of orthodoxy in the preface to \textit{Spinoza's Critique of Religion}, and his making the Bible comprehensible to the \textit{polis} in "Jerusalem and Athens" while refusing to collapse the Bible into mere philosophy. Both essays are amplifications of claims made in "Progress of Return?": the argument in the preface that theology and philosophy have not and cannot refute each other is made in the close of the third lecture of the series, and the points in the 1967 essay on the conflict and agreement between Jerusalem and Athens are made in the second lecture of "Progress or Return?"

To turn to the preface of the book on Spinoza, Strauss believes that a defense of orthodoxy is necessitated for two reasons. First, there is the dialectical collapse of Zionism as noted above. Second is the failure for Strauss of Franz Rosenzweig's "new thinking."

\textsuperscript{64} We find this to be a more satisfactory version of the notion of "persecution and the art of writing" than the simplistic notion that potentially persecutable authors have a secret teaching. Although we cannot demonstrate this thesis here, it appears to us that the structure of \textit{Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy} demonstrates that the writings of Spinoza, Maimonides, Socrates, et al. are taken by Strauss as objects of a certain kind of phenomenology and then silently converted into philosophemes in "Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Science," thus performing the historically aware rigorous science for which Strauss calls.

\textsuperscript{65} "Why We Remain Jews," JPCM 329.
which (JPCM 153) could not allow a viable orthodox life since it privileged human consciousness in belief by interpreting the Torah as Gebot (a command which is for me, and thus expresses my autonomy) and not as Gesetz (universal prohibitions simply to be obeyed), and by refusing to believe in the miracles of the Bible. If this was the only road ahead for the "Jewish problem," then it was incompatible with the "intellectual probity" of the orthodox (JPCM 154). In order to return truly to Biblical faith, orthodoxy must be vindicated, and this is not possible without once and for all disarming Spinoza's critique of orthodox existence in the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus. Strauss' declaration of détente is simple and resembles William James' argument in "The Will to Believe": reason and revelation are incommensurable because philosophy does not have the recourse to experience that is necessary to disprove orthodoxy. But this claim is true if and only if orthodoxy accepts that its claims about God are not cognitive but fideist, without "the binding power peculiar to the known." For rational philosophy to leave epistemology behind and make fideist claims against events which are indeed possible is for rational philosophy to become irrational. Given the (Kantian?) premise that the existence of an omnipotent God is (really?) possible,

miracles and revelations in general, and hence all biblical miracles and revelations in particular, are possible. Spinoza has not succeeded in showing that this premise is contradicted by anything we know... The orthodox premise cannot be refuted by experience nor by recourse to the principle of contradiction. The genuine refutation of orthodoxy would require the proof that the world and human life are perfectly intelligible without the assumption of a mysterious God. (JPCM 170)


68 It is really possible here that Strauss conflates logical possibility and real possibility, the important Kantian distinction made at Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin's, 1929), xxvi n. Such a problem is not fully solved at Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 79-84 since it is not necessarily the case that the orthodox do not use miracles as a source of maxims. Thus, in the following sentence, I have added parenthetical claims for the sake of Strauss' argument, while questioning them. Cf. Michael L. Morgan, "The Curse of Historicity: The Role of History in Leo Strauss's Jewish Thought," in Dilemmas, 164-65 n. 21, and M. Jamie Ferreira, "Kant's Postulate: The Possibility or the Existence of God?" Kant-Studien 74:1 (1983), 75-80.
But if philosophy is to admit the real possibility of revelation, then it itself, according to Strauss, must admit that it is not a system of cognitive claims but of fideist ones (JPCM 171): “philosophy, the quest for evident and necessary knowledge, rests itself on an unevident decision, on an act of the will, just as faith.”69

Nevertheless, we know from the later essay “Athens and Jerusalem” that Strauss is (JPCM 380) “unable to be orthodox,” and so the critique of Spinoza is not the last word on the matter of orthodoxy. Rather, Strauss makes a dialectical return to Athens and argues that the rejection of religion has changed in the modern era: religion is not a delusion because it centers around stringent rules, but rather because it alleges to be a comfort which history has not known. A recognition of the horrors of historical existence within thought, a “willingness to look man’s forsakenness in its face, ... the courage to welcome the most terrible truth” of the Spenglerian decline of Western civilization (JPCM 172) is just as much a representative of “intellectual probity” as orthodoxy is. Strauss even claims that such a recognition is truly dialectical because this final critique of orthodoxy recognizes its other—Biblical morality—in itself (JPCM 172), because it accepts the Biblical accounts of what a world would be like if humans existed in nearness to the divine, and then turns to the world and sees it sorely lacking. As such, even the critique of orthodoxy is not opposed to orthodoxy. Strauss' arguments in the “Preface” are neither a defense nor critique of either Athens or Jerusalem, although each of the four possible combinations are moments within the Straussian dialectic.

As stated earlier, the lecture on “Jerusalem and Athens” is an amplification of certain claims made in “Progress or Return?” In the earlier lecture, Strauss follows his call for a return to the premodern sources of Western civilization by doubting whether such a return

69 Cf. the final two paragraphs of "Progress or Return?" (JPCM 130-32), especially the following (JPCM 131): "Generally stated, I would say that all alleged refutations of revelation presuppose unbelief in revelation, and all alleged refutations of philosophy presuppose already faith in revelation."
is possible, because the two sources of the West (Greek philosophy and the Bible) are in fundamental opposition. Nevertheless, Strauss passes from this claim to a dialectically opposite one (JPCM 104): “Yet this very disagreement presupposes some agreement.” This agreement is precisely the opposition of both Athens and Jerusalem to the values of modern culture as manifested in morality-systems and a notion of justice qua (JPCM 106-7) “obedience to the divine law.”

However, the content of such obedience is different in Athens and Jerusalem. Athens values contemplation and understanding of the impersonal ways of necessity (as Shestov also claimed), performed in the context of urban megalopsychia; Jerusalem values actions serving a personal God, performed in the context of desert humility. Both present themselves as divine laws, but contradict each other (JPCM 113) on the value of knowledge: in Athens, knowledge is supreme, while in Jerusalem, it is eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that leads to the Fall.

Yet Strauss is not bothered by this tension in the least. Rather, it is “the secret of the vitality of Western civilization” (JPCM 116) and is reassuring to both the theologian and the philosopher as long as each is aware of the dialectic importance of the other in the dynamic “ontological” determination of “West.” The conflict must be lived, either as “the philosopher open to the challenge of theology, or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy.” The West cannot be what it is unless it lives this life; the desire of philosophers and theologians to transcend the tension is only a death wish, for Strauss believes that it can only lead to the end of the West. Nevertheless, it is clear from Strauss’ own performances of the conflict that one does not need to remain on one side of this either/or through-out one’s life. Indeed, Strauss’ own shuttling back and forth within this either/or, between incommensurable texts such as “Why We Remain Jews” and Socrates and Aristophanes, is more than adequate demonstration of this. Strauss is both a theologian

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71 Strauss, “Why We Remain Jews,” in JPCM 311-56; Socrates and Aristophanes (New York: Basic
and a philosopher, although never transcending the opposition between the two poles. This is a middle way which does not rest between anything. Precisely the opposite: Strauss gets a lot of exercise in running back and forth between Athens and Jerusalem.

The tension between the two poles and the desire for a middle way that is not a totalizing Aufhebung is readily apparent in "Athens and Jerusalem." The very project of the essay—seeking the wisdom in both pole without any prejudices—is a philosophic one, because it is a quest for wisdom. Strauss concludes (JPCM 380): "By saying that we wish to hear first and then act to decide [as opposed to Israel's saying "we will act and [then] we will hear" at Mount Sinai]72, we have already decided in favor of Athens against Jerusalem." Yet at the beginning of the very next paragraph, reservations are made: "This seems to be necessary for all of us who cannot be orthodox and therefore must accept the principle of the historical-critical study of the Bible." Strauss is declaring himself to be a Spinozist, but which Spinozist? The exoteric Spinoza who refuted revelation, or the esoteric Spinoza who still wrote from within the Jewish tradition?73 And what does the "seems" mean in this new paragraph?74 Can it still be possible to decide for Jerusalem and accept the historical-critical study of the Bible? If this were to be the case, it would be necessary to translate Biblical narrative into the language of philosophy. The goal of this move would not be a Levinasian display of the incommensurability between the two cities, but rather a limited commensurability which simultaneously strengthens the appeal of the Biblical narrative by revealing the mysteries of the Torah as part of a dialectic web of identity and difference with the mysteries of being which have plagued and supported the West.


74 Orr mentions another "seems" at the beginning of the previous paragraph (JPCM 379)—"Yet our intention to speak of Jerusalem and Athens seems to compel us to go beyond the self-understanding of either"—but passes over the "seems" discussed here. Cf. Orr, Jerusalem and Athens, 147-49.
This is exactly the path which "Jerusalem and Athens" takes. The first section details a parallel progress within Genesis and early Greek thinking, stressing the ambiguity in both sides. Genesis is mined for its philosophical wisdom: following in part the biblical commentaries of Cassuto, Strauss both here (JPCM 383) and in the earlier lecture "On The Interpretation of Genesis" (JPCM 362-67) re-describes the creation narratives as examples of Platonic dieresis, the classification of beings into twos (creatures can be split into beings with and without local motion, locomotive beings can be split into those that do and do not live on land, etc.). The following chapters of Genesis are, for Strauss, a narrative of "God's education of man" (JPCM 387). Beginning with the Fall—which on the one hand teaches humankind that it must live with suffering through its own error but also sets the stage for the gift of the divine covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses—humankind progresses from knowledge of good and evil through anarchy to the covenantal protone nation-state centered around God's righteousness which unfathomably transcends human standards of justice. Yet the ineffability of divine justice forces the Biblical narrative to remain always ambiguous by Athenian standards. "The apparent contradiction between the command to sacrifice Isaac and the divine promise to the descendants of Isaac" (JPCM 392) is only one of many examples of this.

However, even here there is already a moment of Hegelian recognition which indicates a subtle dialectical pass over into Athens. In describing the ineffability of divine justice as leading to the consideration that "nothing is too wondrous for the Lord" (JPCM 392) and in closing his analysis of the Akedah by stating that the preservation and birth of Isaac are "two wonders [which] illustrate more clearly than anything else the origin of the holy nation," Strauss is hearkening to and deconstructing the very distinction between Jerusalem and Athens which he himself made earlier in the essay. At this point, Strauss writes (JPCM 380) that "according to the Bible, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord; according to the Greek philosophers, the beginning of wisdom is wonder." Having proceeded to the close of Strauss' analysis of Genesis, the attentive reader comes thereby to
realize that Strauss’s non-reductive (because it accepts revelation as revelation) reading of the origins of “Jerusalem” in wonder has unexpectedly ended up expressing the origin of “Athens.” This continues in Strauss’ exploration of Greek creation narratives, in Hesiod as well as the Pre-Socratics, Plato and Aristotle. While cataloguing the differences between the narratives in Genesis and Hesiod (JPCM 394-96)—Hesiod does not posit a created heaven and earth and does not view human suffering as rooted in human sin, Hesiod’s Zeus is only whimsically concerned with issues of justice—Strauss subtly notes that Zeus is more to be feared than the wondrous God of Genesis, since Hesiod claims that Zeus destroys entire cities as punishment for one man’s injustices, as opposed to Abraham’s tenacity with God at Genesis 18. This is as far as possible from being a middle way; this is a view of the way of the West as a Jerusalem-Athens Möbius strip, in which one suddenly finds oneself on the outside edge after having walked a ways on the inside.

Yet this deconstruction falls apart. The Aristotelian God “above justice as well as injustice” (JPCM 396) is a God who cannot be recognized in the Bible. The daimonion of Socrates, as described in the Apology, is not simply divine but also demonic. The Delphic oracle, which propelled Socrates into the life of elenchos, spoke not spontaneously as the divine voice spoke to the Biblical prophets, but at the prompting of Socrates’ friend Chairephon. The fundamental opposition between even Socrates and the prophets is expressed by Strauss as follows:

The philosopher is the man who dedicates his life to the quest for knowledge of the good, of the idea of the good; what we would call moral virtue is only the condition or by-product of that quest. According to the prophets, however, there is no need for the quest for knowledge of the good: God “hath shewed thee, 0 man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” (Micah 6:8) In accordance with this the prophets as a rule address the people and sometimes even all the peoples, whereas Socrates as a rule addresses only one man. (JPCM 403-4)

The use of the phrase “as a rule” jumps out at the reader here. It leads her to expect exceptions. It is as an exception to this rule that Strauss makes his last dialectical turn, to Jerusalem back from Athens. This exception is the parable of the lamb which Nathan tells
to David as an exhortation to repentance after David has succeeded, but only through subterfuge, in making an honest woman of Bathsheba. In “Jerusalem and Athens,” Strauss juxtaposes this with a citation from Xenophon’s Memorabilia that contains a similar exhortation to repentance, by Socrates to Critias. Nathan is successful, whereas Socrates is not. Strauss ends the essay with this juxtaposition, leaving the reader to do much work, yet the conclusions to be made are not too secretive. Nathan’s success demonstrates that the prophets are able to perform the elenchic task better than Socrates can. Furthermore, if the goal of Biblical prophecy is the teshuvah of the Israelites, then Nathan’s success means that teshuvah can be equivalent to the philosophic notion of “quest for knowledge of the good”. For if King David needs to return to Torah in order to internalize the good through just action—and it must be remembered that this is indeed a process and a quest, given the conflicts with his sons that take up the second half of 2 Samuel, and David’s subsequent repentance at 2 Sam 24:10 ff.—how much more do the rest of us, lesser than King David, need to make this same return! If the Athenian mode of prophecy was necessary for the strength of Jerusalem at this exemplary moment in history, then this allows similar possible dialectical turns between Athens and Jerusalem in the present day, in which we are philosophers open to theology at one moment and theologians open to philosophy at the next.

True teshuvah, the return that is repentance and thus also in a sense progress becomes possible through these dialectical turns. A more viable Jerusalem is grounded in a strong Athens, in the elenchic way of life, without erasing the differences between the two. The Straussian teshuvah is fragmented by the retrieval of the Athens/Jerusalem conflict, yet it remains a complete and authentic teshuvah, since the two cities pass through each other.

As noted above, Strauss himself briefly hints that his jumps between Jerusalem and Athens can be read as part of a post-Holocaust way of thinking. The suspicion of any account of true justified knowledge leads to Strauss’ view of being as a mystery, a view

75 This narrative is key in Strauss’ thought, appearing also in “Progress or Return?”, On Tyranny, and Natural Right and History.
which Strauss terms “non-ontological.” Emil Fackenheim, during a moment in history (the Persian Gulf conflict) when Jewish existence appeared to him to be threatened, phrases this view of Jerusalem and Athens most baldly as perhaps necessarily part and parcel of post-Holocaust thought:

A rabbinic legend has Plato go to school with Moses: what made the rabbis invent it? A deep question, but less relevant in the present Jerusalem—post-Holocaust, non-metaphorical, physical, Jewish—than its opposite. The rabbis tell the tale of a Torah prior to Creation, preworldly and known to God but—needless to add—revealed also to Moses: what made the rabbis let Moses go to school with Plato?

A Jew of today, I open the Book of Isaiah for an answer. Athens is universal. In Isaiah's second chapter—all nations flowing unto Mount Zion, so as to unlearn war—Jewish Jerusalem reaches a universalism of its own. The Jewish urge to get to that chapter is great, greater today, perhaps, at this time of my writing than ever before: yet just now a Jew cannot, it seems, get beyond Isaiah's first chapter, with Jerusalem a 'besieged city' (Isa. 1:8), and its people—compared to the multitude laying the siege—'a small remnant' (Isa. 1:9). Perhaps such is a time when a Jew, holding fast to a Torah vulnerable below—never letting go of that 'below'—needs support from a preworldly Torah, unassailable above. Perhaps such is a time for Moses to go to school with Plato.

These brief paragraphs conjure up many standard Fackenheimian themes. A list of three should suffice here. First, the mention of the aggadah about Plato and Moses is in line with Fackenheim's philosophic-kabbalistic appropriation of midrash (narratives in rabbinic writings constructed as interpretations of Biblical verses) as speaking to a post-Holocaust existence which is, like midrash, simultaneously “fragmentary and whole”. The reason why midrash corresponds to the truth of existence hearkens to the other two themes of Fackenheim’s thought. It is always rooted in current Jewish history, fragmented because of the cataclysm that the Holocaust was, but necessarily whole because to leave the fragments as fragments would be to violate the so-called “614th commandment” against giving Hitler posthumous victories. Finally, Fackenheim always remains rooted in Hegel; even when he shows how history has revealed the failure of Hegelian dialectic, this failure is still maintained as part of the dialectic of history and has dialectic results. Thus, although

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76 Fackenheim, “Reply,” 297.


78 Fackenheim, *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken, 1982), 120.
Hegel's conclusions may be wrong, Hegelian method is not. The entirety of Fackenheim's writings attempts to set out both what a life in the broken Hegelian middle might be—the themes of teshuvah and tikkun (mending) that animate To Mend the World, are key elements in the picture of such a life—and how Hegelian method might guarantee that that life is really possible. These three themes together constitute the picture of Moses going to school with Plato, of Jerusalem using Athens as a bulwark against hostile forces, of a midrashic Hegel who shows the way for post-Holocaust Judaism. Yet it is the Hegelian theme, or more precisely the theme of how to be a "Hegelian-after-Hegel" which is undoubtedly the most important, for it keeps Fackenheim's arguments away from reverting into madness.

Although these three themes are most notably interwoven in To Mend The World, they are already, if not more subtly, associated in Fackenheim's earlier writings as well. Furthermore, in Metaphysics and Historicity (written in 1961, the same year as Totality and Infinity), Fackenheim briefly shows that a theory of alterity is part and parcel of his post-Hegelian Hegelian work. Fackenheim's 1961 essay is an extremely complicated argument as to whether and how it is possible to agree on eternal truths in an age in which those very truths are argued to be historically constituted. The two positions—metaphysics and historicity, respectively—are fundamentally opposed. The timeless truth of the metaphysician is shown by later thinkers to be simply the truths of a certain historical perspective upon the world. Truth is reduced to a worldview, and philosophy is reduced to the history of ideas, none of which can be shown to be more true than the others (MH 137). Fackenheim is made nervous by this historicist position (MH 123); it entails the risk of justifying totalita-

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79 Zachary Braierman, in his (God) After Auschwitz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), shows how Hegelian method is retained in To Mend The World in Fackenheim's reduction of Spinoza and Rosenzweig to "Hegelian signifiers."

80 This phrase is taken from "Reply," 278. Other phrases Fackenheim uses for this type of thinking include "post-Hegelian Hegelianism" and "inverted Hegelianism post Hegel mortuam."
rian ideologies which cannot be assured of the rightness of their world-view without violently stamping it upon the rest of the world. Fackenheim also wants to respect the truth of humanity's historical situatedness. But how can one talk about historicity without falling into the ethical abyss of historicism? Fackenheim's entire essay is an answer to this question. The concept of historicity which Fackenheim arrives at is inherently meontological by his own admission in the 1961 essay. As I shall claim below, it also undergirds the discussion of history in To Mend The World. There are two assumptions of historicity with which Fackenheim wants to agree: human freedom introduces a distinction between the order of history in which humankind acts and the order of nature in which humankind is acted upon, and the essence and laws of beings are always in a fluxic process. The first assumption expresses that, by virtue of natural (biological, chemical, psychological) processes, I am able to project myself into the world and break out of my shell, be part of the public realm called "history." The second assumption rests on the fact that my actions change over time; this is the true sign of freedom and demonstrates that the agents of history are not merely automata. Fackenheim concludes from these principles (MH 128) that "human being, then, is a self-making or self-constituting process."

Being is therefore the result, and not the condition, of action. The nature of humanity's historicity, then, is meontological (MH 129) on Fackenheim's claim. The notion of meontology here means something different than it does for Levinas. For Levinas, as we saw above, meontology hearkens to a place beyond Being that is truly the ultimate, yet is also totaliter aliter (wholly other) than human being and hence cannot be spoken. For

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81 As Michael Morgan notes in "Philosophy, History, and the Jewish Thinker," both in Fackenheim: German Philosophy and Jewish Thought 161n. 25 and Dilemmas of Modern Jewish Thought 174 n. 26. It is at this point in MH that Fackenheim obliquely points to the anxieties of post-Holocaust Jewish life. Also see "Holocaust and Weltanschauung: Philosophical Reflections on Why They Did It" in The God Within, 172-185.
Fackenheim, the relation between human being and the ultimate is more dialectical. The ultimate can easily be spoken ("self-making"), and although it might not make any sense from the ontological point of view in which being precedes action, "meontological logic" generates a logic of its own (MH 130) and has roots in the history of philosophy (Eriugena, Boehme, Schelling, and Berdyaev).

The God of meontological metaphysics would have to be described as a process which (i) because it is pure making proceeds from the indifference of sheer possibility of nothingness (me on) into the differentiation of actuality—ex nihilo in aliquid; (ii) because it is self-making established its own identity throughout this process by returning upon itself; or, otherwise put, proceeds into otherness, yet cancels this otherness and in so doing establishes itself; (iii) because it is absolute self-making, actualizes ex nihilo the totality of possibilities. (MH 129)

The circularity apparent in the logic of meontological process is necessary precisely because self-making is predicated upon a forward movement which also returns upon itself, which establishes itself by integrating its own past history into its projection of future possibilities (Heideggerean language to which Fackenheim is not completely averse in this essay82).

Progress or return?

Fackenheim only stays with the theme of meontology for four paragraphs, and departs from it with the sentence (MH 130) "We cannot here further decribe this kind of logic."

This sentence is attached to the following footnote (MH 221 n.23): "It may be observed in passing, however, that the greatest attempt to explicate this kind of logic is beyond all doubt Hegel's work by that name." This makes a certain kind of sense: after all, if the meontological tradition indeed practices the type of dialectic as described above, in which an individual strives to recognize him- or herself within the historical sphere, then it will doubtlessly be Hegelian. Nevertheless, at this point, the reader schooled in French postphenomenological thinking may very well fall into shock, or at least break a pencil-lead in a

82 Cf. MH 131-32. Fackenheim attempts to refute Heidegger both at MH 227-28 n.45 and in "The Historicity and Transcendence of Philosophical Truth" makes another attempt, having been told in a letter from Leo Strauss that the attempt in MH was inadequate. This latter attempt bears much in common with the struggle with Heidegger in the opening sections of the fourth chapter of To Mend The World, esp. that entitled "Historicity and Transcendence." Cf. "The Historicity and Transcendence of Philosophical Truth," in The God Within, 148-63, and To Mend The World, 154-62.
rush of mad scribbling. For Hegel to be associated with meontology is anathema for Levinas. The logic of totality and its inherent violence to which Levinas proposes his meontological response was, in Levinas' view, begun by Hegel. Levinas' opposition to Hegel is already apparent in the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, which posits an eschatology that would be "beyond history" (TI 22), and the negative references to Hegel never stop. More often than not, they are mere sound bites, comfortable as snapshots on the news. Hegel's universal is one of the "insidious forms of the impersonal" (TI 272); the Hegelian identification of will and reason "is opposed by the entire pathetic experience of humanity" (TI 217). These remarks represent a fundamental opposition. The singularity of human existence which Levinas describes throughout his work is fundamentally opposed to the very language of "consciousness" which reduces persons to voiceless objects. But in the modern era, philosophy has in Levinas' eyes been nothing but philosophy of consciousness (OB 103) "which since Hegel has been trying to over-come the duality of being and thought, by identifying, under different figures, substance and subject." When Levinas describes his work as a meontology, this is an anti-Hegelian rallying cry. When Fackenheim does it, it is a Hegelian rallying cry.

Yet Fackenheim is still able to derive a theory of alterity from his version of meontology. When the meontological concept of a self-making God is used to analyze the nature of human historical self-making, it becomes clear that although divine self-making is always and everywhere absolute, human self-making is always (MH 132) "fragmented by the loss of a past which it cannot recapture, and by the refractoriness of a future which refuses to be subdued into presentness. It is, in short, a returning-upon-itself within the limits of a situation." In a situation, both human and historical, there are limits placed upon us by nature or by sociopolitical contexts. In this manner, otherness enters the historical analysis, since the relation between the self and its situation is dialectical. The self projects its possibilities on the basis of its situation and incorporates the situation into its self-making process, but the situation is also the absolutely distinct ground of the self-making
process. Yet the element of otherness in the situation is maintained in the human self-making process. Because human existence cannot wholly transcend its situation, the dialectic is insurmountable. It is a struggle (the very word reminds us of Shestov, but Shestov's struggle is against reason, while Fackenheim's struggle is the struggle of reason itself).

At this point, Fackenheim himself begins to struggle with the struggle. He can conclude that this strong reading of historicity—historicism—makes no sense. Historicism cannot trump metaphysics and its eternal truths, since on its terms it itself is part of the self-making process, just like the metaphysics it counters. The distinction between historicism and history collapses (MH 136). What is needed, as Fackenheim claims, is a historical-metaphysical doctrine that expresses this struggle in terms of a theory of self-making in which historicity can make room (MH 139, 137) for “transhistorical possibilities of self-making ... [in which] the transhistorical integrate[s] itself with the historical, and thus itself become[s] infected with historicity,” all the while dialectically maintaining its nature as transhistorical. In “The Historicity and Transcendence of Philosophic Truth,” Fackenheim describes this in a more elegant and accessible fashion:

The philosopher may be unable to escape from the cave of history. He does find, however, that a light from beyond the cave shines into the cave itself, and that it lights up both the lives of men who must live in history and the philosophic thought which seeks to understand it.83

For such an understanding to take place, Fackenheim argues that the Hegelian speculative language about the struggle of self-making must pass over into an existentialist language, and that the concept of historical situation must be expanded into that of the human situation. This latter concept allows us to theorize the fact that the otherness of the natural and historical situations never allows for a wholly autonomous self-making process. The finitude of the situation does not simply show the logical possibility of my self-making (as the natural situation does) or even give me determinate concrete options for

this self-making (I can go to a disco, figure out the volume of a sphere, or join a public protest). It reveals the human condition universally as one in which in which these limits and opportunities exist. These are no longer my objective limits and opportunities, but are part and parcel (MH 142) of a recognition "that all history is a conjunction of compulsion and freedom, and that to be subject to one and to be challenged to realize the other is universally part of the human condition." The Kierkegaardian analysis of the individuality of the self, as well as Heideggerean analyses of being-toward-death and anxiety, are openly invoked here (MH 226-231nn. 43-48), although Fackenheim has appropriated these positions in his own individual manner.

Yet Fackenheim's distillation of these existentialist positions here is still not his final position on the matter. While existentialist interpretations of both Heidegger and Kierkegaard want to give the impression of being anti-Hegelian and of having left speculative thought behind, this claim is specious because it is itself grounded in speculation (MH 146). Thus Fackenheim wants to dialectically integrate Hegel and existentialism into a position that maintains the irreducibility of both poles, and allows for the human recognition of metaphysical truths about self-making without having these metaphysical truths succumb to the very doctrine of self-making. This integration or mediation, however, is written neither in the language of Hegel or Kierkegaard. Fackenheim's final position (MH 144) turns out to be something which appears remarkably Levinasian, given the disparity of their philosophical approaches.

For what situates man humanly is not produced by man but on the contrary the condition of all human producing. And in rising to metaphysics man recognizes this fact; but in recognizing it he recognizes the otherness of the Other that situates him. This Other is the Other par excellence.

In this recognition the Other must, and yet cannot, remain wholly unknown. It must remain unknown, for if human being were to know it it would cease to be situated by It. Hence all supposed knowledge is but pseudo-knowledge. And yet this Other cannot remain wholly unknown. For to know its otherness is to have passed beyond simple ignorance. We have seen that existential metaphysics originates in the recognition of man's human situation as a dialectical mystery. We now see that this metaphysics culminates in pointing, as to a vastly greater mystery, to the ultimate Other which situates man humanly. And this pointing-to is itself dialectical. It expresses an ignorance which knows the grounds of this ignorance, or a knowledge which knows that it is ignorant, and why. The Other that is pointed to thus remains undefined, and is yet given names. But the names express Mystery. They do not disclose It.
Fackenheim's resolution of the impasse between metaphysics and historicity—echoed by Strauss' "Being is mysterious"—is thus a dialectical meditation on "the ultimate Other." This is a religious meditation, whether or not the ultimate Other is given the name of God or simply left in its obliqueness. Fackenheim himself is oblique on this point, yet there are two reasons why these paragraphs are statements about God. First, the final sentence of the essay is a reference to a marginal note by Coleridge written in a volume of Schelling; where Schelling writes "I am because I am," Coleridge responds "I am because God made me." And in the footnote accompanying the passage quoted above (MH 231 n. 50), Fackenheim briefly and tentatively (and, I believe, without argumentative support) extends his conclusion from one in which the otherness of the world expresses God as creator to one which God as revealer. Although, as noted above, Fackenheim himself states that he no longer ascribes to a concept of revelation in his thinking, the intent in Metaphysics and Historicity seems to be that the conclusion of the impasse between metaphysics and historicity in revelation prevents Fackenheim from remaining wholly in the sphere of thought, divorced from life. "Pointing-to-the-Other, the last achievement of unaided philosophical thought, need not be regarded in existential thought as necessarily the last achievement of man: if the Other is God who reveals Himself." This would mark a smooth transition from Metaphysics and Historicity to Fackenheim's later The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought, which argues that only religion can be the mediating bridge between life and thought.\(^{84}\)

Although Shestov, Levinas, Strauss and Fackenheim—all in their own ways—pass from analyses of human finitude to mysterious evocations of God or Messiah, the distinction between critical and dialectical meontology should not immediately be regretted. There is something definitely odd in Fackenheim from the Levinasian point of view. In spite of the common emphasis on a quasi-religious otherness as the transcendental condition of

\(^{84}\) Fackenheim, Religious Dimension, 117ff.
selfhood, the mystery of Otherness in Fackenheim is not anything specifically "phenomenal," such as the face or touch. Rather, it is the dialectic, resulting from reflection upon the nature of history, which is the engine producing alterity here. In *Metaphysics and Historicity*, Fackenheim almost completely leaves the situations of concrete history behind. For Fackenheim, it is metaphysics that points to the "other par excellence." For Levinas, it is the historical situation itself, without any codification into metaphysics, which serves as this pointing. It would indeed be true to object that there is little space in the constricted lecture format of *Metaphysics and Historicity* to describe how the philosopheme of "the Other who situates me" dialectically passes into life. Indeed, the majority of Fackenheim's writings after 1961, centering on the Holocaust, perform this dialectical turn, and demonstrate that Fackenheim actually does accept the 1961 meontological theory of historicity which he had then described as merely a hypothesis. Fackenheim's "Jewish writings" are an outgrowth of the theories developed in his "philosophical writings," thus preventing an easy distinction between the two.\(^{85}\) Yet in these later writings, the Other *par excellence* disappears.

*God's Presence in History* and *To Mend The World* are predicated upon the claim that there is a new human situation after the Holocaust, since belief in a God who acts either as progress or providence is no longer feasible. Therefore, this new situation offers up new metaphysical truths, even if this runs the risk of becoming "a negative natural theology."\(^{86}\) Indeed, this claim is the wedge that separates Fackenheim from other contemporary Jewish thinkers. Fackenheim is unable to accept either Wyschogrod's view that a radically

\(^{85}\) Michael Morgan has edited two books of Fackenheim's "Jewish thought": *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), and *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). This gives the appearance of a strict opposition between Jewish and non-Jewish thought in the Fackenheimian corpus, although the passage on "ideological fanaticism" from MH is excerpted in the first of these readers. Nevertheless, as John Burbidge implies in his preface to *The God Within* (ix-xiii, esp. xi), Fackenheim's later Jewish thought cannot be divorced from, and is indebted to, Fackenheim's earlier studies of German idealism.

contingent history has no recourse to critique a transcendent God, or Richard Rubinstein's argument that the Shoah calls for the rejection of the God of history. This is not simply for personal reasons or even for theological ones, but for Hegelian ones. On the Hegelian assumption that life is dialectically related to thought, that history expresses metaphysical positions, the Shoah must be perceived as making a theological or a philosophical claim. Wyschogrod claims that Fackenheim's first mistake is to view the Shoah "from the human point of view," but for a Hegelian the human reflection on life which propels philosophical self-understanding is necessarily bound up with this viewpoint. And to follow the path of Rubenstein in dealing with the Holocaust, by making a clean break with the long-lasting historical idea of God's acting in human history, is, like Wyschogrod, to make a turn to pure and simple thought that, because it does not relate to all events in history, cannot relate at all to the category of history.

If the task of post-Holocaust self-making is important, it is necessary to appropriate the Holocaust in the context of its historical situation: not the context of mechanization and anti-Semitism that led up to the Holocaust, but the context of past Jewish historical actualities which the Holocaust threatens. This can only occur when the past which fragments my present appropriation (MH 132) is itself thematized as fragmentary. For history to have a more ontologically positive valence than "fragment" would imply that human self-making can be as absolute and self-enclosed as divine self-making is, thus ignoring the fact that the post-Holocaust situation is situating, dialectically other in an irrecoverable fashion. If history must be fragmentary according to Fackenheim's logic, then it only makes sense he


88 Wyschogrod, 286.

89 It should be noted that Fackenheim's fragmentation of historical actualities is not limited to Jewish history. It is a constant hermeneutical technique, which extends also to the reading of the incarnation narrative given in *To Mend The World* 281ff, and to the reduction of Spinoza and Rosenzweig to "Hegelian signifiers."
will subsume Jewish history under the rubric of its "midrashic framework," the framework of the very fragmentariness of Jewish history.

The midrashic framework is both light and heavy for Fackenheim. It is light because the tensions between the fragments allow us to reject some of them; Fackenheim thus has no problems rejecting various theodicies formulated in the rabbinic period. Yet it is heavy because Jewish history cannot be re-integrated by Jews of today into a seamless fabric. The dialectic turns which the post-Holocaust situation inaugurates cannot be overcome, but their contradictions multiply and grow as each turn retains the previous one. Thus, in *God's Presence in History*, the collapse of religious theodicies after the Holocaust determines a turn from faith to Jewish secularism. Yet this also collapses insofar as Jewish secularism is shown, in its affirmation of Jewishness, to be an acceptance of a certain kind of election, a type of being-singled-out. The election of the secular Jew has its origin in an Other *par excellence* that can only be described as the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz, "as truly other than man-made ideals—an imperative as truly given—as was the Voice of Sinai." This stage of post-Holocaust self-making, in making the turn back to an uneasy faith that unites faith and secularism within it while maintaining the difference between the two, marks the pinnacle of the integration of the fragmentariness of the post-Holocaust human situation into the general fragmented midrashic framework of Judaism. Jewish existence can continue in the post-Holocaust human situation because the thought of Judaism can still possess a dialectical relation to the life of both the victims and the survivors. The past narratives of witnessing God as Other at Sinai are at one with, but simultaneously ruptured by, narratives in which Otherness is witnessed at Auschwitz. The best example of this is Fackenheim's frequent citation of Pelagia Lewinska's "I felt under orders to live" in *To Mend The World*, a citation in which Fackenheim refuses to speculate

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91 Ibid., 83.
on who or what issued the command. These narratives are gathered into present imperatives which determine future action ("survive!"). Yet this gathering does not have the absolute character of a Heideggerean Versammlung which would gather Being as it is itself; here, Fackenheim makes his dialectical-miento-ntological move both outside of being and within it, a move to a rupture in being the fragments of which we cannot transcend. Fackenheim stresses that the demands of the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz—the four fragments of witness, survival, hope, and acceptance of the commanding power of the divine presence—can-not be united into any calm maxims of will. Bearing witness to the Holocaust does not exactly breed hope. Yet all must be maintained in the uneasy Aufhebung of these commands. Thus, the argument from Metaphysics and Historicity that the doctrine of self-making, if accepted, authorizes only limited integrations of the historical into my future plans, appears pari passu in the last two sentences of God's Presence in History: "Jews after Auschwitz will never understand the longing, defiance, endurance of the Jews at Auschwitz. But so far as is humanly possible they must make them their own as they carry the whole Jewish past into a future yet unknown." As Fackenheim describes it, implicit within the commands at Auschwitz is the idea of historicity. And as in Metaphysics and Historicity, the dialectic of the post-Holocaust human situation leads to an inability to express that which transcends as anything more than a voice. Even the term "voice", situated as it is within the midrashic framework, cannot have any ontological reference that can be gleaned by human understanding. Certainly not God.

In such a manner the transhistorical enters the order of the historical. Thus, when William Dray points out in his own article on Metaphysics and Historicity that Fackenheim never answers the question of whether the transhistorical must necessarily become infected with historicity94, we can counter by pointing out that God's Presence in History is

93 Fackenheim, God's Presence in History, 98.
94 W. H. Dray, "Historicity, Historicism, and Self-Making," in Fackenheim: German Philosophy and
engaged in nothing less than the elucidation of a positive answer to this question. It should be duly noted that this is not Fackenheim's own response to Dray. Fackenheim looks back at *Metaphysics and Historicity* "with a disbelief engendered in retrospect," and chastises his younger self for a romantic attachment to Mozart (!), and a failure to speak of the Holocaust only as an example of "ideological fanaticism" and not as the overwhelming of the human situation which it was. While this may be true of MH taken on its own, I believe that, when read as part of Fackenheim's entire corpus, it calls forth for a dialectical turn from thought into life which Fackenheim makes in his future work.\(^{95}\)

In *To Mend The World*, the dialectic of *God's Presence in History* is redescribed as the "dialectic of *teshuvah*", thus further integrating the post-Holocaust human situation into the fabric of the Jewish tradition. Again, the dialectic finds its fruition in an uneasy maintenance of historical polarities, what Fackenheim here defines as *tikkun*, "mending." In its use in Lurianic kabbalah, *tikkun* is a total mending of a total rupture, and the two movements are folded into an "at-oneness of God and men" in the exile of the Shekhinah along with Israel, both ruptured and mended—the rupture that is exile is accompanied by the mending that is God's presence with the Jewish people that grounds an anticipated redemption. Fackenheim's appropriation of *tikkun* maintains this paradox: after the Holocaust, "the impossible *tikkun* is also necessary,"\(^{96}\) but the appropriation is also sufficiently self-aware that it realizes that such a *tikkun* can only be fragmentary, "both ever-incomplete and ever-laden with risk."\(^{97}\) Israel is this fragment, yet it also becomes dialectically folded into the a post-Holocaust *tikkun* in its prayer on Yom Kippur (a prayer that for Fackenheim binds together religious and secular Jews), as it turns from a questioning of the why of

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\(^{95}\) Fackenheim, "A Reply," 293-96.

\(^{96}\) All preceding ideas and quotations in this paragraph are from Fackenheim, *To Mend The World*, 252-54.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 310.
existence itself into an acknowledgment of its feeling of being-elected, of being-singled-out. "And in this returning—a Messianic moment, a messianic fragment—Israel, Torah, and God are one." The Other par excellence crosses the boundaries between these three entities; and their oneness is, in our opinion, the clearest formulation of "the vastly greater mystery" to which Fackenheim refers in Metaphysics and Historicity. The mystery is not God alone, but rather the penetration of the infinite and the finite, or the Hegelian interweaving of subjects and worldly substance in an absolute self-transcending motion. Here, the structure of the mystery—the way in which this interpenetration comes to be—is indeed not disclosed. But the mystery itself can be easily named—amcha, lit. "your people," the people who survive by affirming themselves as the people of Israel. A mystery it must be, or else teshuvah would be an exhaustive answer to the Holocaust, and the Holocaust would no longer be a rupture in history. In a sense, this is the mystery of otherness itself: how does my recognition of something as other, insofar as it passes beyond mere ignorance, retain the otherness of that which I recognize?

Nevertheless, there is a slight shift in ideas between the writing of God's Presence in History and To Mend The World, but it does not appear in these concluding pages of the latter work—the deconstruction of Biblical revelation is constant in both works—but in the fourth chapter. Here, Fackenheim for the first time proves that the command of teshuvah is possible within life, and can ground post-Holocaust existence without that existence collapsing into madness, even if that madness is also forbidden. In God's Presence in History, the testimony of those who did and did not survive the Holocaust is invoked only to testify to the completeness of the discontinuity in the human situation that the Holocaust

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98 Ibid., 329.

99 As Braiterman shows in his analysis of Fackenheim in (God) After Auschwitz, the word amcha is a key element in the Fackenheimian dialectic, as it marks the Aufhebung of the Shoah in this new Zionist mystery. Indeed, Fackenheim at "Reply" 287 uses the word in the context of a brief (too brief, in my opinion) rejoinder to Michael Wyschogrod: "In elementary—nay, survival—necessities, I have learned over the years, amcha is more to be trusted than its professors."
was. In *To Mend The World*, this testimony qua a resistance which passes from thought into life is shown to be a way of being, “an ontological category.” One wonders, then, whether the rupture in Fackenheim’s own writing in 1967—the turn that ends his treatment of German philosophy and Jewish thought as separate arenas—also marks a turn away from the theory of meontology developed in *Metaphysics and Historicity*. The answer to this question must be a negative one. For not only does the description of self-making in 1961 reappear in *God’s Presence in History*, as seen above, but also in *To Mend The World*. *Tikkun* is defined by Fackenheim as a recovery of past tradition which, in its fragmentariness, determines the riskiness of the Jewish future.100 *Tikkun* is hence meontological through and through. John Burbidge points this out when he describes *tikkun* as a type of (post-)Hegelian dialectic qua “double representation” in which thought and life are distinct yet related. Burbidge takes the concept of *tikkun* further than Fackenheim is willing; it is meontological insofar as it moves backwards and forwards along the historical axis by its hearkening back to past narratives and issuing new imperatives for the future.101

Because *tikkun*, as Fackenheim describes it, is the only possible mode of action in the post-Holocaust human situation, and because it rests upon a certain understanding of the world that is rooted in German idealism, it is the epitome of Fackenheim’s formulation of “Moses going to school with Plato.” The Torah’s ineluctable bond to the order of history carries with it the risk of being negated by certain historical situations, and so it needs the “unassailable preworldly Torah” that is “Athens”, which for Fackenheim is typified by Hegelian dialectic. But when Hegelian dialectic buttresses the Torah, it makes the Torah the product of an Athens-Jerusalem dialectic. While Fackenheim does not oscillate between Athens and Jerusalem with the rapidity of Leo Strauss, it is still the case that Fackenheim’s meontological resolution of the Athens-Jerusalem problematic is thoroughly dialectical, and

100 Fackenheim, *To Mend The World*, 310.

that the dialectic movement in Fackenheim reveals Strauss' meontological approach. For Fackenheim (and Strauss), "Jerusalem" is a combination of "Greek" thought with the traditional Jerusalem in which both seek each other and flee from each other; Jerusalem needs Athens in order to survive the post-Holocaust human situation, but not so much that the essential meontological determination of being-singled-out by the Other *par excellence* is threatened.\(^{102}\)

**Conclusion**

The four thinkers discussed in this chapter resolve the Athens/Jerusalem problem through the delineation of a type of thinking called "meontology," broadly centered around the theme of nonbeing. Yet it is the relationship between meontology and ontology which remains murky after the survey of these approaches. What does it mean for Shestov to proclaim that he is leaving Athens behind for Jerusalem while simultaneously announcing that his philosophy goes to the outskirts of, but not completely outside, being? What is the relationship between the Heideggerean style of phenomenology that allows Levinas to turn to an indolent way of being in the world and see in this mode of being a proclamation of something that lies beyond being which authorizes a rejection of traditional ontology? Is proclaiming the instability of ontology—as Strauss and Fackenheim do in their rapid dialectical turns between Athens and Jerusalem—a sufficient mode of resistance? This is the differend between the two approaches, then. In surface readings of Shestov and Levinas, there is no relation between the order of being and what lies beyond being. The ontological tradition of philosophy has simply thought incorrectly. But for Strauss and

\(^{102}\) Thus, I agree with Michael Morgan's assessment in "Philosophy, History, and the Jewish Thinker" that *To Mend The World* belongs to Athens and Jerusalem, and that Fackenheim's life informs this style of thinking—this is only good post-Hegelian Hegelianism. Nevertheless, the dialectic relationship between Athens and Jerusalem in Fackenheim's thought prevents any interpretation of Fackenheim as a "fanatic" or "militant" Jewish thinker, as Fackenheim himself argues. Whether Fackenheim's Zionism constitutes a blind spot in this matter is for the reader to decide. Cf. Morgan, *Dilemmas*, 122; Fackenheim, "A Reply," 277-78.
Fackenheim, *meontology is a type of ontology*. Insofar as self-making determines being, the question of being can still be answered—for Fackenheim by the State of Israel, and for Strauss by the vision of prophecy as *echt* philosophy in both Greek and Jewish texts—even if there are some mysterious elements which remain in this answer. To speak of meontology in Judaism at the turn of the millennium is a conundrum. Despite the similar theory of alterity in both Levinas and Fackenheim, and despite their mutual opposition to certain aspects of Heideggerean thought, we find that there can be no mediation between critical and dialectical meontology. Critical meontology views *to me on* as totally other than being; dialectical meontology views *to me on* as simply another being or another way of being. Hegel blocks any mediation here. Levinas and especially Shestov want to keep the transhistorical safe from history; the spiritual eyes see alone and extricated from a social context while the coming-to-pass of the Infinite in the ethical relation cannot be narrated in terms of a traditional history which reduces singular persons to members of classes or tribes.\(^{103}\) Most baldly, what use can this concept be if one cannot even answer the question of what meontology is?

One could try and resolve this question by turning to an analysis of Hegel, and adjudicating whether Fackenheim is more correct than Levinas or not in his view of Hegel as the meontologist *par excellence*. However, this does not guard against the possibility that Hegel himself has misunderstood meontology. In order to resolve the meontological conundrum, it is therefore necessary to go back to the Platonic teaching of *to me on*, to reawaken the idea in its original guise. In the following chapter, I show how the Platonic concept of nonbeing makes possible both the critical and dialectical approaches to nonbeing.

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CHAPTER 2
BEYOND BEYOND BEING:
Non-Being in Plato's Sophist

Near the close of the sixth book of Plato's Republic (508d–509c), Socrates famously names the idea of the good as the cause of all truth, and explains this by analogizing the good to the sun. As the sun provides for the “coming to be, growth, and nourishment”\(^1\) of visible objects but is not itself any of these processes of becoming, so is the good the source of both existence and being (to einai kai ten ousian) without being either of these. Indeed, the good is defined as epekeina tes ousias, beyond being (509b). By stating that the good is superior to being, Plato leaves the Republic open for an interpretation which states that discussions of the good—ethics—are superior to epistemological or metaphysical discussions. This point of view, namely that “ethics is first philosophy”, is a programmatic statement of Levinasian thought. This appears throughout Levinas' writings, with specific reference to this section of the Republic. In Totality and Infinity (TI 103), Levinas writes that “the Place of the Good above every essence is the most profound teaching, the definitive teaching, not of theology, but of philosophy.” In the précis of the argument of Otherwise than Being (OB 19), Levinas continues along these lines by asserting that the humanist reduction of the person to the historical fact is a forgetting of “what is better than being, that is, the Good.”

Now it is clear that Levinas is not a thoroughgoing Platonist. The very analogy of the sun in Republic VI is contrary to the Levinasian thinking of appearance as an enigmatic shadow.\(^2\) Furthermore, Levinas' ascribing a transcendental necessity to the life of separation and the economic order therein (because there can be no ethics without

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\(^1\) All citations from Plato will be from the translations found in Plato: Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

separation; TI 220) is used in *Time and the Other* to criticize the Platonic distrust of
pleasure.³ Thus, one should interpret Levinas' acceptance of Platonic doctrine at *Republic*
VI not as predicated on an acceptance of Platonic metaphysics and epistemology *tout court*,
but on Levinas' resolution of problems in the Husserlian and Heideggerean theories of
intuition and appearance. It seems that the most that can be said about Levinas' Platonism
is that there is broad agreement between Levinas and the "interrelational" view of Platonic
epistemology: the (Form of the) good is not an *ousia* but rather an organizing teleological
structure, and knowledge of things involves being able to relate it to the teleological
structure of goodness.⁴ (Thus Levinas has a full knowledge of hedonic enjoyment because
he gives its morality a certain preliminary place in the teleological model of the ethical life.)

Nevertheless, readers should question Levinas' acceptance of Plato on this issue.⁵

There are problems with the theory of the Good as it is laid out in the *Republic*. And they
start immediately, at 509c, with Glauccon's response to the argument for the good beyond
being: "And Glauccon comically said: By Apollo, what a daemonic superiority!"⁶ The comic
element cannot be a judgment on the validity of Glauccon's comment since Socrates immedi-
ately responds by blaming Glauccon for forcing him to give a definition in the first place. If
Glauccon were not to be taken seriously, then there would be no reason for Socrates to
chastise him. What is comic is rather the hyperessential language which Glauccon forces

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upon Socrates, language that is ultimately useless and that implies that the inconceivability of the good (509a) would be better reflected if the good were left unspoken. And indeed, the analogy of the Divided Line (509d–511e), which follows this comic interlude, fails to mention the Form of the Good, as is universally noted in the secondary literature.  

And although the Good is mentioned once again in the analogy of the cave in Republic VII, it remains unspoken in later dialogues such as the Sophist and Statesman. Yet the methodological advances of these two dialogues, specifically in terms of the description of dialectic as a process of collection and division (the classification of objects through a process of continually dividing the world into subcategories) which had first been broached in the Phaedrus, is important for a new definition of the good. Given at Philebus 65a, Plato’s last definition of the good appears to be completely unrelated to the definition given earlier in Plato’s career at Republic VI. In the Philebus, we read:

Well, then, if we cannot capture the good in one form [ousia], we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion, and truth. Let us affirm that these three should by right be treated as a unity and be held responsible for what is in the mixture, for its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one.

This is an outright rejection of the hyperessential language of the Republic. The good is no longer beyond being, but now rather a mixture of three ousiai. And goodness is not the source of the being of objects, as Socrates asserts in Republic 509; in the Philebus, goodness is the result of a good mixture, with proper proportion or measure. Goodness is achieved through a skill of measuring, a techne. Indeed, if goodness is only because of the unity of the three ousiai listed at Philebus 65a, then (as Kenneth Sayre argues from this passage) for the late Plato, the good can be defined as unity itself. It is no longer the case that something is good because it participates in the Form of the Good (as one would assume from the theory of forms given in the Phaedo); something is good because it participates in unity.  

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This is puzzling, especially for those readers who are making the turn to Greek thought from the postmoderns. If Levinas is right in his assertion that middle-period Plato has "the most profound teaching of philosophy," why on earth should someone of Plato's acuity leave it behind? If we are to trust Levinas, then it becomes necessary to construct some notion of "being" which would commensurate the different definitions of the good in the Republic and the Philebus by showing that the later definition fits the criterion of "beyond being" given in the earlier definition. This is not impossible. For in the inability to determine the good under a single form, the need presents itself for constructing a theory of value around the unity of disparate features: whether of beauty, proportion, and truth, or of the one and many (as mentioned in Philebus 15d), or of limit and unlimitedness (as in Philebus 16cd). In this unity there would be something of the character of beyond essence, insofar as the unity would not be a pure and indivisible unity. What it would mean to be a form, to be the essence of a thing, would be beyond a primitive monological (or uni-faceted) definition of ousia that is the basis of the definition of the good given in the Republic. In short, I propose a re-reading of "the good is beyond being" as "the good is beyond beingM," where "beingM" stands for the middle-period uni-faceted understanding of being. BeingM is insufficiently reflective; as the Stranger states at Sophist 218c (in another context), it is "content to use the same word without formulating what it means." In the late dialogues, the answer to the question "what is x?" no longer has a simple answer.

This all might be fairly unimpressive were it not for the fact that the move from a simple to a composite understanding of ousia is described by Plato as a move away from pure ontology. Through the analysis of non-being in the Sophist (the meontological analysis) the unity of disparate features becomes theoretically possible. There, in the sections detailing the battle between the giants and the gods—the gigantomachia—and the blending of the five highest kinds⁹, Plato makes steps toward a new definition of ousia which depends

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⁹ This analysis assumes that the discussion of the gigantomachia is commensurable with the following section on the five highest kinds, even though the gigantomachia speaks of ousia whereas it is to on that is
upon a theory of blending (sympleke). This theory of blending becomes possible only due to the new analysis of the form of nonbeing as difference or otherness. Thus, it becomes possible to say that, for the late Plato, there is no knowledge of being as something meaningful without an elucidation of the concept of alterity. But what kind of alterity? The alterity of the other being (the “not” of dialectical meontology), or the alterity of the other-than-being (the “not” of critical meontology)?

In this chapter, I will argue the following: in the Sophist, Plato argues that being and alterity are non-independent, in the sense that Husserl gives this phrase in the third of the Logical Investigations.10 A surface reading of the Platonic text leads to an interpretation that the belonging-together of being and nonbeing discloses a pre-ontological understanding of Being itself in the sense that Heidegger delineates in Being and Time (and hints at in his lecture course on the Sophist given in the Winter Semester of 1924–25), a positing of a higher unity necessary for consciousness’ understanding of the relationship between being and nonbeing which sublates alterity into being. I argue that this view risks forgetting the argument which Plato places in the mouth of the visitor from Elea in the Sophist, namely that the elucidation of alterity confounds the desires of the diakribologoumenoi, those who want to give a precise numerical account of being. Thus, I present the view that being and alterity are moments-of-... By focussing on the absence of a philosophical right to ontologically define an alleged larger structure, indicated through the “...”, this locution

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introduces the notion of alterity typified by critical meontology—the other-than-being—into a framework where scholars have previously thought that only dialectical meontology—the other being—existed. The title of this chapter, “beyond beyond being,” then has a double meaning. It refers to a move back from the Levinasian notion of the beyond being, which fails to do justice to the way in which an account of non-being is imbricated in a supposedly purely ontological account. Simultaneously, it refers to a move forward that follows Levinas in the elucidation of the structure of the beyond-being, and how other beings lie in its traces.

Obviously, one cannot jump head-first into this argument without some preparatory work. This chapter will thereby adhere to the following structure. First, I will give an overview of the problems concomitant with the theory of Forms given in the Phaedo and the Republic, according to the later interpretation of middle Platonism in the Parmenides. Second, I will relate the arguments against uni-faceted definition in the sections of the Sophist which argue against the diakribologoumenoi and relate the narrative of the “gigantomachia,” a struggle between gods and giants over the meaning of being. Third, I will present Plato’s argument that nonbeing should not be conceived as nothingness (as Parmenides himself did), but rather as otherness; a being’s aspect as nonbeing, its difference from other beings, assists in consciousness’ ascription of essential properties to that object. Plato thus clearly opts for a dialectical view that being and alterity are always and everywhere co-said. Fourth, I show that there is a problem in the Platonic texts of foundationalism, a problem which I believe only a turn to phenomenology can clarify. Here, I lay out certain Husserlian theories—foundation, categorial intuition, and the distinction between parts and moments—necessary for this clarification, as well as Heidegger’s appropriation of these concepts in History of the Concept of Time and Plato’s Sophist, and show how a phenomenological examination of the issues discloses the truth of middle Platonism. An otherness beyond being and being’s others grounds the dialectical turns between being and alterity found in the Sophist.
The Problems of Middle Platonism\textsuperscript{11}

The primary characteristic of the Platonic Forms as they appear in the \textit{Phaedo} and the \textit{Republic} is their complete separation from objects. Beauty does not need beautiful objects in order to be Beauty; Largeness does not need large objects in order to be Largeness, etc. At \textit{Phaedo} 78d5, Socrates states that each form is \textit{auto kath' hauto}, existing "itself by itself." Key passages in Plato's dialogues depend upon this theory of forms: Glaucon uses the same phrase near the opening of \textit{Republic} II (358d2-3) in his desire to hear justice praised "itself by itself" by Socrates as opposed to his previous elenchic arguments against Thrasy Men of injustice, Diotima describes beauty in this matter at \textit{Symposium} 211b, and many more examples could be adduced. The aspect of forms as \textit{kath' hauto} means that forms are \textit{simplex}; they are noncomposite (\textit{Phaedo} 78c), without parts, "entirely free from what they are not."\textsuperscript{12} The partial features of sensible objects can never be free from their opposites: an object might have one beautiful feature and another ugly one, or its degree of beauty might change depending on its spatiotemporal position, or the quality of the lighting involved. Sensible objects can thus be both beautiful and ugly simultaneously (\textit{Symposium} 211a) or tall and short simultaneously (\textit{Phaedo} 102bc), and are thus never \textit{auto kath' hauto} as forms are. The fact that sensible objects can be characterized simultaneously by opposite predicates leads to an epistemological denigration of the visible. Because of the separation between forms and visible objects, forms are always only \textit{intelligible}.

The claim that the forms are "intelligible but not visible" is made in the analogy of the Sun


\textsuperscript{12} Sayre, "The Role of the \textit{Timaeus}," 95.
(509b8), and is predicated upon arguments made in the *Phaedo* for the superiority of the intelligible over the visible in the same manner that the soul is superior to the body. These arguments are nicely summarized at *Phaedo* 66a:

> Then he will do this [grasp the Forms] most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense-perception with his reasoning, but who, using pure [eilikrînei] thought [dianoia] alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears, and in a word, from the whole body, because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it.

It is not only the body that confuses the soul, it is worldly reality in general. Even when the soul focusses on worldly objects that are constituted by becoming and change (as opposed to focussing on Forms, which are really real), the soul “seems bereft of understanding” and thus gives up the possibility of epistemic knowledge in its ability only to formulate doxic opinions about the world, opinions which are never stable, but rather (*Republic* 508d) “changing this way and that.” Furthermore, forms are a type of cause (*Phaedo* 100e), a ground of our predications about sensible objects: “it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful.” This early attempt at forming a language of essences is further developed in the course of the analogy of the Sun in the *Republic* (507b5-7). Here, Socrates states that the forms such as “beauty itself and good itself” are observed in terms of their mia idea, their “single form,” and that this is the ontological essence of the many beautiful and good objects. This being of the object is seen to have the same character as the beings which exhibit this essence. Forms predicate themselves (*Phaedo* 102e): “Tallness, being tall, cannot venture to be small.”

In the *Parmenides*, this understanding of forms is threatened with collapse. In the presentation of a dialogue between Socrates and Parmenides, Socrates and the middle-period theory of Forms are subjected to a number of damning criticisms from Parmenides. When Socrates explains the relationships between sensible objects and Forms as one of participation (*methexis*) or sharing-in (*metalepsis*)—the large object participates in the form of Largeness, the beautiful man has a share in the form of Beauty—Parmenides turns the
tables on him (131ac). Making the proper logical assumption that, if this model is true, the sensible object must either share in the whole form or in part of it, Parmenides comes to the conclusion that neither of these options are possible, and middle Platonism is therefore not a viable path of thinking. If the object shares in the whole form, then the whole form is present in many objects, and is thus itself many and no longer single, not simply transcendentally separated from objects but indeed (131b2) “separated from itself.” Yet if the object shares in a smaller part of the form like a sail spread over a group of people (131b8)—and this scenario is particularly odd in the case of Largeness, for which “small parts” is an oxymoron—then the form can no longer be simplex and in composite.13

Another problem, which has been known since Aristotle as the “Third Man” Problem (cf. Metaphysics 990b17, 1039a2-3) arises at Parmenides 132ab as a logical consequence of the theory of the self-predication of forms, and the additional assumption that Largeness itself cannot be the vehicle of our knowing that Largeness is large (what Vlastos called the nonidentity assumption). This necessitates an infinite regress in which a Largeness2 is conjured up in order to explain how Largeness and large objects are large, a Largeness3 is conjured up in order to explain how Largeness2 and Largeness and large objects are large, etc. The boundary between forms and objective appearances becomes blurred here, and thereby forms can no longer be auto kath’hauto. A similar regress occurs when Socrates suggests to Parmenides that forms are patterns in nature that sensible objects resembles. Parmenides points out quite reasonably that such resemblance must be symmetrical; again form and sensible objects must partake of a higher-order common genus that organizes

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13 Sayre, Plato’s Late Ontology 24 and Parmenides’ Lesson 76, notes that these problems for mēthēsis are contingent upon the spatial nature of the sail-example and the example of Largeness. However, Socrates himself suggests another model of participation, ignored by Parmenides, which escapes the Parmenidean attack: temporal participation, e.g. the day that exists everywhere simultaneously without being separated from itself. Sayre argues throughout his work (e.g. "The Role of the Timaeus," 106) that the account of the Philebus explicitly takes up this temporal account of participation by means of Eudoxus’ neo-Pythagorean interpretation of irrational numbers in terms of the Parmenidean distinction between time and the instant. For a milder version of this claim which does not depend upon historical claims about Eudoxus, cf. the appendices to Dorothea Frede’s commentary of the Philebus (Plato, Philebos [Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1993]).
them, and again the resemblance of the form to the sensible objects means that forms cannot be rigorously thought as *auto kath'hauto*. Furthermore, the intelligibility of forms is also at odds with the basic account of participation. If sensible objects participate in non-sensible forms which Socrates describes to Parmenides as “thoughts” (132b5), then the thought-structure of Forms must be spread out along sensible objects in some manner, which would require that things are composed of thoughts.

In short, there is a problematic tension between the transcendence and immanence of forms that grounds middle-Platonism. On one hand, there is the structure of the Forms themselves, which must be *auto kath'hauto* in order to have the explanatory power that they do for why objects are the way they are. Nevertheless, this very fact can only be cognized if Forms show themselves in some manner, in some particular comportment of sensible objects. And in this moment of realizing the necessity of the relationship between forms and particular objects, forms instantly cease to be *auto kath'hauto*. Thus Parmenides points out that the main logical consequence of the forms being *auto kath'hauto* is that they are “necessarily unknowable”: if the forms are not “in us” (as Parmenides describes the situation at 133c7), if they are not phenomenally apparent, then the very form of knowledge by which we would putatively know these forms can never be accessible to humankind. Yet Parmenides is not arguing for a two-world hypothesis, in which we know particulars by virtue of “the truth that belongs to our world” (134a12) while the world of generals and its truth remain for-ever unknowable. For without *some* theory of Forms, thought (135b10–c1) “doesn’t allow that for each thing there is a character that is always the same.”

What is needed, then, is a re-interpretation of how the one Form can come to appear in many objects and not itself become changed as a result. This necessitates nothing less than a sweeping revision of the ontology of the *Republic*. This revision begins in the *Parmenides*, continues through the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, and ends tentatively in the *Philebus*. Constance Meinwald has already described this change in terms of what one might call a deconstruction of the form/particular binarism, since forms are now said to be like
particulars insofar as they are "rolling around as intermediates between what is not and what purely is."\textsuperscript{14} But Meinwald does not go far enough. Being and nonbeing are two victims of this redefinition of forms. Like the other forms, their stable bedrock can no longer be number (their oneness) or their self-sufficiency \textit{kath'hauto}, but rather their blending with other forms, including each other.

\textbf{The Inadequacy of Uni-faceted Definition}

On the surface, Plato's \textit{Sophist} is a recounting of a successful attempt at defining sophistry, performed by the mathematician and Academy member Theaetetus and a visitor (\textit{xenos}) from Elea.\textsuperscript{15} The first two-fifths of the dialogue are attempts to define the sophist using a method of collection and division that Plato had previously outlined at \textit{Phaedrus} 265d–266c. After seven attempts at defining the sophist in this manner, they give up (236de). The difficulty is ascribed to the fact that the sophist makes false statements: such an assertion rests on the assumption that false statements \textit{are}. However, this is an anti-Parmenidean assumption, one which is especially "difficult" (236e1) for a philosopher who, like the visitor, hails from the same city as Parmenides. Since false statements state what is not the case, or more generally what is not (\textit{me on}), the analysis of false statements rests on the assumption that "that which is not is" (\textit{to me on einai}). Otherwise, it would be impossible even to utter falsehoods, much less to write inadequate dissertations. Yet this


\textsuperscript{15} The White translation translates xenos throughout as "visitor," a marked change from the references in previous translations (Cornford, Fowler, Jowett, Bernardete) to the "Elatic Stranger." In any case, the differences between the alien cultures of Socrates, Theodorus, and the Visitor—Athens, Cyrene, and Elea—should not be overlooked (cf. \textit{Theaetetus} 145b8 and especially \textit{Statesman} 257b5–6, which explicitly makes it an interreligious text). This is especially true if one is reading these late dialogues as preparatory exercises for the replacement of the politics of the \textit{Republic} by that of the \textit{Laws}. Cf. Seth Bernardete, \textit{Plato's Sophist} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 69.
goes against the Parmenidean command that philosophy should never take on this very thought (237a8, 258d2). What thus becomes necessary for the visitor, in the interest of truth, is a parricide (241d3) that begins from a realization that Parmenides has blindly failed to recognize a fundamental Eleatic confusion about the meanings of “is” and “is not” (243c).

The first problem of being (243b–246d) is a quantitative one: the position of those who claim to give a precise account (diakribologoumenoi; 245e7) of the proper number\(^\text{16}\) of being by assigning it a numerical value is untenable. The Ionian dualism (for example, that all things are either hot or cold, or some such pair) necessarily falls into a Parmenidean monism: since both heat and cold are, the pair can be subsumed under a more primordial concept of being... The monism itself collapses in two subsequent arguments (244cd, 244e–245d) about naming. Although these appear specious (the visitor assumes that for one thing to have more than one name, or even one name, is problematic), both of these arguments center on the same problem: the assignation of a number “one” or a name “whole” to being means that one is assigning a characteristic of sensible objects to something which is defined as not sensible. The fact that the different names “being,” “one,” and “whole” are used interchangeably, the fact that they mean different things—for example, unity has no parts whereas wholeness does—determines the collapse of such a rigid monism. Yet this new account in turn collapses in the face of an argument that whereas Being cannot participate in Wholeness (because a Form cannot have parts), Wholeness participates in Being (because wholeness is). By substitution, one reaches the odd conclusion that being cannot participate in itself, which the visitor interprets as the paradoxical statement that, on this account, being will not be being (245c5: ouk on estai to on). A model which is open to both unity and plurality is necessary for any justified true

\(^{16}\) The word diakribologoumenoi does not in and of itself refer to a numerical definition of being as either one, two, or three; it simply means "those who give a precise/exact/detailed (akribes) account." However, from the context at 245e1–2 makes it clear that this precision has to do with whether being is one or two, and thus the exactness/akribeia of the account/logos is a numerical exactness.
account of the nature of being.\textsuperscript{17}

After the visitor has disposed of the \textit{diakribologoumenoi}, he goes on to reexamine the difficulty of defining being from the point of view of competing non-numerical views of the nature of \textit{ousia}. This quarrel is described as a “gigantomachia,” a battle between gods and giants. On one side of the quarrel are the giants who state that being is always embodied (246ab); on the other are those “friends of forms” (248a) who argue that true being (\textit{ousia}) has no body whatsoever (246b). The giants have views similar to Democritus and the atomists; the gods have views similar to middle-period Platonism (cf. \textit{Phaedo} 66a).

The visitor argues against the giants by forcing them to admit that not only souls exist but that abstract entities (such as wisdom or justice) exist, since the just soul can only become just by having justice be real in it. Once they admit that being must consist of both embodied and bodiless entities (247c11), then their materialist position is suddenly at a loss as to discern what these two types of beings have in common, and their position collapses.

At this point, the visitor famously attempts to give a description of being (\textit{to on}) as possessing power (\textit{dynamis}) to affect or be affected. Much ink has been spilled on what this \textit{dynamis} might actually mean, but at this point, it is simply sufficient to make two observations about the visitor’s remarks here and at 247e8-248a1. First, the visitor’s remarks about what might characterize all beings (\textit{onta}), which would presumably be the nature of being (\textit{ousia}), in no way strengthens the giants’ position. It is true enough that the Stranger straightforwardly avers at 247e3-4 that \textit{ta onta estin dynamis}, but such a simple identity-statement cannot be what the Stranger means. There are three reasons for the conclusion that this is a predicative statement and not one of identity. Firstly, at 247d9 the visitor announces that he is describing those things which “possess” (\textit{kektemenon}) power as truly being; being is not having. Secondly, the visitor describes power as a

\textsuperscript{17} Also cf. the deduction of number in \textit{Parmenides} 143, which proceeds along similar grounds. For readers who find the arguments about naming in this section suspicious if not specious, it is suggestive to think of them as primitive attempts at a Quinean critique of synonymy.
description (horos) of beings and not a defining account (logos). Cornford is correct to stress this point.\textsuperscript{18} This is not a definition of what the meaning of beings is, but only a mark of their character which does not exhaust their nature. Finally, if this were to be a definition, it would be difficult to reconcile this with the attack on Parmenides and the other diakribologoumenoi that the visitor has just made less than three pages before. The effect of the Stranger's alleged definition of being as power seems to give dynamis the supreme status of the Parmenidean One which had just now been overthrown. Whether all is one or all is power, the argument for an imprecise account of being which allows both plurality and unity to simultaneously characterize to on still stands. No defining account of being can be uniform or uni-faceted.

As Martin Heidegger claims (PS 476/329), the visitor's claim that the mark of beings is power is part of a very sophisticated pun occurring in these lines, which can and should be read as an anticipation of the model of interrelation between forms which appears later in the dialogue. For it is necessary to read closely the words with which the Stranger leaves the giants (247e8). After Theaetetus represents the giants as accepting the Stranger's mark of beings, the Stranger says, "That will do, for later on both they and we perhaps may change our minds [kalos isos gar an eis husteron hemin te kai toutois heteron an phaneie]." Not only is the language of otherness (heteron) significant here as a hope for an actual definition of being, but one can also read this as a hope that otherness itself will occur later within the dialogue, in order to alleviate the problems of uni-faceted definition. This indeed is the case when difference is introduced as one of the five highest forms (megista gene).

When read in such a manner as to highlight the metaphorical validity of the description of dynamis and the necessity of thinking otherness, we have a sophisticated comic statement of what will appear later (at 256e) as the interweaving of being and non-being in every form. Dynamis is thus the ability to take on otherness and be effected and affected by this

otherness.

The critique of uni-faceted definition continues in the discussion of the point of view on the part of the friends of forms. Like the Socrates of the Phaedo, this group makes a distinction between the variable realm of becoming and that of unchanging being. The visitor's objection is that the epistemology of this group, centered on a theory of intercourse (koinonia) with objects of becoming (through sense) or with being (through reflection) bears a resemblance to the giants' theory of the mark of beings as power given at 247e. But the friends of forms claim to reject de facto the argument that any dialectic of affecting or being-affected occurs in the knowledge of being. As a form, it is immune from the notion of change which such a model implies (248e).

If knowing is doing something, then necessarily what is known has something done to it. When being is known by knowledge, according to this account, then insofar as it's known it's changed by having something done to it—which we say wouldn't happen to something that's at rest.

The problem is once again that of the knowability of forms. It is not one of the logical right to claim that forms exist; the argument against the giants tells us this much. Rather it is an issue of the incommensurability that results when a strict dichotomy is drawn between becoming and being in an argument which would state that they exist in different realms. How can forms be known when the knower/soul exists within the realm of change and becoming, while the forms lie within the realm of unchanging being? Nevertheless, like Parmenides' admission that the theory of forms is in some way necessary, the visitor asks "for heaven's sake" (pros Dios; 248e8) whether it is so easy to be convinced that change and other characteristics of becoming (life, soul, mind, etc.) have no place within the realm of being. Theaetetus answers that to admit such a radical separation would be "admitting something frightening" (249a3) despite the fact that such a doctrine is the centerpiece of the Phaedo and Republic. Theaetetus' fear is allayed by the visitor's argument that since it is strange not to ascribe mind (nous) to absolute being, then the properties of mobile/sensible objects such as life and soul must be drawn back into the picture. There is no nous without
life, no life without soul, no soul without change. Thus, the narrow definition of being (ousia) given by the friends of forms collapses and must be broadened in order to include the realm of change (249b2-3): “we must admit that what changes and change itself are real things [onta].”

This is not a return to a quasi-materialistic notion of being. Rather, the closing exchanges of the gigantomachia imply that neither position in any form is valid. Instead, they must unite into a more coherent theory. Either pole is untenable; both are necessary. The visitor states that if all (including ousia) is changeless—if the friends of forms are correct—then nothing is knowable and knowledge is fruitless and impossible. Yet if all is only flux, then this dismisses the abstract notions by which we ground our lives; without things which “abide constant in the same condition and in the same respect” there is no stable thing which could possibly be known. In conclusion, as the visitor states at 249e2-4, “now we are wholly in the dark about it [to on], though we fancy we are talking good sense.” This tension is expressed quite wittily in the visitor's speech at 249c10-d4, in which he asserts that the knowledge-valuing philosopher must refuse the position of both sides, but simultaneously urges him to accept both sides (249d3-4): “he must declare that reality or the sum of things is both at once—all that is unchangeable and all that is in change.” It is the nature of this childlike (249d2) “both” which marks the final rejection of uni-faceted definition and grounds the discussion of the five highest kinds in an expansion of the interrelational model of knowledge to include the forms themselves. Here, the definition of nonbeing as otherness is key; for it explains how forms can possibly relate.

Non-Being, Otherness, and the Coherence of Disparate Elements

The gigantomachia has been nothing less than an argument against a style of definition in which the definition de facto excludes all things different than it from the object being defined. Being can neither be one and only one, nor two and only two, nor body and body alone nor form and form alone. Combination between forms is thus to be the principle of
discourse; we know this from the "ordinary language" of such a proposition as (251b) "The man is good" in which the form of Man combines with the form of the Good in order to make the proposition meaningful. In addition, if there is no combination between forms, there can be no discourse of any kind; we would not be able to speak of rest and movement if they were not allowed to combine with existence (252a). Even phrases such as "apart from the others", when used to describe the separation of forms \textit{auto kath'hauto}, invoke a model of combination (between movement, being, distance, and otherness) which is alien to this middle-Platonic position (252c). Yet again, this does not mean that the opposite tack is to be taken instead. If all forms combine, then the distinction between movement and rest becomes utterly meaningless (252d). So it remains to draw a map of which forms blend with which others, as well as demonstrating how this blending is possible in the first place.

Five highest forms (\textit{megista gene}) are put forth in 254d-255e: movement, rest, existence, sameness, and difference. (As a further confirmation of the distance between the \textit{Sophist} and the \textit{Republic}, goodness is not part of this group.) It is difference or otherness (\textit{to thetaron}) which is most important in this section. Only the account of difference allows the Stranger to solve the problem of the specific being of non-being by stating that beings that are not are other-than (241d), and indeed to explain the false statements of sophistry as statements that are not insofar as they are other than the truth. However, even though difference is the fulcrum of the new arguments being made about forms, my view is not a proto-Levinasian view that difference is the most supreme of the five highest forms, and thus higher than being. Rather, the account of difference is an account of how being and non-being belong \textit{together} as partners in all of our epistemic claims of how forms and things interrelate. At best, one might say that since the understanding of non-being serves as a precondition for the fuller understanding of being, it makes sense to say that all our epistemic claims are meontological in this guarded sense.

The visitor first broaches the relation between being and otherness in the discussion of
whether any of the five highest kinds are the same as each other. He asks first whether otherness and being might simply be two names for one form (255c8–10); given the nature of the visitor's argument against the *diakribologoumenoi*, the reader should already be suspicious. And indeed, a wedge between being and difference is discovered, with the help of the distinction between those things which are said *auta kath'hauta* ("by themselves") and those which are *pros alla* ("in relation to other things"). This distinction in predication has been interpreted by Constance Meinwald as the great theme of late Platonism, heralded in the dialectical exercise of the *Parmenides*, where the distinction is written as one between predication *pros heauto* and predication *pros ta alla* but with the same meaning as the distinction in the *Sophist*. Predication *kath'hauto* or *pros heauto* is grounded in "the structure of the nature in question"; the predicate is part of what it means to be the subject. Hence, examples of such nonrelational sentences include "Triangularity is three-sided" and "The Just is virtuous", since "being virtuous is part of what it is to be just." Predications *pros (ta) alla*, on the other hand, are more ordinary relational predicates dealing with the display of features by individuals: "Ruth Ginsburg is just," "Fluffy is a cat," "The sweater is puce," etc. ¹⁹ This predicative distinction is used to argue for a strict difference between *to on* and *to thateron* at 255d1–8, on the grounds that while *to on* can be spoken of as being both *kath'hauto* and *pros allo*, difference is always said *pros alla* (when it is a matter of other objects of indeterminate number) or *pros heteron* (when it is a matter of only two objects, as in 255d1–8). To speak of difference, it is necessary to speak of at least two differentia; difference is always difference-from-something-else.

Quickly, the distinction between otherness and being becomes more difficult. Since the relation of otherness is always one between objects other than each other, between heteron and heteron (255d1: to d'heteron aei pros heteron), to on, the nature of the object itself, has been pushed out of the picture, although only momentarily. When the visitor speaks of otherness itself, he is no longer speaking explicitly of being, but rather of something else in which all objects participate which is utterly different from being. The nature of this participation is explained at 255e3–6:

And we're going to say that it [difference/otherness] pervades [dieleluthuian, lit. passes through] all of them [the highest forms], since each of them is different from the others, not because of its own nature, but because of participating in the type of the different [metechei thaterou].

If otherness is laid out throughout every form, then it would be fair to assume that no form can come to be understood as the form that it is without its being situated in a cluster of forms which are other than it. This does not automatically mean that being (or any of the other five kinds) is essentially otherness in a strong sense, or that no object can display properties on its own. The nature of an object is not otherness. But the above passage does mean that a list of defining characteristics that would define the nature of an object could only have meaning for us insofar as they differ from other characteristics which would be displayed by other objects. The nature of objects, when pervaded by otherness, allows this nature to be comprehended more fully. It should not be surprising, then, that the series of collections and divisions that take up the first thirty Stephanus pages of the dialogue are a process of just these determinations of otherness that crystallize the natures of objects (e.g. the angler is other than the fisherman who hooks with an upward stroke, cf. 220e–221a).

And how is metechei in the above passage to be interpreted? J. L. Ackrill states that metechei thaterou here performs a non-identity function: “(1) where estin [“is”] is being used as copula it gets replaced in the philosopher's version by metechei; (2) the philosopher's version of ouk estin [“is not”], when the estin is not the copula but the identity-sign,
is not ou metechei ["does not participate"], but metechei thaterou pros ["participates in otherness with regard to"].\textsuperscript{20} But when this analysis is combined with the visitor's insistence that being and otherness are radically different, both of Ackrill's statements turn out to be true and false in different senses. For the only way by which "being and otherness are not the same as each other" can be understood is through the common participation of being and difference in difference and being. Only this allows being and otherness to be predicated of each other (being is other-than, otherness is). One does not have priority over the other. Every non-identity necessarily implies a copula—if Theaetetus is not flying, he is not-flying. (Still, a synthetic judgment is necessary to state exactly what the predicate of this copula is. As the visitor points out at 257b6-8, the not-tall can either be short or equal.) As a result, the natures of Ackrill's estin and ouk estin are so closely related here that his argument for the separation between the existential and the predicative "is" is threatened. The fact that simplex forms cannot be known auto kath'auto (as the Parmenides showed) necessitates that as far as the requirements of knowledge are concerned, the meaning of the being of an object is known through the meaning of its clusters of relations with its others.\textsuperscript{21} The metechei that pertains to the nature of the object has no meaning without the metechei thaterou pros. This priority of otherness will become particularly vexing in the phenomenological clarification below.

What we have here, then, is the beginnings of a new thinking of ousia on the part of the visitor in which otherness becomes part and parcel of the account of being. This is a new model of participation; in the middle dialogues, participation was always about the nature of the object. For example, beauty and largeness are moments of the nature of the bouncer who instantiates these forms. But the new model is strange in that the pervasion of otherness only accounts for relations and multiplicity. The immunity of otherness from being


\textsuperscript{21} Cf. Fine and Nehamas, \textit{supra}.
able to make claims about the proper predicates of an object has given it a strange phantom identity. As a result, the issue of whether difference and existence are two or one has become rather complicated. The argument for their strict difference, rooted in the distinction between two types of predication, is correct, while the epistemological necessities of the knowability of objects complicate this answer. There is here an echo of the visitor's critique of determining the number of being earlier in the dialogue, an exchange which called for a simultaneous thinking of unity and plurality. This thinking begins with the parcelling out of difference, and continues with the analysis of the blending (koinonia) of forms.

The combination between being and nonbeing is the main argument of Sophist 255e–257a. Each of the five highest kinds blends both positively and negatively with sameness and difference. Motion is the same (as itself); it is not the same (as sameness). Motion is different (from difference), but it is not difference itself. Motion is, but it is not the form of being. The Stranger concludes not only that for each of the forms that (256e6-7) "being is many, and not-being is unlimited [polu men esto to on, apeiron de plethei to me on]." All forms both are and are not, depending on the type of predication involved. This applies even to being (to on). This is not a very radical position; it is consistent with what Gail Fine has called the "interrelation" model of knowledge in Plato, in which "nothing can be known in itself, but only as an element occupying a particular place within a structured field, knowledge of which is involved in knowing all its elements."22

Nevertheless, certain of the Stranger's statements are stronger than this, and make it tempting to construct a notion of otherness that goes beyond Plato's hesitance in guarding it from claims that an object is properly thought of as other. At 256d10-e4, the Stranger expresses the interrelation model in a baldly contradictory manner. For each form, kata panta gar he thaterou phusis heteron apergazomene tou ontos hekaston ouk on poiei—"for all of

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them, the nature of otherness makes each other than being and therefore a thing that is not.” If the reader uses being (to on) as an example here, he or she would have to come to the conclusion that the visitor’s statement implies that being is not being, that to on ouk on esti. Thus, not only would being be other than other kinds, it would as such not be being. Otherness would thus take over the domain of being, and interrelation would then not solely be between different kinds, but rather within each kind itself. This second kind of otherness is not a thateron pros, but is hypostatized. This second meontology is not dialectical, but critical. The 256de passage says not simply that being needs to be other pros ta alla—that a form of otherness is needed in order to explain how being and motion can differ—but that being needs to be other pros heauto, that otherness is part of the meaning of being (and other other forms) in a similar manner that virtue is part of the meaning of justice.

This is not sophistry. Rather, this reading clarifies certain epistemological claims that are running beneath the argument about the ways in which the forms can be known. For the argument that non-being is (insofar as objects are different from each other) is only useful for asserting how sentences using negative predicates—e.g. “Danny DeVito is not beautiful”—can be meaningful, or how it is possible to make false statements. The former operation is outlined in the visitor’s account of the parts of otherness (257d-258e). Not-being qua difference is parceled out (katakekermatisthai, 257c8) across all things in relation to each other (258e1, epi panta ta onta pros allela). The visitor uses this to draw a parallel

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23 To be sure, the Stranger equates both to me and to ou with otherness at 257b12; nevertheless, this formulation is strange when metechei tou me ontos could have been used instead.

24 It is usually taken to be the case that being is exempted from this argument because of the contradiction that ensues. Cf. Frede, “The Sophist on false statements,” 403. Yet Plato never says this explicitly. In a sense, difference has to pervade being in order to make the argument that, for example, being is not the same as sameness. Insofar as being is different than other gene, being is not, and thus participates in not-being (as Frede seems to note on 404). Denis O’Brien (Le Non-Être: Deux Études sur le Sophiste de Platon [Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1995], 53–56 and 177, argues that being does not participate in otherness in relation to the being of each object—this would institute a contrary relation between being and non-being which is the very trap from which the visitor seeks to extricate himself—but does participate in otherness in relation to the objects themselves.
between the departmentalization of knowledge and the departmentalization of otherness. The form of otherness has subforms such as “not-beautiful” or “not-tall” which institute relationships between forms (tall and not-tall, not-beautiful and beautiful), both of which can be said to exist. This is the final element in the argument that it is not illogical (as it at first seemed, cf. 238c11) to assert that non-being is. And once we can say that the dispersal of non-being also extends itself to thinking (260bc), we can assert that false thinking, i.e. sophistry or false statements, is possible and then identify it as such.

However, this relational account of non-being as difference does not resolve the issues raised by the Stranger at 251bc, viz. the proposition “the man is good.” For although 257b–260c solves the problem of how certain types of predication are possible, it does not directly solve the problem of how predication and meaning themselves are possible. For this, it is necessary to have a stronger notion of otherness as a predicate of forms pros heauto, in order to give birth to meaningful forms. For example, the proposition “My phlegm is green” is not meaningful unless it already implies that phlegm is not greenness. Otherwise the sentence would be a simple analytic judgment. Predication by its very nature is otherness pervading the realm of being, breaking it apart in order to create meaningful propositions such as “Fluffy is white.” Without otherness speaking always and everywhere throughout language in the sense of to on ouk on implied at 256e, there is no way that a field of possible predicates could be set off apart from the object for the purpose of linkage to it. Otherwise, only self-predication would be possible, and the problems of middle Platonism return. Otherness gives being to consciousness, not simply insofar as (the) being is different from other forms or other objects are different from each other, but in the sense that otherness is the condition for the object’s knowability.

At this point we can return to the question of whether otherness and being constitute separate forms. And in line with the philosopher-child’s demand at the close of the gigantomachia, it becomes possible to have it both ways. If difference and being were two names for a single kind, then it would be impossible to argue that predication could take
place, since none of the forms could blend. However, as argued above, it seems that
otherness, in its pervading of being, marks epistemological territory in the "realm" of being
in order to fulfill the standard functions of language. We are able to assert "S is p" propos-
sitions only by linking two disparate kinds which are different from each other, and we are
able to make "negative" predicates (such as shortness, equalness, plainness, ugliness,
unjustness) only through the parceling of otherness across being. Through the introduction
of difference and the concomitant possibility of the coherence of disparate kinds within a
single unitary structure, it has become difficult for the philosophical eye (254b1) "to keep
its gaze fixed" in the face of all this shifting-around between being and nonbeing. And
since all forms, including being and nonbeing, engage in this rolling around and blending,
the argument of the Republic that forms just don't behave in such a slatternly manner
collapses.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that the phenomenon of shifty "pervading" is more perva-
sive than even the visitor is willing to admit. For example, it is taken as a given at 252d6–8
and 255e11–12 that motion and rest can never blend. Yet this is exactly what is called for
in the visitor's oath in the gigantomachia at 248e8-249a2 when he states that absolute being
needs to incorporate change within it. The realm of ousia must be constituted as rest if
there is to be any worth to the distinction between being and becoming. Yet if ousia is to
be comprehended by the soul, then it must incorporate change. John Malcolm raises this
issue in an article25, but backpedals slightly in writing that "it is not at all clear to what
extent this passage is to be taken as giving us a definite change in Platonic doctrine and not
merely as raising paradoxes to show puzzles in the doctrines of those who spoke of the
nature of to on." This would seem to completely miss the urgency of the visitor's oath
pros Dios in this speech; and even if this oath is not important, it would sap this part of the
gigantomachia of any force, reinstalling middle Platonism as the true model of thought,

despite all of the visitor's critiques of it throughout the *Sophist*. The question of the blending of motion and rest is also at stake in Gregory Vlastos' category of "Pauline predication" which states that it would be correct to say that motion and rest blend in the statement "motion (the form of motion, not its various instantiations) rests." Vlastos refuses to acknowledge the truth of the converse statement ("the form of rest moves"). But the fact that the *Sophist* has shown that forms roll around as sensible objects were said to do in the *Republic* insofar as they oscillate between their participation in both being and nonbeing would seem to argue that the converse statement is at least as true, if not more so, than Vlastos' "Pauline predication."  

Thus, Plato has gone beyond the fundamental presuppositions of the accounts of being given in the gigantomachia. The analysis of otherness has led dialectic beyond being (*epekeina tes ousias*), and it is tempting to conclude from this that otherness therefore constitutes goodness. Yet one must not give in to this temptation, and it would definitely be a mistake to say that otherness *by itself* is *epekeina tes ousias*. For this would revert to the very model of uni-faceted definition which the visitor consistently critiques in the gigantomachia and in the arguments against the *diakribologoumenoi*. For if being (*to on*) has become constituted in part by otherness, then the symmetrical relation holds as well. Otherness is dialectically pervaded in a strong sense by being.  

Thus it would be more proper to say that it is in the argument for the intimate coupling of being and nonbeing/otherness that the account of *ousia* in the *Sophist* goes beyond that of the *Republic*. From this, we could conclude that the model of the good hidden underneath the *Sophist*'s arguments is the belonging-together and mutual pervasion of being and otherness, almost but not quite a unity. But this is a major imposition upon the *Sophist*; any discussion of

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27 Ackrill points out that "motion exists" is obviously not the same as "existence moves," but allows that symmetry does have its place within *sympleke*, especially where difference is involved. Cf. Ackrill, op. cit., 217-18.
value must refer to the *Philebus*. For if the *Sophist* has given us a better definition of *epekeina tes ousias*, it still remains the case that it has failed to give a definition of goodness.

**The Apeirontic nature of Nonbeing: Philebus**

It is not immediately clear how to make a smooth passage from the account of negation and non-being in the *Sophist* to the new account of good in the *Philebus*. The best link comes at *Sophist* 256e6–7, in which the relationship between being and nonbeing is described as follows: “So as concerning each of the forms that-which-is is extensive (*polu*), and that-which-is-not (*to me on*) is indefinite in quantity (*apeiron plethei*).” According to Sayre, *apeiron plethos* is a rare term in the dialogues and always has one of two technical meanings: a) that of *Parmenides* 143a2, at which it refers to a numberless multitude which has no specific members whatsoever, or b) that of *Parmenides* 144a6, at which it refers to “an indefinitely (or infinitely) numerous set of elements, each of which is unique unto itself.”

Resting on Sayre’s assumption that the expression *apeiron plethos* is never used arbitrarily in the dialogues, one can thus ask what it means for nonbeing to possess unlimited/indefinite—apeirontic—qualities. In the *Philebus*, the *apeiron* is defined most succinctly at 24e9–25a2: “When we find things becoming 'more' or 'less' so-and-so, or admitting of terms like 'strongly,' 'slightly,' 'very,' and so forth, we ought to reckon them all as belonging to a single kind, namely that of the unlimited.” In other words, the *apeiron* is a continuum of predicates. This recalls the structure of the nature of *to me on* laid out in *Sophist* 257b6–8, in which the nature of the otherness of the not-x opens up an multiplicitous field of predicates which not-x might mean. The visitor cites the example of

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28 Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology*, 62. In all of Sayre's explorations of the *apeiron plethos* both in this work and in *Parmenides' Lesson*, he never cites its appearance in the *Sophist*.

both equal and short being examples of the not-great. The Philebus changes the story slightly, pointing out that any not-x has an unlimited potential of predicates, and we could add to the list of the forms that are examples of the not-large: the tiny, the thin, the mediocre, the poor, etc. lie along different continua of greatness. The fact that the Sophist defines to me on not as the contrary of being, but simply as that which is other than it, means that there is thus an in(de)finite number of forms (and things) that are not. To say that nonbeing is apeiron plethos is to make a pros heauto predication. Nonbeing is unlimited; to be unlimited is part of what it means not to be. On the contrary, limit (peras) is defined in the Philebus (25a9-b1) as that which only admits its opposites. “Opposite” here does not refer to the opposite of any form but rather to the opposite of the idea of more and less, namely ideas of ratio or measure such as “equal” or “double.” That which is equal is not unlimited in number, and suggests no apeironic continuum.

In the Philebus, nonbeing is an element of what it means to be, given the understanding of nonbeing as unlimitedness. At 16c, Socrates states that “whatever is said to be consists of one and many, having in its nature limit and unlimitedness.” This account of what it means to be makes two advances over the account in the Sophist. First, it describes sensible objects as a mixture (meikton) of limit and unlimited—this is different than the account of the Sophist in which the nexus of relations of otherness are viewed not to be part of the nature of the form. The mutuality of the relationship between limit and unlimited in the Philebus is stronger than the account of the Sophist, since both relata exist within the nature of the sensible object. Second, the Philebus gives an account of the dialectician’s explorations of this mutuality as metron, measure. For example, in the area of music, the dialectician discovers the unity of limit and unlimited in the measure of the scale or the proper harmonies (17c11–d4); on the one hand, s/he discovers a number of mellifluous intervals, yet when the notes that exist within these intervals are added to each other (for example, the fifth above the note, the third below this second note, the sixth above this third note, the octave below this fourth note, not to mention minor and major intervals
which each have their own appeal to certain moods of the soul), one develops some system of scales, an overarching theory underlying the appearance of notes which as an explanatory power of what music is.\textsuperscript{30} The notes comprising scales are the mediating points between the limit of "note" (i.e. middle C) and the unlimited of "pitch" (any tone at all). Similarly, Socrates uses the example of Thoth's construction of the alphabet through the differentiation of a distinct number of vowel and consonant types from the unlimited variety of possible vocalic sounds (18b6–d2). It is one thing to say, as the \textit{Sophist} does, that being is other than other forms, and nonbeing/otherness serves as a heuristic device by which it is possible to delineate the essential properties of an object \textit{X}. It is another to say, as the account of measure in the \textit{Philebus} states, that the multitudinous nature shared by nonbeing and the apeiron is an \textit{integral} element of what ordinarily goes under the name of "being." The mixture essential to meaning (what an object is for me) gives the unlimited a stronger role in claims as to the nature of an object than Plato wanted to give to nonbeing qua difference in the \textit{Sophist}. Nonbeing does not simply an epistemological device; ironically, it possesses ontological power insofar as the being of objects is a combination of limit and unlimitedness.

But this mixture stronger than participation is for Plato in the \textit{Philebus} what constitutes goodness. The definition of goodness at 65a as a sort of unity (\textit{hoion hen}) of truth, beauty, and measure has been already cited at the opening of this essay. But not all elements of goodness are created equal; Sayre is correct to point out\textsuperscript{31} that measure seems to play the most decisive role here, both at 64d3–5, in which Socrates argues that there can be no mixture without measure, and also at 66a7–9, in which Socrates states that measure is the first of all possessions. Nevertheless, Sayre's final statements about unity as goodness in the \textit{Philebus} are slightly insufficient:

\textsuperscript{30} The Greek musical scale bore little resemblance to either the eight-tone or twelve-tone scales of the modern West.

\textsuperscript{31} Sayre, op. cit., 171-3.
But we know from 25ab that measure is achieved by the imposition of Limit. And as argued earlier in this chapter, Limit and Unity are ontologically equivalent. So the following deduction is now available. Whereas measure is the primary ingredient of the Good, and whereas measure is achieved by the imposition of Limit, which in this role is equivalent to participation in Unity, for something to be good is for it to participate in Unity ... the Good is Unity ... it is because of Unity that a mixture becomes good.\textsuperscript{32}

There are three imprecisions with Sayre's account. First is the description of measure as being achieved by the "imposition" of limit, when this imposition only occurs from the perspective of the dialectician. The dialectician does not create anything; music and language, as well as their natural measures, exist before humans construct scales and alphabets. Naturally occurring measures arise in one of two ways according to the \textit{Philebus}: 1) according to 26a2–5, through the unlimited's production of its own limits, or 2) according to 16c9–10, through their connatural ontological status. Thus limit does not take the upper hand in the relationship with the unlimited; they mix equally with each other. Second, as Dorothea Frede has argued, the phrasing of the good not as a unity \textit{tout court}, but only as a sort of unity, a quasi-unity (\textit{hoion hen}), is a sizable problem in Sayre's conclusions about the \textit{Philebus}.\textsuperscript{33} And finally, Sayre leaves out the fact that the good not only participates in unity/limit, but also in the \textit{apeiron}. While simply participating in the \textit{apeiron} does not automatically make something good, the fact remains that simply participating in limit as \textit{hen} runs the risk of resuscitating a by-now naïve Parmenideanism as long as there is no account of how the one can \textit{relate} to the \textit{apeiron} within this larger structure of mixed unity.

All of this is by way of saying that if Sayre omits the importance of the \textit{apeiron} in the late Platonic formulation of the good, then the importance of non-being is omitted as well. At the same time, it is undeniable that in the mixed life, Plato describes limit as supreme. Thus there is a doubleness to the \textit{apeiron}. There is the \textit{apeiron} that grounds knowledge and

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 173.

\textsuperscript{33} Frede, op. cit. While this may be a sizable problem, it is not an insurmountable one, since \textit{hoios} need not have the looseness associated with the Latin \textit{quasi}, but can express a comparison without any value judgment attached.
goodness, for a mixture can only be good through participation in the apeiron, and then there is the template-like apeiron upon which knowledge is grounded. On one hand, I have argued that the apeiron plethos, whether by itself or associated with nonbeing, serves as a precondition for justified true knowledge. One must first divide out all the not-x before one can say what x is, and the apeiron serves as a template on which naturally occurring measures are discovered. In this sense, nonbeing and the apeiron are curiously “foundational” in a loose sense of the term. Yet at the same time, the apeiron, when not seen in partnership with limit or being, is of low rank and uncognizable as such; limit is placed on top of the unlimited, gives it shape and form. There can be no choosing between these two models of apeiron as the origin (and hence transcendentally highest) and as the lowest. For the process of discovering measure, as the philosophical pleasure that defines the good mixed human life, is described as a return to our own mixed nature, our own (Philebus 32b) “natural combination of limit and unlimitedness.” This achieving of nature is ineluctably imbricated with a participation in the very nonbeing which Parmenides proscribed and which is associated with the lowest level of knowledge; in the case of music, this would simply refer to sound without pitch, a technoid bleep of some kind. The mixture of the good is a mixture of the highest and the lowest, limit and unlimited, in which the unlimited as a curious foundational status which belies its status as nonbeing.

Phenomenology and Meontology

Thus, the problem of nonbeing opens up a problem of foundation or grounding. It is the intimate reciprocity between being and nonbeing—the way in which being is other than other forms and thus is not, and the way in which nonbeing qua otherness is—that enables us to perceive the nature of sensible objects. Yet at the same time, it is the exploration of sensible objects that founds the very knowledge that this relationship is foundational. The issue in Plato is that of the role that being and nonbeing play in our sensible intuitions. A turn to the phenomenological concept of categorial intuition—the way in which the intuition
of an object's being-white serves as the precondition for the statement "X is white"—is natural. What follows is an argument that Heidegger's lecture course on the *Sophist* constitutes a working-through of problems in Husserl on categorial intuition from a Platonic standpoint. Although the breach between Husserl and Heidegger is usually seen as a shift from the study of consciousness to the study of being, the very fact that Husserl is forced into admitting categorial intuition qua the intuition of the being of objects serves as a natural transition between these two poles.\(^{34}\) Even by Heidegger's own account, it is by no means certain that Heidegger sees the turn to ontology as a rejection of Husserl. The concept of categorial intuition is key in this regard. In the 1963 account of "My Way to Phenomenology," Heidegger specifically singles out the Sixth Logical Investigation as an influence upon his thinking insofar as "the distinction which is worked out there between sensuous and categorial intuition revealed itself to me in its scope for the determination of the 'manifold meaning of being.'"\(^{35}\) This is not a back-handed statement of praise, made in hindsight. Heidegger also singles out categorial intuition as a fundamental discovery of phenomenology in the lecture course given in the Summer Semester of 1925 (in other words, directly following the lectures on the *Sophist*) later published as *History of the*


Concept of Time. Thus, not only does the Sophist seem to be a phenomenological clue for Heidegger, but as I argue, it is in the turn to categorial intuition that the link between the sensible object and the intelligible form appears at its most complex, and enables an understanding of the apparently contrary positions of Fackenheim and Levinas seen in Chapter 1.

How does the issue of categorial intuition arise? In the sixth of the Logical Investigations, Husserl argues that a distinction between sensuous and categorial intuition is necessary, since sensuous perception can never be sufficient for consciousness’ understanding of a percept. In the course of analyzing a perceptual statement such as “Fluffy is on the bed, eating some food and ruining my fuchsia sheets”—this example is not Husserl’s—the question of how my perception has been fulfilled, of how I come to recognize the identity of the perceived object with the object I sense in my consciousness, comes to the fore. The confirmation of the nouns in the above statement—the issue of whether “Fluffy” refers to my cat or to my leather-clad spouse with whom I playing a game—is apparently clear enough. But how is it possible to fulfill such logical particles as “and,” “is,” “some,” etc., elements which are not included in simple sensuous intuition (LI 773–74)? One cannot simply lay eyes upon the forms of quantity or union. Yet the problem of fulfillment even raises problems for apparently simple percepts such as “fuchsia sheets.” When I say “fuchsia sheets,” I am not only referring to the two fuchsia-sheet objects which lie in front of my eyes. Rather, “fuchsia” attaches also to the category of being-fuchsia. In other words, my perception of “fuchsia sheets” is inherently predicative; it is ineluctably intertwined with the sentence “the sheets are fuchsia,” since fuchsia sheets are sheets that are fuchsia (LI 775). Thus, I must have a concept of the category of being-fuchsia which

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36 Heidegger, History of the Concept of Time, 47–72.

37 References to Fluffy throughout this chapter are made in gratitude to Cynthia Freeland.

38 “White paper is paper which is white.”
accompanies the sensuous intuition of food strewn throughout my boudoir. But there is no such sensible thing there as being-fuchsia; there are only the sheets. "Being-fuchsia" is not simply an ontological category, but also a relational one. As Husserl points out in §42 of the Sixth Investigation (and as Heidegger summarizes in History of the Concept of Time\textsuperscript{39}), the intuition of something such as being-fuchsia implies a synthesis of the relata ("sheets" and "fuchsia") into a totality which takes the structure of "S is p" (LI 779). This totality is not real; to use the language of the Third Investigation, being-fuchsia is not a piece of the sheets themselves which could be cut off and displayed independently (LI 467ff.). Rather, the relation is ideal. The abstract nature of being-fuchsia renders it non-independent, and hence a moment of the sheets. The category is always needy, requiring the S-is-p structure of the state of affairs (Sachverhalt) in order to come to presence.\textsuperscript{40}

Thus, the intention of the word "fuchsia", as Husserl writes (LI 775), "only partially coincides with the colour-aspect of the apparent object; a surplus of meaning remains over, a form which finds nothing in the appearance itself to confirm it." Whence this excess? Husserl is forced to posit the existence of another type of intuition, one which pertains to categories (and other formal particles of language) and specifically the category of being, as opposed to sensibilia. While Husserl spends most of §43 of the Sixth Investigation arguing in good Kantian fashion that being can in no way be perceived because it is neither in the object nor attached to it (i.e. being is not a real predicate), there is the also the important anti-Kantian caveat that being is still given to consciousness in categorial intuition.

\textsuperscript{39} Cf. Heidegger, History of the Concept of Time, 54.

\textsuperscript{40} The key sentence from LI on the difference between pieces and moments (467) reads as follows:

We first perform a fundamental division of the concept part into pieces, or parts in the narrowest sense, and into moments or abstract parts of the whole. Each part that is independent relatively to a whole W we call a piece (portion), each part that is non-independent relative to W we call a moment (an abstract part) of this same whole W.

Robert Sokolowski, in his discussion of parts and wholes in Husserlian Meditations (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 8–17, gives helpful examples (9): leaves, branches, and roots are pieces of a tree, while loudness, timbre and pitch are moments of a sound.
(LI 784) "if based on an act which at least sets some individual instance of it imaginatively before our eyes."\(^{41}\)

The order of intuition in general, as laid out through the distinction between sensuous and categorial moments, is quite interestingly problematic. In §46, Husserl argues that sensuous intuition precedes categorial intuition. I cannot have an intuition of being-fuchsia in the above example without the sight of the food-spattered bedding. As the most straightforward example of intuition, sensuous intuition comes first temporally, and serves as the foundation for other perceptive levels and acts. Categorial intuitions are always founded in sensuous intuitions. Husserl defines foundation in the Third Investigation as a need for supplementation (LI 463): "if a law of essence means that an A cannot as such exist except in a more comprehensive unity which associates it with an M, we say that an A as such requires foundation by an M or also that an A as such needs to be supplemented by an M." Something is founded if it needs something else in order to come to presence; hence, for something to be founded is nothing other than for it to be a non-independent moment. Categorial intuitions are non-independent since I cannot sensibly intuit being, quantity, etc.; they require supplementation by the stuff of sensuous intuition. Hence the categorial act is always founded upon the act of sensuous perception (LI 780–81). The temporal succession between sensuous and categorial perception is clear: consciousness moves from the particular to the general.

What we have are acts which, as we said, set up new objects, acts in which something appears as actual and self-given, which was not given, and could not have been given, as what it now appears to be, in these foundational acts alone. On the other hand, the new objects are based on the older ones, they are related to what appears in the basic acts. Their manner of appearance is essentially determined by this relation... We are here dealing with a sphere of objects, which can only show themselves 'in person' in such founded acts. In such founded acts we have the categorial element in intuition and knowledge, in them assertive thought, functioning expressively, finds fulfilment. (LI 787–88)

Sensuous perception precedes categorial intuition in the process of knowledge. Yet at the same time, it is clear from the example of the fuchsia sheets that I cannot say "fuchsia

\(^{41}\) Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B 626 ff.
sheets” unless the categorial intuition is prior in some manner. How can I be sure in my attribution of being-fuchsia or being-sheet to this object before me if I have not already some intuition of being-fuchsia or being-sheet? Although I have to see the sheets before I say “fuchsia sheets”, the question arises of whether what I see has any meaning to me without the categorial intuition. Husserl’s description of categorial intuition as manifesting itself as a “surplus of meaning” is thereby threatened by his subsequent splitting of intuition into sensuous and categorial moments, which make the founded act transcendently prior to the founding act. When we make explicit the categorial element in intuition—that is, when we turn to the analysis of predicative statements about perception—the relationship of foundation becomes complicated. Although “the matter seems quite the same” to Husserl when he turns from perception to language (LI 775), it has become anything but that. If my statement expresses what I see with “precise adequacy,” and if this statement is already imbricated in categorial acts, then the categorial act is ontologically prior (but not epistemologically prior) to perception. Even when I quickly glance at a blank computer monitor\(^{42}\), I still see it as a bare figure, and this seeing is still imbricated in intuitions of being-figure; the issue is one of whether I could ever isolate an unarticulated perception that would be free from imbrication in categorial acts.

What comes to the fore is that categorial intuitions constitute sensuous intuitions by giving them objectivity, by generating the meaning of objectivity as something broader than the mere ontic reality of bare perception. (Constitution, a term only used in the Logical Investigations in variants of the phrase “constitution of a species,” is defined in Ideas I as sense-bestowing.\(^{43}\)) In History of the Concept of Time, Heidegger points out that the act of synthesis that makes a state of affairs such as “the sheets are fuchsia” present, while dependent upon the material sheets, “takes place so that this matter and this alone shows

\(^{42}\) The example (but not the conclusion) is Steven Crowell’s, from personal correspondence.

\(^{43}\) LI 141; Husserl, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book, 128–130.
itself explicitly in the state of affairs [and thus] gives something which is inconceivable through simple perception as such."\textsuperscript{44} In this higher-order phenomenological analysis of the object beyond the level of simple perception, Heidegger appears to realize that categorial intuitions need to be ontologically prior to sensuous intuition if the category is not to be a "philosophical construct" which would presumably fall into the trap of a weltanschauunglich relativism which Husserl would deplore.\textsuperscript{45} Thus, Heidegger writes that "concrete intuition expressly giving its object is never an isolated, single-layered sense perception, but is always a multi-layered intuition, that is, a categorially specified intuition"\textsuperscript{46} As Jacques Taminiaux writes, "perception ... is universalizing from the outset"\textsuperscript{47}, and this seems to be a moment at which Heidegger has to make an anti-Husserlian argument in the process of performing a rigorous science of categorial intuition.\textsuperscript{48}

To elucidate this structure on the ontological level, the Heideggerean focus on the importance of categorial intuition on phenomenology demonstrates that Being is always and everywhere in beings. Being is at issue in all our assertions but cannot be shown to be at issue without the evidence of those assertions themselves: "each concrete apprehending thus also already includes the ideal unity of the species, although not explicitly."\textsuperscript{49}

However, the way in which this mutual relation comes about remains a mystery, and can only be explained through some sort of dynamic nature in the ideal Being and concrete beings. This dynamic nature, as Heidegger explains the lecture course on the \textit{Sophist}, is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Heidegger, \textit{History of the Concept of Time}, 64.
\item \textsuperscript{45} The phrase "philosophical construct" is Taminiaux's, at "From One Idea of Phenomenology to the Other," 31; the conclusion about relativism is mine.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Heidegger, \textit{History of the Concept of Time}, 68.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Taminiaux, ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{48} The extent of any anti-Husserlianism would depend on the exploration of the issue of whether Husserl's development of the language of constitution in \textit{Ideas I} represents the same putative anti-Husserlian turn which Heidegger is supposedly making in \textit{History of the Concept of Time}.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Heidegger, \textit{History of the Concept of Time}, 67.
\end{itemize}
nonbeing. Only in a relationship of reciprocal foundedness between being and nonbeing, to on and to me on, in which isolating one from the other is senseless and in which no larger whole encompasses them, can the relationship between Being and beings (categorial intuition) be explained. For this reason, the conclusions about categorial intuition in History of the Concept of Time are predicated upon the explorations of the relationship between being and nonbeing in Heidegger's lecture course on the Sophist.

On the surface, this lecture course is interesting primarily because Heidegger devoted the first third of the lectures to an analysis of various texts of Aristotle, primarily Book Z of the Nicomachean Ethics. This is a properly phenomenological discussion, about origins (archai) and the process of unconcealing and disclosing them (aletheuein). In other words, Aristotle leads Heidegger into a discussion of foundationalism and Heidegger demonstrates that this issue, at stake in the Logical Investigations, is also at stake in Plato's Sophist. Heidegger is clear that Aristotle does not have the most explicit answer, or even the final answer, to the question of foundation. For even in Aristotle, this process is apparently contradictory, as Heidegger states in §12 of the lectures. In Topics VI (PS 84/58), the nature of the path of philosophy is to begin with a bare seeing (aisthesis) of the particular (katha hekaston). This first aesthetic look is necessarily false, because it deals with bodily matter and not with the formal elements of the object (line, point, monas). Thus, as Aristotle writes in Metaphysics VII, the path of philosophy is to work through this first aesthetic seeing, to run through (PS 85/59) "that which is straightforwardly uncovered [towards] see[ing] what is simply and properly known." From this first factual state, e.g. a body, reflection works toward the origin through abstracting from the particular body to a more general concept of surface, to a still more general concept of line, to the universal concept of point. Nevertheless, Aristotle argues oppositely in the opening to the Physics that the way of philosophy actually begins with the universal and proceeds to the particular. In stark contradiction to the belief of the Topics that the purity of the aesthetic perception leads to a view of the object as something known in itself, the opening of the Physics points out
that the object as it is first perceived is rather something which is intermingled (i.e. the point/line/surface is mixed with the body).

How can this contradiction be resolved? Which is the founding element of intuition: the particular sensuous object or the universal categorial, though grasped as intermingled, whole? (Of course, this is the Husserlian problem.) In this text, Heidegger resolves this problem through an account of the universal as something that includes its particular encompassed elements as moments which are simultaneously same as and different from the whole. Thus, the whole (*holon*) has (PS 88/61) a "double meaning." On the one hand, various different living things are wholes insofar as they are complete; each horse is a complete animate being. On the other hand, the particular is only a moment of the category of being-whole. This dual meaning of "whole" which Heidegger finds in Aristotle allows Heidegger to interpret the particular and the categorial as equiprimordial. To grasp the origin is not simply to grasp the universal, but to grasp the multiple particular moments "which reside in the universal itself" (PS 89/61), i.e. a composite particular/universal structure in which the two are dialectically related, since each serves to articulate the other more completely. It is the relationship *between* the particular and universal, already but not explicitly present in the bare glance (*aisthesis*) of the object, that is key.

How, then, to think of the relation between whole and parts, between particular and universal? Heidegger's answer is *Durcheinanderlaufen* ("intercrossing," PS 461/319), which expresses a belonging together in reciprocal foundedness. This description of the relation between moments as *Durcheinanderlaufen* is bound up with the notion of *to me on* as otherness in the *Sophist*. It was briefly noted above how Heidegger finds a pun in the visitor's description of being as marked by the power (*dynamis*) to affect and to be affected. Heidegger's German translation of the Greek here is *Möglichkeit* (possibility), which has a different valence than the common link between the English "power" and the German "Kraft"; Heidegger dismisses the latter term (PS 475/328-9) as a parody of those giants who think that being is entirely materialist. In the light of Heidegger's assertion that
the definition of *on* as *dynamis* is prepared by the visitor’s assertion that predication appends a *heteron* to a being (PS 422/291), we can conclude that his reading here of the visitor’s definition as “Being thus means *possibility*” should be read as the possibility of reciprocal foundedness in co-saying. The heterology in ontology is clear in the pun which Heidegger discovers: *on* as *dynamis* will later appear further determined through the concept of *heteron*, since the definition (PS 476/329) of *on* as *dynamis* for the co-saying of particular and universal “expresses the fact that every being, insofar as it is, is itself and something other.”

Thus, Heidegger is arguing here that there can be no co-saying without a reciprocal heterological relationship. This allows us to return to the example of categorial intuition and show how the Platonic *dynamis* works in this structure. The categorial relationship between Being and a particular sensuous object (the S-is-p state of affairs mentioned earlier), allows for both to come to presence. Being thereby brings the being into the light of its Being (the possibility of affecting), while at the same time is in its nature determined by its other—Being appears always as the Being of a being—through the very fact of this blending. It is on this heterological ground of predicative co-sayings that Heidegger will deduce the viability of addressing nonbeing as a type of being. The description of the intercourse between forms taken up at *Sophist* 254–57 and §77 of the Heideggerean text, which demonstrates that non-being exists insofar as objects and forms are different from each other and hence are not, is a sensuous instantiation of the intercourse between being and beings that the visitor has already described in the *Sophist*’s account of the conditions for the possibility of predication. The *Sophist* demonstrates not only the ontic possibility of an intercourse between an account (*logos*) and nonbeing, i.e. falseness and sophistry (*logos pseudos*), but the ontological necessity of a blending between being and otherness which grounds all these other intercourses between objects. Heidegger seems to posit *to me on* as a sort of ontological otherness which serves as the condition for the possibility of *thateron*, being-other-than-something-else, which in turn serves as the condition for the
possibility of meaning.

Thus we can place Heidegger's analyses of co-saying and *Durcheinanderlaufen* under the rubric of "meontology", and more specifically a meontology which grounds all ontological thinking. The analysis of the blendings of the *megista gene* have proven that "the presence of the *heteron* constitutes the non-being of every being," that all beings always are and are not, that not-being is properly called otherness (PS 556/385: "Nichtsein hier heißt: *heteron*). But this also means that non-being is also properly called as a certain type of being, since *to on* is preserved within this description of nonbeing as otherness. But the being that is preserved here is not the being (*to on*) that is confused with the verb "to be" (*einai*) at various points in the dialogue, as shown in Heidegger's list at §66cof the fundamental unclarities of the Parmenidean thesis of being: it is always a being. This is the most fundamental insight which Heidegger has and Plato does not. Plato can only go as far as to elucidate the blendings between forms, without looking at their ontological basis, even though he has been hinting at this basis throughout the previous sections of the dialogue. For Heidegger, Plato's closest approach to the ontological basis of the co-saying of being and nonbeing arrives at 257b3, when Plato summarizes his view of nonbeing as otherness by stating that *to me on* is not something excluded from being, its opposite, but rather *heteron monon*, some other thing. This means for Heidegger that it is in the notness of nonbeing that we find the possibility for understanding an object, not simply as something other than some other sensible object, but also as the being that is other than Being. Nonbeing brings the ontological difference to light. This appears to be the case from the following passage:

Putting it sharply, the Being of the "not" [das Sein des Nicht], the *me*, is nothing else than the *dynamis* of the *pros ti*, the presence of the Being-in-relation-to. This is only a more precise formulation given to our interpretation of the idea of *koinonia*. The Being of the "not," the *me* in the sense of the *heteron* is the *dynamis* of the *pros ti*. Plato does not exhibit this as such, but it is implicit in the idea of *koinonia*. (PS 558/386-7)

But for Heidegger, Being always appears *pros ti*, in relation to an object. It is only in the
equiprimordiality of Being with beings that the equiprimordiality of the universal and the particular which Heidegger found in Aristotle is possible. But if this relationality is due to nonbeing, as Heidegger claims above, then Heidegger’s lesson to the reader of the Sophist is that Being can never properly be thought without its “not,” the me of to me on. Being and nonbeing are also equiprimordial. To me on is constitutive; it is the precondition for a being to be seen as the being that it is, and Heidegger recognizes nonbeing as such. Thus, the phenomenological seeing of Being which Heidegger has performed in his analysis of the Sophist is just as much meontology as it is an ontology. To draw a hierarchy here in which the me on is more supreme than the on would be ultimately useless and would mark a return to the false position of the diakribologoumenoi. Nevertheless, insofar as the Being of the me, through its koinonias, plays a constitutive role in the process of gathering truth, I simply raise the possibility that “meontology” is a more accurate term for this arche-research than “ontology” is. Thus, when Heidegger states later in the lectures at §78β (PS 566/392) that to me on is like to on and that “Plato acquires me on as on,” it is incumbent upon the readers of Heidegger to take this passage in conjunction with the previous statements on the Being of the me at §78α, and realize that this can only stress the equal koinonia between being and nonbeing.

At the same time, it must be admitted that although one can interpret Heidegger’s lectures on the Sophist as positing a belonging-together of meontological and ontological discourses, it is all too easy to respond to the surface level of Heidegger’s lectures and claim that Heidegger’s meontology is always fully dialectical insofar as a more primordial Being presents itself through the blending of a being and its others. Being would reign supreme again, on a higher level. The account of the Being of beings would thus be an account of the intercourse between being and nonbeing. And there is evidence in the lectures on the Sophist for this less charitable view. For the equiprimordiality between the universal and the particular, grounded in the belonging-together of being and nonbeing, is extended by Heidegger here in these lectures to an account of Being-in. Set forth in detail
in *Being and Time* as pre-phenomenological familiarity with Being through the structures of the world⁵⁰, Being-in is also briefly mentioned in the *Sophist* lectures as (PS 369/256) "perhaps the primary ontological fact of Dasein itself." Here, it is described as constituted by "a certain infatuation with immediately given appearances" which is simultaneously knowledge and a lack thereof. The Being of beings is always given to Dasein in its situation and Dasein on some level knows this, for otherwise it could not become infatuated with appearances. On the other hand, this knowledge is hidden by the very immediacy of the sensuous which it founds. One could thus make the argument that it is precisely the account of the role that otherness plays in constituting meaning that serves as an unveiling of this knowledge and brings it to the level of a fully articulated ontology.

At this point, a return to Husserl is in order. In the Third *Logical Investigation*, Husserl spends some time speaking of reciprocal foundedness (what Heidegger appears to appropriate as *Durcheinanderlaufen*), and it is worthwhile to ask whether this might apply to the relationship between sensuous and categorial intuition in the Sixth Investigation, or the relationship between being and nonbeing in Plato. In his definition of reciprocal foundedness, Husserl writes (LI 466) that "their relative lack of independence is unquestionable, as is the case, e.g. in the unity of Quality and Place." In addition, for these non-independent moments, Husserl writes that these parts need not be incorporated into a higher unity that binds them. The reciprocal relation of foundedness is for Husserl a sufficient bond that obviates the addition of a supernumerary whole (LI 477): "for this reason they require no chains and bonds to chain or knit them together, or to bring them to one another." Indeed, in these relations, there is "simply no unifying form." But this relationship can only apply to situations in which the parts are moments, not in which they are pieces.⁵¹ Thus the issue of separate presentability comes to the fore. In the case of

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⁵¹ Timothy J. Stapleton, *Husserl and Heidegger*, 60: "Those wholes whose parts are moments, essentially dependent, require no external bond."
sensuous and categorial intuition, this is the crux of the difference between Husserl and Heidegger: Husserl would seem to think that sensuous intuition is separately presentable, while Heidegger argues that "each concrete apprehending thus also already includes the ideal unity of the species, although not explicitly."\(^{52}\) Heidegger is thus more amenable to seeing the relationship between sensuous and categorial intuition as a reciprocal foundedness, even though he realizes that being able to speak of this depends upon a founded act (an act of ideation, of apprehending a universal such as "fuchsonianess").\(^{53}\) Thus we are left on the border of being able to speak of the separate presentability of sensuous intuition, on the border of its being utter nonsense. There are good reasons both for and against viewing the relationship between sensuous and categorial intuition as one of reciprocal foundedness. Heidegger thus argues for the non-independent relation between beings and Being, sensuous and categorial intuition, in *History of the Concept of Time*. But in addition to this non-independent relation, the lectures on the *Sophist* demonstrate that one cannot intuit Being without the intuition of nonbeing as well. Being and nonbeing blend with each other, as Plato demonstrates. If this relation is non-independent, then by Husserl's argument in the Third Logical Investigation, one has a right to ask why any overarching whole should be posited to explain their relationship. In other words, the question arises of whether Heidegger's hints in the *Sophist* lectures, that Plato's acquiring of nonbeing as a type of being disclose a pre-ontological understanding of Being on the part of Dasein in terms of its governance of the relationship between being (*to on*) and otherness, repeat certain idealist moves which Husserl himself would claim to be unnecessary. Husserl tells us that there is no need to name this overarching and unifying form; on a Husserlian reading of Heidegger's lectures on the *Sophist*, Heidegger would appear to be stubbornly unwilling to let the dialectic relationship between being and

\(^{52}\) Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 67.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
nonbeing remain foundational. And there is a corollary benefit to the Husserlian approach which should persuade that the critique of Heidegger is not simply politically motivated; for Heidegger’s understanding of the relationship between being and nonbeing as disclosive of an ontological understanding that needs to be articulated leads to a Third Man Problem. If a being can only come to have meaning by rolling around with its other in a reciprocal or dialectical relationship of affecting and being affected, and if this rolling around instantiates the dynamic or dynamis of Being-itself, it is all too easy to recreate Parmenides’ critique of middle Platonism and aim it at Heidegger. Could not one say that Being-itself too must roll around with its other in order to be knowable? What will happen then? Should one then posit a still higher order of being to serve as a unifying whole that encompasses this relationship? This would continue ad infinitum. The most that one can say is that meaning is constituted through the Durcheinanderlaufen of being and nonbeing. While to on and to me on are non-independent moments of a larger whole, to give a name to this whole would engender a series of inextricable philosophical problems.

In the refusal to name, we gain a philosophical right to be critical meontologists and posit something which lies beyond being. But we should be aware that it was dialectical meontology, the exploration of the way in which being and nonbeing roll around with each other, that gave us this right. If the critical notion of nonbeing (the unnamable Other that lies at the origin) serves as the condition for the possibility of the dialectical notion of nonbeing, then one can indeed say that a Hegelian trip to the broken middle of the kind that Fackenheim wants to make is false. Indeed, Fackenheim should leave Hegel behind, charter a boat on the Mediterranean and make the move from Athens to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it is equally important to point out that one cannot know to make this move without an engagement in the dialectical relations of otherness. I come to know the unnamable Other through tarrying with the named others of my existential situation (Fluffy, for example). In addition, if I perceive this other as not me, then according to the model of Platonic epistemology which Gail Fine lays out, then I also come to know myself better in
this process. In the next two chapters, I lay out a history of these crossings between religious and ethical attunements to alterity, and between other-regard and self-cultivation. These are the lessons of the Jewish meontological tradition: the Other beyond being and the other being are correlate to each other, and that the realization of this correlation engenders my ability to redeem the world.
CHAPTER 3

MEANTOLOGY AS ETHICAL TELEOLOGY:
The Place of Nonbeing in Maimonides and Hermann Cohen

In the previous chapter, I argued that Levinas misinterpreted the Platonic arguments he uses to justify his critical meontology; Plato cannot get past the dialectical meontology in which otherness can only refer to other objects, and not to a transcendent realm. Nevertheless, there are phenomenological arguments, notably from the third of Husserl’s Logical Investigations, which can justify the Levinasian view of nonbeing as absolute otherness. These arguments, however, do not give evidence for critical meontology over and above dialectical meontology; it is not the case that Husserl proves Levinas to be true and Fackenheim to be false. Rather, they argue for a correlation of the two kinds of meontology; the two kinds of nonbeing are shown to be non-independent. The otherness beyond being announces itself in the other being that is not me.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the historical elucidation of nonbeing determines and governs this correlation, in two senses. First, I will show that nonbeing is a Janus-faced concept, referring both to a nonbeing above being and a nonbeing below being as non-independent parts of nonbeing. Nonbeing is both lack and fullness; and lack and fullness are dialectically related. In the philosophies of Plotinus, Maimonides, and Hermann Cohen, this relation is mediated through the insight that existence is teleological. Lack is on the way to fullness. Human existence begins in the nonbeing that is lack, and its task is to near (as fully as possible) the nonbeing that is fullness, the nonbeing above being. Second, given that teleology is part of the natural structure of existence, the process of approaching the telos is given normative value. In other words, meontology necessitates an ethics. This chapter will demonstrate how Maimonides and Cohen deduce ethics from teleology, and go on to offer critiques of both. In medieval and modern Jewish thought, the value of ethical actions is genuinely put into question. For Maimonides,
ethical actions are only instrumental; I carry them out for the sake of my own perfection and to attain the world-to-come (‘olam ha-ba’). However, Cohen is more torn on this issue. There are passages in his writings in which ethical acts are viewed as good in and of themselves, since he argues that the self cannot gain anything from the ethical affect of compassion (Mitleid), and there are others in which he formulates a more instrumentalist position.

It is impossible to understand Cohen’s concept of nonbeing without the Maimonidean concept. In turn, it is impossible to understand the Maimonidean concept without seeing how it fits within the framework of Neoplatonized Aristotelianism handed down to him. Hence, the method of this chapter will be, as it was in the last, one of excavation. I will begin with a brief analysis of the locus classicus of to me on in Hermann Cohen’s Religion of Reason from the Sources of Judaism, and mark out the necessity of the return to Maimonides. Then, from a demonstration of Maimonides’ own opacity on this issue, we will mark out the necessity to return to the Aristotelian and Plotinian understandings of nonbeing. At this point there will be a clearing in which we can reconstitute the difficulties of the appropriation of this concept by Maimonides and Cohen.

Return

There is a fascinating passage, occurring relatively early in Cohen’s posthumously published (1918) Religion of Reason (RR 62–64), in which Cohen asserts that his concept of the Ursprung—the originative causal principle which Cohen equates with God—is meontological and indebted to Maimonides' development of the thematic of to me on as privation in the Guide of the Perplexed. Maimonides, in turn, develops the theological stakes of the development of the meontological concept in ancient Greek thought. According to Cohen, the history of this concept is as follows. In pre-Socratic Greek culture, thanks to the deceptions of oratory and sophistry, the difference between the Greek negative particles ou and me had disappeared. Democritus and Plato renew this distinction in stringent form,
between simple negation (ou) and privation (me).\footnote{Whether this distinction actually exists in this way in Greek philosophy is indeed a matter of debate. According to the Liddell-Scott lexicon, me is used in dependent clauses with a subjunctive or optative verbal mood, and ou is used in independent clauses with an indicative: "me expresses that one thinks a thing is not, ou that it is not." None of their definitions, however, speak to the negation of non-participle nouns such as to me on. Despite the lexical problems, the distinction is strong in the history of philosophy in other thinkers besides Hermann Cohen. Paul Tillich takes it for granted in the first volume of his Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 188ff; the distinction seems to be rooted in Schelling and the Schellingian interpretation of Boehme, not in Greek thought itself. To see it reflected in Cohen, then, is rather strange, since Cohen associates Schellingian ontology with pantheism. A full explication of this problem would involve carefully reconstructing the Cohen-Fichte relationship and how Cohen invokes certain Fichtean-idealist positions in his response to the Trendelenburg-Fischer debate. Cf. Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, abrdg. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 442, 504; AW 108ff and 204ff; Robert F. Brown, The Later Philosophy of Schelling (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), 127, 164; Andrea Poma, The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen, trans. John Denton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 73–78; Klaus Köhnke, The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy between Idealism and Positivism, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 170–78, 267.} Meontology is thus a mode of thought oriented around the evidence of privation. The function of privation is (RR 62) to reach "out beyond the meaning of affirmation, insofar as it intends to bestow a foundation to affirmation." In other words, the concept of lack which privation brings forth is dialectically linked to a notion of fullness which is infinite and hyperessential, and thereby beyond the simple ontology that is part of ordinary affirmations and negations. This meontology is indispensable for Cohen, insofar as it is the only philosophical argument which he marshals in the Religion of Reason for his demythologized concepts of God and creation. It is Maimonidean in spirit. Maimonides, according to Cohen, has taken over the Platonic distinction of negation and privation. Cohen's evidence is Guide I:58, in which (he claims) Maimonides makes the following argument. Since privation exists, there must be a negation of that privation which is completely one, unique, and serves as the ground of all activity on the part of humans who are deprived of that essential oneness. If God is the negation of the set of all objects that are relatively inert, then he is the Ursprung of activity; hence, his existence suffices for the existence of creatures, and there is a logical right to speak of God as creator.

But this is only the last appearance of this idea in Cohen's oeuvre. Cohen's analysis of to me on appear at least as early as his 1902 Logik der reinen Erkenntnis, and
Cohen makes an explicit link between meontology and Maimonides in 1908, in the essay "Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis." Here, Cohen reads his own devotion to Maimonides as a reaction against Aristotelian materialism. Cohen charges Aristotle with re-inaugurating a historical disappearance of the *oulme* distinction (CEM 250) and interprets Maimonides as a thoroughgoing Platonist who only plays at being an Aristotelian within medieval culture at large. But Cohen's view of Aristotle in this essay seems anachronistic to the modern reader. Today, Aristotelian ethics is dominant, either as "virtue ethics" in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre or as a statement of self-insufficiency and the need for others in the work of Martha Nussbaum. On the other hand, Cohen describes Aristotle's thought (CEM 239) as "hostility against the idea, against the idea of the Good ... if the Idea is generally of no value, then the idea of the Good cannot have value either." At the other end of the century, we can read this as being too extreme. We know that Aristotelian and Neoplatonic themes share an uneasy togetherness in the Guide; we know that Aristotle is *not* an enemy of the concept of goodness *tout court*, but rather only of Cohen's idealized concept of goodness derived from the sixth book of Plato's *Republic*.

Nevertheless, the section of Cohen's "Charakteristik" on the relation between privation and negation does serve two important purposes for our preliminary observations on the stakes of meontological thinking. First, Cohen is clearer here than in the *Religion of Reason* on the unique nature of Maimonides' doctrine of the "so-called" negative attributes (CEM 248). What Maimonides is doing is not negative theology, which would simply be a

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2 Today, we would describe this argument as "Straussian." Of course, Strauss' own distinctive readings, while formally similar to Cohen's, are vastly different in content. For more on the Strauss-Cohen relationship, see Kenneth Hart Green, "Leo Strauss as a Modern Jewish Thinker," JPCM 17–25. Green, however, does not see the postmodern elements within Strauss' iteration of Cohenian formal structures.

3 Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 277: "It scarcely needs repeating that it is the central thesis of *After Virtue* that the Aristotelian moral tradition is the best example we possess of a tradition whose adherents are rationally entitled to a high measure of confidence in its epistemological and moral resources." Also cf. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 20: the advantage of Aristotelian philosophy over Plato's emphasis on self-sufficiency is that if offers "a kind of human worth that is inseparable from vulnerability, an excellence that is in its nature other-related and social ... in whose values openness, receptivity, and wonder play an important part."
learned ignorance of God or a realization that this essence is unknowable. Cohen argues that God's essence is indeed knowable for Maimonides. Through the meontological technique of describing God as the negation of the multiple privations of the created world, the true nature of God as ethical comes into view (CEM 254): “the purpose of the increase in negations is to help Maimonides towards the increase in the true, fruitful, that is to say the ethical, knowledge of God.” In Cohen's eyes, then, the Guide offers no such thing as negative theology, even though Maimonides places limits on the language which one can use to describe God—or, more precisely, describes the transgression of these limits as metaphorical. Secondly, Cohen argues that the Maimonidean doctrine of creation, rooted in meontological principles, contains a temporal element that governs the teleological path of the Guide. The created realm is one of privation and possibility, but the definition of possibility is for Cohen dialectically related to a future actuality. The “not” of creation qua realm of privation is future-oriented (CEM 254): “that which is possible is that which is not yet actual.” Created existence is never without its Sehnsucht⁴, its propulsive longing to realize itself. For Cohen, the path engendered by this propulsion is Torah, a gradual coming-to-be of actuality and passing-away of privation.

But it is all too easy to argue against Cohen's reading of Maimonides. Not only is there the weighty theological concern of whether the divine-human relationship is here reduced to ethics⁵ but there is the equally weighty philosophical concern of whether Cohen has read the history of philosophy correctly. For where is Maimonides supposed to have gotten his Platonic orientation? In the Guide, the only Platonic dialogue mentioned by Maimonides is the Timaeus, whereas Cohen's reading of the Plato-Maimonides relationship depends on the assumption that Maimonides is familiar with the arguments of the Parme-

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⁴ I have purposefully switched from Cohen's vocabulary to that of Schelling here.

nides and Sophist. Furthermore, there is no explicit citation of any of Plotinus' Enneads in the Guide. Alfred L. Ivry has made a compelling argument for parallels between Maimonides and Plotinus and how these might have come about through Maimonides' knowledge of the Arabic-Plotinian sources. On the other hand, Cohen's argument is a reductive syllogism: 1) Aristotle is an enemy of the good; 2) Plato is a friend of the good; 3) Maimonides is a friend of the good; 4) Maimonides is a friend of Plato's and not Aristotle's. At this point, it is unclear whether Cohen is merely trying to use Maimonides in order to boost the Jewishness of his own theory of correlation between humankind and the God (in which humankind depends upon God for existence, and God depends upon man for the actualization and unfolding of His being). Yet this theory is apparently controverted by Maimonides himself at Guide I:52 (G 117), in which he states that "it is clear at first glance that there is no correlation between Him and the things created by Him." Of course, there is no guarantee that Maimonides and Cohen mean the same thing by "correlation." The Arabic term used by Maimonides, idafa, refers rather specifically to a relation between two terms that cannot be conceived separately in the mind, e.g. parent and child. To posit a correlation between humans and God in this framework would mean that God could not be a completely independent entity. God would no longer be the necessary existent that Maimonides defines God to be; he would be contingent, and humanity in some way would

6 Alfred L. Ivry, "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides' Thought," in Perspectives on Maimonides, 115-40. Ivry makes the intriguing suggestion that Maimonides may have come to know Plotinian doctrines through the dissemination of Ismai'li theology, which was steeped in Neoplatonism.

7 Cf. RR 88.

8 It should be noted that the most sustained effort to rehabilitate Cohen for a postmodern age, by Almut Sh. Bruckstein, is cognizant of his misreadings of the tradition and attempts to make other arguments for his conclusions. Cf. "Hermann Cohen's 'Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis': A Reconstructive Reading of Maimonides' Ethics" (diss., Temple University, 1992); "On Jewish Hermeneutics: Maimonides and Bachya as Vectors in Cohen's Philosophy of Origin," in Stéphane Moses and Hartwig Wiedebach, eds. Hermann Cohen's Philosophy of Religion (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1997); "Joining the Narrators: A Philosophy of Talmudic Hermeneutics," in Robert Gibbs, Steven Kepnes, and Peter Ochs, eds. Reasoning after Revelation (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 105-21.

be a cause of God. For this reason, Maimonides’ refusal at chapter I:52 of the Guide (G 117) to posit a correlation between God and humans is grounded in the claim that “He has a necessary existence while that which is other than He has a possible/contingent existence.” If God is in need of anything from humankind, then we can no longer speak of God as the negation of privation. If God needs humankind in order to unfold himself, as Cohen indeed thinks—”It is as if God’s being were actual in man’s knowledge only” (RR 88)—than God is deprived of something which he should, by his very nature as the negation of all privation, possess. And if we introduce privation into the God-idea here, then we lose the philosophical right to protect God from other privations, other expressions of finitude, such as corporeality. As a result, it is necessary to return strictly to the framework of the Guide in order to establish whether Cohen is being as faithful to Maimonidean meontology as he claims to be. One must forge a map of the concepts of privation and negation, matter and form, the human moral path and death. This map must begin with Aristotle and Plotinus; only in a contrast of these two views of nonbeing can the contribution of Maimonides to meontology come into relief.

**The Plotinian-Aristotelian Grid**

If Maimonides is to be interpreted as a meontologist (as Cohen claims), then the first step is undoubtedly to turn to those passages in the Guide which mention privation, the type of negation which Cohen associates with the Greek particle *me*. The term “privation” first appears in the Guide at I:17 (G 43), where Maimonides lists three principles of the created realm: matter, form, and “particularized privation, which is always conjoined with matter.” It is necessary to assess where this fits on the axes of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic interpretation.

When Aristotle defines “privation” (*steresis*) in the philosophical glossary that constitutes Metaphysics D (1022b22–1023a9), he claims, almost as if he is throwing his
hands up in the air, that (1022b32–33) "there are as many kinds of privations as there are words which derive their negations from the alpha-privative." But Aristotle manages to distill these multiple meanings to four, and, in comparison with other definitions of privation in the Metaphysics, one can further distill these four down to two basic senses. In the first sense, more obvious but taking up less space in Aristotle's text, one can speak of a natural object not possessing something which other natural objects do (e.g. "a plant has no eyes"). In the second and more important sense, one can speak of a natural object which does not possess something that it should by nature have. Thus blindness is a privation for humankind, since by nature all humans should be able to see.

Privation is not simply a grammatical tool, however. It is supremely important for Aristotle's account of how change is possible. At the close of Metaphysics L.2 (1069b32–34), Aristotle classifies the principles of existents subject to change as follows: "The causes (aitia) and the principles (archai), then, are three; two of them are the contraries, of which one is the formula or the form (logos kai eidos) and the other is the privation (steresis), and the third is the matter (hyle)." (I will return to an analysis of the surface similarity between this sentence and the aforementioned quotation from Guide I:17 shortly.) Aristotle gives a highly compressed and oblique explanation of why there are three causes of change (1069b3–7): "If change proceeds from opposites or from intermediates, and not from all kinds of opposites (for also voice is non-white) but from

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11 These two senses are paralleled at Met. Θ.1 (1046a31–35) and Ι.4 (1055a33–b29).

12 This is the more important sense because it is the only sense of prative propositions given by Aristotle in the tenth chapter of the Categories (12a27–34). Cf. Wolfson, 543.

13 Aristotle also refers to the blindness of moles as a privation, but claims that the privation refers to the genus of moles, as opposed to individual moles; sight is still something which the genus of moles should have, in Aristotle's opinion. Cf. 1022b25–26.
contraries, there must be something underlying which changes to contraries; for it is not the contraries that change."

A fuller explanation is in order. For this, it is best to turn to *Physics* A.5-8.\(^{14}\) At A.7 (189b34–190a31), Aristotle does a thought-experiment on the sentence "The person becomes musical." In some sentences which take the structure of "A becomes B," it would make logical sense to say that such a sentence is convertible to "B comes to be from A." Yet in the case of "The person becomes musical," this is impossible; the phrase "The musical comes to be from the person" implies that the individual passes away as the musical comes to be. The proper version of this sentence would either thus be "The unmusical becomes musical" or "The unmusical person becomes musical." The upshot of this linguistic analysis is that in change, there is an underlying subject (*hypokeimenon*) that persists during change and that there are attributes of that subject (e.g. unmusicality) which do not persist during change. Thus the principles (*archai*) behind objects are at least two: the subject and its form expressed in terms of attributes. Yet Aristotle continues by claiming (190b29–30) that "in a sense the principles may be spoken of as being two, but in another sense as being three." A formal attribute such as musicality must originate from another attribute—form cannot originate in substance, musicality cannot come to be from the person herself—but it must originate from *somewhere*. In an adaptation of the pre-Socratic theories of contrary pairs (hot/cold, dense/rare, full/void) listed at A.5 (188a19–23), Aristotle claims that this origin is the privation of that attribute. Using a different example, Aristotle writes (188b12–15):

> the harmonious must necessarily come to be from the inharmonious, and the inharmonious from the harmonious; and the harmonious must be destroyed into something which is not harmonious, not into any chance thing but into that which is opposed to the harmonious.

If contraries, expressed in terms of an attribute and its privation, are not part of the account

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of generation and corruption, then it would have to be the case that change would occur out
of nothing at all; i.e. change would not be able to occur. Aristotle's advance here over the
pre-Socratics (a similar but not identical advance to Plato's in the Sophist) is a distinction
between nonbeing as privation and "unqualified nonbeing" (haplos me on). Aristotle
agrees that it is impossible for something to come from unqualified nonbeing. Yet at the
same time, he asserts that things constantly come to be from nonbeing, since privation is
the ground of the coming to be of a certain attribute (as the example of harmoniousness
demonstrates). Thus, privation (191b15–16) "in itself is a non-being (esti kath'auto me
on)," and is necessarily one of the three archai of things. There is no change without
privation.15

At Physics A.8 (191b27–29), Aristotle states that this distinction between qualified
and unqualified nonbeing is only one way of solving the problem; the other is the distinc-
tion between potential and actual things. The statement that "we have settled this elsewhere
with greater accuracy", which gives no reference, most probably refers to Metaphysics θ.
The link between privation and nonbeing made in the Physics is here explicitly extended to
potentiality. At θ.3 (1047a30–b2), in the context of the association of actuality (energeia
entelecheia) with motion, Aristotle notes that nonbeings are never described as being in
motion, but are commonly associated with predicates such as "thinkable" or "desirable."
These predicates are associated with potentiality; that which is only thought or wished-for
does not actually exist within a spatial frame. The common opinion reflects the
metaphysical truth that nonbeings can only exist in actuality when spoken of in the future
tense (1047a35: esontai).16 Those nonbeings which are associated with privations

15 Following n. 1 above, we note that on the evidence of Physics A and Metaphysics A, Cohen would
seem to be wrong about Aristotle's collapse of the distinction between ou and me. At CEM 252, Aristotle
cites De Interpretatione 16a32 as evidence for this slippage; the only other use of ouk on to refer to
privation, in my limited knowledge of Aristotle, is at Physics A.8 (192a4–5).

16 Apostle's translation of the Greek here seems to translate esontai as a subjunctive or optative ("while
they [nonbeings] do not exist in actuality, they may exist in actuality"). The Bonitz translation
(Aristoteles' Metaphysik [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1980] correctly emphasizes the indicative mood of the
Greek here: "zwar noch nicht in Wirklichkeit seien, doch in Wirklichkeit sein wird."
(1047b1–2)—as opposed to other types of nonbeings which are associated with falsity\(^\text{17}\)—"exist potentially, but they do not exist, in the sense that they do not exist actually." The association of nonbeing (and hence privation) with potentiality is repeated at Metaphysics N.2 (1089a25–31). Here the locutions of Physics A, in which the generation of an attribute is described as arising from the privation of that attribute, are repeated, with the language of potentiality (*dynamis*) substituted for that of privation.

"Nonbeing" in its various cases has as many meanings as there are categories, and besides these it signifies what is false and also what is potential. It is from this last [i.e. what is potential] that generation proceeds; and so a man is generated from what is not a man but is potentially a man, and the white is generated from what is not white but is potentially white, and the situation is similar whether one thing is generated or many.

Nonbeing is thus one of the senses of being itself. Being has two broad senses, according to Aristotle at Α.2 (1069b16); it can be either potential or actual. As potential being, as a privation, it can also be described as a nonbeing. Thus, to say that change is the passage from potential being to actual being (1069b17) is the same as saying that change is the replacement of privation by form, which in turn is the same as saying that change comes from nonbeing in a qualified sense, "as an attribute" (*kata symbebekos*). This is the complex picture that lies behind Aristotle's assertion at Γ.2 (1003b10) that "therefore, we say that nonbeing is nonbeing (dio kai to me on einai me on phamen)."

In this cluster of privation-nonbeing-potentiality, there is a highly curious element. Privation seems to be an arrow pointing only in one direction. With any pair of contraries, one might think that each pole is the privation of the other. The sentence "Coldness is the privation of heat" should be reciprocal. When an object that is black not-white becomes an object that is white not-black, privation should in some sense remain. Yet Aristotle seems to claim (at Metaphysics I.4, 1055b26–27) that the privative pole of a pair of contraries is always stable, and never shifts from object to object. This is supported at the philosophical

\(^{17}\) Cf. θ.10, esp. 1051b33–1052a4.
glossary of *Metaphysics* A.22, in which blindness is described as a privation of sight while sight is never described as a privation of blindness. True enough, blindness is not something that humans should by nature possess. But although Aristotle does define privation as the simple absence of an attribute (i.e. of a property which makes an object what it is, cf. *Metaphysics* 1046a33), it nevertheless remains the case, as Denis O'Brien argues, that Aristotle views change as “the replacement, within a continuing substrate, of privation by form”\(^{18}\) (e.g. “the unmusical becomes musical”), and *not* as the replacement of one kind of privation by another (“the not-white becomes not-black”). There is good reason on Aristotle's part, however. If Aristotle were to view privation as always concomitant with any material state, then he would be dangerously close to the conflation of privation with matter. But if this were to be the case, then privation would have to be an essential aspect of matter, and Aristotle insists that “a denial [only] belongs to something accidentally”\(^{19}\), i.e. as an attribute. If a privation were not to be an attribute, then there could be no way in which it could pass away as matter takes on a certain form. The argument would collapse in the following manner:

1. Privation is part of the essence of matter.
2. In “The unmusical man becomes musical”, unmusicality is a privation.
3. Unmusicality qua privation is part of the essence of man.
4. Hence, when the unmusical man becomes musical, he also remains unmusical, because essential properties cannot disappear.
5. Our proposition should hence read “The unmusical man becomes unmusical-musical,” which is nonsensical.

\(^{18}\) O'Brien, 179.

\(^{19}\) *Metaphysics* 2.3, 1029a25.
The problem with the above is obviously in the transition from the second to the third sentence, as specific privations are confused with privation in general. Yet this is the problem which Aristotle would see himself getting into were he to view change as the replacement of one privation by another instead of the replacement of privation by form.\textsuperscript{20} The conflation of privation and matter, by reducing the number of archai of change from three to two, renders change itself impossible.

Plotinus sees no need to move to a three-archai hypothesis. Instead, Plotinus sees a deep problem in one of Aristotle's examples, and feels free to equate matter and privation (and hence nonbeing) as a result. The stark difference between Plotinus and Aristotle on this matter can be best seen in a comparison of sections A.9 of the Physics and II.4.16 of the Enneads.\textsuperscript{21} At A.9, in a final case-study supporting his argument for the separation of matter and privation, Aristotle writes (192a23-24) that in the cases of “the female which desires the male and the ugly that desires the beautiful,” the desire is not rooted in femininity-itself or ugliness-itself, but rather in the material subject that possesses femininity or ugliness as an attribute. The two-archai hypothesis, which would conflate matter and the privation, would necessitate that in the desire for change, a contrary would desire its own extinction in the form. But when matter is seen as the only contrary, the two-archai hypothesis necessitates an account by which the satisfaction of the ugly's desire for the beautiful would end up in the annihilation of the object itself.

Yet the language of Aristotle's example places certain conditions upon the nature of desire which appear to be anti-intuitive. The desire of the ugly for the beautiful is not a desire on the part of the ugly to be with the beautiful, but a desire on the part of the ugly to

\textsuperscript{20} For another version of this explanation, see Apostle, Metaphysics, 324n. 13: "Further, if matter qua matter were not-A [a privation] then when it takes on A it would have both A and not-A (qua matter), and this is impossible."

\textsuperscript{21} This follows O'Brien, 179–80, but the comparison between Physics A.9 and the closing sections of Enneads II.4 is also made by A. H. Armstrong, in his translation of the Enneads (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966–88), 140n. 2. All translations of the Enneads cited are Armstrong’s.
be the beautiful. Desire for Aristotle is a desire for essential change. From the perspective of the female-male example, this makes no sense whatsoever. Does a female's heterosexual or heterosocial desire reflect a desire to be male, a desire for a sex-change, in spite of this natural impossibility? This indeed may be exactly what Aristotle thinks.22

For Plotinus, the account of desire is vastly different. At Enneads II.4.16, Plotinus claims that when the female desires or is impregnated by23 the male, the female (ll. 14–15) “does not lose its femaleness but becomes still more female, and that is, becomes more what it is.” Similarly, the unsown field, as it is sown, is confirmed in its fieldness. From these examples, as simple as the analysis of “The man becomes musical”, Plotinus is able to argue that matter is the same thing as privation. Thereby Plotinus returns to the two-archai theory of Plato and the pre-Socratics, although this return is made through the Aristotelian development of the concept of privation. For Plotinus, privation does not disappear in a change; rather, in the shift from potentiality to actuality, privation expresses itself more. The female or the field does not gain a new attribute, but reveals itself as the material precondition for the instantiations of form in the world. In other words, it shows its function as something that is to be hidden underneath the child or the plant.

The stakes of this difference between Aristotle and Plotinus regarding the nature of privation become clearer upon turning to Enneads II.4.13.24 Here, Plotinus takes up the example of blindness which Aristotle used in the glossary of Metaphysics A. In the context

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22 This pace O'Brien, who wonders (179), "Could even Aristotle have thought that?" There is now a vast literature on Aristotle's theory of sexual difference. In On the Generation of Animals, Aristotle describes the female as an incomplete male, and asserts that women contribute only matter (and not form) to children. Thus, one might conclude that the female indeed desires to be the male, that this desire is naturally frustrated because the separation of animals into genders is good from a teleological perspective, and the next best thing that a woman can do is bear male children. Nevertheless, this conclusion is slightly unfair to Aristotle's richly nuanced position, which is filled with tensions even in On the Generation of Animals itself. Cf. Cynthia Freeland, "Nourishing Speculation," in Engendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle, ed. Bat-Ami Bar On (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 145–187.

23 There is a lacuna in the text at this point.

24 We regretfully omit here a discussion of Stoic impulses upon Plotinian thought, specifically the assumption that qualities are de facto visible.
of arguing against the Aristotelian view of matter, Plotinus ventriloquizes his opponent's position as follows (ll. 12–14): “For anyone who is deprived has a quality—a blind man, for instance.\textsuperscript{25} . . . But if complete privation belongs to it [matter], it is qualified still more, if privation too is really something qualified.” Plotinus’ response (ll. 14–16) is to claim that this reduces everything to quality, and hence the Aristotelian definition of privation is philosophically useless: “Even quantity would be a quality, and substance too.” What we gather from this sentence is that like blindness, one can also describe quantity and substance as being deprived of sight. One could extend Plotinus’ argument and claim that even matter, which is not privation for Aristotle, would technically have to be described as privation under Aristotelian criteria because it too does not see. Of course, it is perhaps too easy to criticize Plotinus for missing Aristotle’s empiricism, since the privation of blindness is only a quality insofar as it refers to an attribute that the human should by nature possess; Plotinus ignores this aspect of the Aristotelian definition of privation. On the other hand, Plotinus is undoubtedly true to the letter of the Aristotelian definition of privation as absence (ll. 21–23):

\begin{quote}
And privation is certainly not quality or qualified, but lack of quality or of something else, as soundlessness does not belong to sound or anything else [positive]; for privation is a taking away \textit{[aris\linebreak[s]is]}, but qualification is a matter of positive assertion.
\end{quote}

According to Plotinus’ rigorous reading of the Aristotelian definition of privation, Aristotle cannot have it be the case both that privation qua nonbeing is both absence of a quality and the presence of another quality. If privation is the lack of quality, Plotinus seems to be reasoning, it must be the lack of quality \textit{tout court}, i.e. the lack of \textit{all} qualities, the lack of any quality whatsoever.

If privation be completely unqualified, \textit{pace} Aristotle, it must also always be indefinite (\textit{aorist\linebreak[s]on}, II.4.13.32), since definition gives quality. It is unlimited (\textit{apeiron},

\textsuperscript{25} MacKenna’s more readable translation of this passage is as follows: “Deprivation, we will be told, comports quality: a blind man has the quality of his lack of sight.” Cf. Plotinus, \textit{Enneads}, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin, 1991), 103.
II.4.15.17), since the imposition of limit or boundedness would give it spatial qualities. It is otherness, in a circumscribed sense of the term. One can say that privation qua matter— itself is other than the objects of the sensible world, composites of matter and form. Yet the language of “other than” itself would seem to reinscribe matter as a unified object. In order to emphasize the oddity of its absolute indefiniteness, Plotinus in one passage (II.4.13.31) calls matter alla, “others,” bizarrely using plural form. In another passage (II.4.16.1–3), he uses the language of the Sophist to describe the unique nature of the otherness of matter: “Is matter, then, the same thing as otherness? No, rather, it is the same thing as the part of otherness which is opposed to the things which in the full and proper sense exist, that is to say rational formative principles [logoi].”

But the language of “parts of otherness” here means something different than its appearance at Sophist 258de. There, it had a proto-Aristotelian sense in that each object participates in otherness insofar as it is other than other sensible objects. Here, each object participates in otherness insofar as it is other than forms, the only beings which are worthy of the name. All sensible objects, no matter what perfections they might possess, are therefore always under the mark of privation, precisely because they are material objects. Insofar as we are material, we are not. Privation here is no longer merely a logical principle which explains how material substance can take on differing forms. It is an existential (for lack of a better word) principle which describes—but does not exhaust the description of—the nature of existing objects.

Because privation is now defined in terms of complete lack, matter is nonbeing, me on. This definition comes at several places in the Enneads. At II.5.4.10–14, Plotinus describes matter as nonbeing insofar as it is deprived of all actual reality (energeia) and insofar as it is deprived of form (eidos). These two ways of matter’s nonexistence makes it “still more nonexistent (pleionos me on),” less existent than even the apparent existence (indalma) of false existents. False existents at least have substance, even though that
substance is falsely described. This is a marked change from the nature of nonbeing in the *Sophist*, in which nonbeing simply refers to a different kind of being. Plotinus' notion of nonbeing here (II.5.5.11–13) refers to something that is "cast out and utterly separated, and unable to change itself, but always in the state it was from the beginning, and it was nonexistent." Nonbeing here is still qualified—it is not the sheer negation of existence, but rather the privation of those qualities which mark existents—but it is less qualified than the nonbeing of the *Sophist*, which as an other being, still possessed qualities. Ironically, Plotinus succeeds in communicating the mysterious and dark nature of non-being through his ambivalence over its relationship to being. Matter as *me on* may be less than an *indalma* (a word which Armstrong translates as "phantasm") at II.5.4, but Plotinus is less careful elsewhere in the *Enneads*. At I.8.3.9, Plotinus describes matter as something "like an image [eikon] of being or something still more nonexistent [*mallon me on*]." The issue of how something can be "like" (*hos*) an image—a meta-image, a simulacrum of simulacritv—is puzzling to say the least. The use of "like" here does not seem to be comparative. A spectral rhetoric emerges (III.6.7.12, 18). Matter is a "ghostly image of bulk (*eidolon kai phantasma onkou*)", and "a phantom (*eidolon*) which does not remain and cannot get away" from its own nature. At II.5.5.23, Plotinus describes the matter of the sense-world as "actually a phantasm (*energeia eidolon*)," possessing the actuality of not having any qualities, and thus having no actuality whatsoever. As such, it is truly nonbeing (*ontos me on*). Even when the "partial" soul, in its care for the soulless (III.4.2.1), imposes form upon matter, the composite object created is described by Plotinus in rhetoric that can only be properly described as macabre (II.4.5.18): "the matter of this world becomes

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26 The concept of soul's care for the soulless here is a quotation from *Phaedrus* 246b6–7. Of course, exactly why this occurs is neither explained in Plato or Plotinus. Similarly, when the "partial" soul forms its dark material image (III.9.3.14–16), it is said to return to it "rejoicing." To be sure, this is necessary as part of the explanation of how composite objects come to be. Yet the account is clearly mythological, without any rational justification whatsoever.

In addition, there is some debate over what exactly the "partial" soul is. O'Brien, 181, defines it as the soul that comes to be in plants. J. M. Rist, in *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 123, states that this is Plotinus' name for the individual.
something defined, but not alive or thinking, a decorated corpse.” In the composite object, form and matter are always separate; the belonging-together of the composite is only an illusion to the empirical orientation that fails to take the philosophical path towards reducing objects to their simplex components (II.4.5).

Being defined in terms of utter lack, matter can also be associated by Plotinus with evil (I.8.5.6–10):

Evil is not in any sort of deficiency but in absolute deficiency; a thing which is only slightly deficient in good is not evil, for it can even be perfect on the level of its own nature. But when something is absolutely deficient—and this is matter—this is essential evil without any share in good. For matter has not even being—if it had it would by this means have a share in good; when we say it “is” we are just using the same word for two different things, and the true way of speaking is to say it “is not” (me einai).

Whereas one might argue that two objects can be formally alike but different in content (i.e. two squares of different magnitudes), it is impossible for two objects to be alike in this manner when their “form” is formlessness. Hence one can argue that evil and matter are identical with each other and with nonbeing, because both are formless. Matter is the utter deprivation of qualities; evil is the utter deprivation of the good. The good is equated with the One at several places in the Enneads (most notably in the title of VI.9). Evil thus cannot be a quality, since beings are beings with qualities in virtue of their oneness (VI.9.1.1). Thus, that which is absolutely deficient of qualities, has no oneness, no quality that makes it a formed being, is evil.

Yet this is not the only sense of nonbeing in the Enneads. Just as it has several senses for Aristotle, nonbeing has several senses for Plotinus.27 At VI.9.5.30, it is the One that is described as nonexistent. On one level, this makes perfect sense. Just as there are many colors that are not white, there can be a multiplicity of terms that refer to that which is not being, by which it is best to understand “not in the realm of existents.” If matter is nonbeing because it is below all predicates, then the One is above all predicates. Plotinus'

27 Cf. P.A. Meijer, Plotinus on the Good or the One (Enneads VI,9): An Analytical Commentary (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1992), 287n. 813.
One, also described as the Good, is beyond being (*epekeina tes ousias*) in the same manner as Plato's conceptualization of the good in the *Republic*. Nothing can be predicated of the Plotinian One, because it is (III.8.20.30) “of such a kind—though nothing can be predicated of it, not being, not substance, not life—as to be above all of these things.” And there must be such an object which is absolutely simple and unique, according to the argument found both in Plato and Aristotle, such that the existence of composite objects is grounded in an anterior simplicity.  

The fact that nonbeing can be properly spoken of as both above and below being was the source of much confusion among Plotinus' students. As J. M. Rist points out, it is Porphyry who is the first to describe the one as “not-Being beyond Being,” in a formulation of the One as a radical otherness, a formulation which bears some resemblance to Levinas’ appropriation of Plato. And although Plotinus might not have objected to this formulation, Rist points out quite rightly that in VI.9.8.34–35 that it is not the One that possesses otherness, but rather sensible objects. Plotinus “emphasizes that it is in a sense the Beings which are not-Being—we should understand of course 'not-infinite-Being’—because they are other than the One.” Porphyry's Levinas-like meontology conceals a more standard ontology in which the All-Highest (God, One, Good) is Being-itself.

A complete analysis of the problem of describing the One would lead far afield. Yet I do want to point out that this duplicity in the description of nonbeing—an oscillation between a rhetoric of hyperessentiality and a rhetoric of hopeless hypoessentiality—is

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28 Cf. *Enneads* V.4.1, and Lloyd Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: Routledge, 1994), 5–7. Gerson points out that Plotinus' arguments for the uniqueness of the One are actually more Aristotelian than Platonic, since all Forms in both middle and late Platonism possess and share certain qualities (eternity, oneness, etc.)

29 Rist, 29–30.

30 But cf. Levinas' critiques of Neoplatonism in “From the One to the Other: Transcendence and Time,” trans. Barbara Harshav, in *Entre nous*, 133–53. This essay was later modified and published as “Philosophy and Transcendence,” trans. Michael B. Smith, in *Alterity and Transcendence*, 3–37.

troubling for Plotinian rhetoric on logical grounds. For example, the One is described at Enneads V.5.6.5 as "formless (aneideon)," and at V.5.10.20ff. as unlimited or infinite (apeiron). Each of these predicates is equally attributable to matter. Matter is formless because it is deprived of any qualities that form would bring to it; indeed at II.4.13.24, matter is described as "med' eidos," a formulation which has the same import as aneideon. Plotinus uses the term apeiron to describe matter at several places in the Enneads. Throughout II.4.14 and II.4.15, apeiron is used as a synonym for the lack of qualities that is synonymous with privation, and hence with matter (e.g. II.4.14.29–30). And at I.8.3.14, evil (and hence matter) is defined in terms of its contrariety, using both the terms apeiron and aneideon: "At this point one would be able to arrive at some conception of evil as a kind of unmeasuredness in relation to measure, and unboundedness in relation to limit (apeiron pros peras), and formlessness in relation to formative principle (aneideon pros eidopoietikon)." Both matter and the One are described in terms of alpha-privative predicates which are hence contraries. Yet the logical problems raised here are immense. First, how is it possible for the qualitative marks of beings—limit and the formative principle which is identical to the objective logos—32—to have more than one contrary? Although there are many things that can be negations of x (both red and black are not white), there cannot be more than one thing that is the contrary of x (black, and not red, is the contrary of white). Secondly, although Plotinus describes both the One and matter as lacking qualities, it is impossible for there to be more than one entity that is deprived of all qualities. For if there were two entities that were without qualities, there would have to be a difference between them—or else there would be only one entity without qualities—and that difference would have to be qualitatively. This would reintroduce qualification in that which is not supposed to have qualities, and make the point senseless. The Aristotelian and Platonic resistance to theorizing around the concept of pure lack avoids these problems.

Plotinus has no logical answer to this conundrum, and I will not attempt to supply him with one here. A beginning path towards an answer will appear in the discussion of Maimonides below. For the moment, it suffices to state only that the relationship between the One and matter is closer than the standard account of emanation which posits that they are two poles which could not be further apart. According to this standard account, on the one side stands the First, ultimately prior: the One which emanates. On the other side stands the Last, ultimately posterior: the matter which is the final "thing" (if that is the right term) to be derived from the One because there is nothing more indefinite than it. If this intimacy is overtly expressed at all in Plotinus, it is in his psychology, which implies that the very distance between the poles leads to a relationship between the embodied soul and the One which is a relationship of the most intimate and fervent desire. This desire institutes teleology as an ethical norm; Plotinus' ethic is a Stoic discipline performed in the name of that which transcends being. Yet this desire would signify only the cruelty of the One if it were not satisfiable; desire must also be potentiality. That which constitutes the satisfaction of this desire is, however, based on the recognition of privation as evil; the soul's desire for the One is the desire to replace the pain associated with the evil of the material world with the pleasure of seeing beauty (III.5.1). Yet in certain places, Plotinus describes the ultimate satisfaction of the soul's desire as more than aesthetic bliss. At the opening of I.2, Plotinus states that the soul's telos is to become godlike and refers to Theaetetus 176a; at I.2.6.3, Plotinus goes even further and states that it is "to be god (theon einai)."

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33 Here, of course, the most relevant tractate of the Enneads is that on Eros, III.5. Cf. Pierre Hadot's commentary on this tractate, Traité 50: III, 5 (Paris: Cerf, 1990).


35 I take the position that God and the One are identical, and furthermore, follow the claim of Richard Sorabji that "union involves something less than identity." Cf. Sorabji, Time, Creation & the Continuum (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 160. For other discussions of what apotheosis means in Plotinus, cf. Rist, 213–30; Meijer, 294–325 and 58–64 (although the two passages seems to make different
Whatever constitutes this conjunction of the human and the divine, we can be sure that it involves one thing: the dismissal of nonbeing, qua matter and privation, from the soul (VI.5.12.23–24): “when someone has come to be also from nonbeing (*ek tou me ontos*), he is not ‘all’ (*pas*) except when he rejects the nonbeing.” Given the fact that Plotinus describes the origin of the human as within the “all” that is also the goal, Levinas’ assertion that Plotinian teleology reflects the typical totality of Greek thought as “an adventure of return and a coincidence with the origin”36 undoubtedly rings true. Yet the claim that the self has *also* come to be from nonbeing means that the opposite assertion rings true as well. Consider the following fascinating passage which narrates the origin of the soul embedded within the material body (VI.4.14.23–32) as the story in which the higher intellectual pure soul of the individual is taken hostage by the schemes of the material body.

But now another man [*anthropos allos*—the embodied human], wishing to exist, approached that [intellectual] man; and when he found us—for we were not outside of the All—he wound himself round us and attached himself to that man who was then each one of us . . . And we have come to be the pair of them, not the one which we were before—and sometimes just the other one which we added on afterwards, when that prior one is inactive and in another way not present.

From the perspective of the second self, the “other man,” the path to the One is an adventure without return. And the remark in this passage that the “other man” at times causes the original essential self to disappear from view, taken in addition to those passages in the *Enneads* mentioned above which describe matter as a force which smothers form and soul to the level of an adorned corpse—can only stress this point. From the view of the original self, the path to the One is a reunion. Yet this is the philosopher’s view, in hindsight; there is no claim that this is the view of the paired self who is on this path.37

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36 Emmanuel Levinas, "From the One to the Other: Transcendence and Time," 136.

37 This will be immediately met with the objection that this is not a substantive argument. After all, can’t one say the same thing about the epistemology of the *Meno*? After all, the slave-boy is not conscious of his return to the knowledge of the length of a diagonal of a square either, yet Socrates clearly speaks of it as
In conclusion, meontology for Plotinus is only applicable to the material world, in spite of the multifaceted use of nonbeing in the Enneads. Moreover, it is less true than the ontology that refers to the intelligible world. Meontology takes place in the shadow of ontology. This is also true for Aristotle, although the “realms” (if this word is appropriate) of meontology and ontology are different. For both Aristotle and Plotinus, the rhetoric of nonbeing is always bound up with the rhetoric of potentiality. Yet for Aristotle, meontological language is inapplicable to material objects who exist in a state of natural perfection (e.g. the person who sees); for Plotinus meontological language is appropriate for every material object because it is partially constituted by matter qua the privation of being and form.

Maimonidean Meontology

With the Greek contexts thus described, it is possible now to return to the exemplary mention of privation—what Cohen understands to be to me on—in Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed. The most relevant section of Guide I:17 (G 43) reads as follows.

I have divided it into sections for handier analysis.

(1) Now you know that the principles of the existents subject to generation and corruption are three: Matter, Form, and Particularized Privation, which is always connected [muqarin] with matter.

(2) For, were it not for this connection with Privation, Matter would not receive Form. It is in this sense that Privation is to be considered as one of the principles.

(3) However, when a form is achieved, the particular privation in question, I mean the privation of the form that is achieved, disappears, and another privation is conjoined with matter; and this goes on for ever, as has been made clear in natural science.

(4) Now as even those upon whom the charge of corruption would not be laid in the event of clear exposition used terms figuratively and resorted to teaching in similes, how much all the more is it incumbent upon us, the community of those adhering to Law, not to state explicitly a matter that is either remote from the understanding of the multitude or the truth of which as it appears to the imagination of these people is different from what is intended by us. Know this also.

return and return only. Nevertheless, it remains the case the Plotinian description of the paired self in VI.4, a description which reifies ignorance as a positive entity, goes beyond anything that the Meno has to offer.

38 The alteration of Shlomo Pines' translation of the Guide here is Diana Lobel's.
I:17 progresses from an aping of Aristotelian arguments toward a complete embracing of the Plotinian worldview. The first sentence of the section I have identified as (1), as pointed out earlier, is almost a carbon copy of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1069b32–34, which states that the principles of the beings which come to be and pass away are matter, form, and privation. If Maimonides were explicitly adhering to the Plotinian worldview, then he presumably would have stated that there are only two principles, form and matter. However, the second sentence of (1), i.e. the statement that matter is always and everywhere "connected" with privation, is closer to a Plotinian argument. Maimonides does not explicitly equate matter and privation in the sense that Plotinus does in the second *Ennead*. At the same time he is not explicitly separating them in the way that Aristotle does. The language of "connection" skirts over the question of whether the number of principles is actually two or three. Thus it appears that, in (1), Maimonides' position is stretched between that of Aristotle and that of Plotinus.

When we turn to (2), the un-Aristotelian tone is brought into further relief. As demonstrated above, Aristotle's arguments for the three principles of objects in *Physics* A are intended as explanations for the possibility of change. Yet Maimonides here argues that the inclusion of privation as one of the three principles is necessary in order to explain how matter can receive form. The language of reception is rather un-Aristotelian; although both Aristotle and Plotinus see form as being in matter, only Plotinus uses such a strong language of reception (cf. III.4.1.15). Finally, the claim in statement (3) of the eternal conjunction of matter with privation seems to be even further away from the views of Aristotle. The metaphysical view that every object *X* will always be marked under the sign of the privative "not" (for if an *X* not-*Y* object becomes *Y*, it is now not-*X*, not to mention

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39 It should be noted that even if Maimonides knew the *Enneads* directly, there is no current evidence that he would have had access to the second *Ennead*. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Maimonides did not have access to the views of the second *Ennead* via other Neoplatonic sources or the writings of the Arabic Aristotelians.
not-Z, etc.) does not correspond with the Aristotelian example of blindness, since sight is never described as the privation of blindness. Maimonides here seems to be defining matter by its eternal connection with the category of privation, closer to the equation of matter and privation found in the Enneads. For Maimonides, privation says something about what it means to exist within the material world; this is true of Plotinus but not true of Aristotle. As a result, those interested in an esoteric reading of the Guide can read (4) of I:17 as more than a simple reiteration of a warning to keep the masses away from difficult issues. The refusal to state matters explicitly reappears as Maimonides' own—witting or unwitting—use of Aristotelian dicta in order to hide and express a Plotinian worldview, in which the material realm is seen as a realm of privation, as one of pure potentiality.40

What is at stake in this account of privation in Maimonides that I have used to argue for a Plotinian meontology in the Guide? The answer to this question is literary. As I noted above, Plotinus does not have a strict argument leading from the nature of nonbeing to the desire of the soul for the One; rather, the empirical observation of the desire to turn toward pleasure and away from pain is associated with the nature of nonbeing. This association finds a parallel in the Guide in the literary transition from I:17 to I:18; what is at stake in meontology for Maimonides is thus, I claim, the possibility to awaken a desire for God and the path of nearing God that this desire unfolds.

Leo Strauss has previously noticed the oddness of Guide I:17. In "How to Begin to Study The Guide of the Perplexed" (G xxx), Leo Strauss notes the sudden shift from the analysis of Biblical uses of the word tzur ("rock") at I:16 to the discussion of the prohibition of the masses' education in divine and natural science as a striking interruption of "the continuity of the argument." Although Strauss claims that I:17 and the other non-lexicographic chapters (i.e. those that do not perform semantic analyses) of the first part of

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40 Thus, I think that only a part of the picture is given in Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 91: "in Chapter 17, Maimonides presents a more Aristotelian 'scientific' account of the nature of generation and corruption."
the Guide “are subtly interwoven with the chapters preceding and following them,” the
primary conclusion which he draws from I:17 is not about this interweaving per se.
Instead, the reader comes upon musings on the role of the numeral 17 in Maimonidean
numerology: “17 stands for nature.” Strauss’ analysis is simultaneously tantalizing and
frustrating, and invites a wrestling with the relationship between the lexicographic and
non-lexicographic sections of the first part of the Guide. It would not be an overstatement
to say that Maimonides’ crafting skills suddenly come to the fore at I:17. After the opening
masterly demonstrations of the claim that Biblical language participates in many striations
of meaning, the next several sections of this part fall into applications of the theory, lists of
various Biblical prooftexts of the equivocalities which Maimonides finds in Torah.41 After
16 of these examples, there is no reason to expect a change in Maimonides’ writing style.
The sudden insertion of non-lexicographic sections into the first part of the Guide serve as
a wake-up call, which guide the reader to further reflection upon the thematic connection
between the metaphysical discussion and the equivocal language analyzed in the subsequent
section.42

I:17 is thus not only Maimonides’ reminder to his disciple R. Joseph of the prin-
ciples of Aristotelian metaphysics; neither is it only an esoteric argument for Plotinus over
and above Aristotle. It is a broad underlining that forces the reader to pay special attention
to the citations and analyses of Biblical texts that follow. The reader’s concentration is al-
ready raised, through Maimonides’ deft deploying of his rhetorical skill, when internalizing
the theme of I:18, that of “approach” or “drawing near.” In the literary structure of the
Guide, the brief discussion of privation calls forth a discussion of nearing, and as the
context of I:18 makes clear, a discussion of what it means to near God. As nonbeing in

41 Readers who are overly familiar with postmodern or New Critical theories of the role of metaphor in
language may be nonplussed.

42 A fuller explication of this claim would also examine the relationship between I:45 (on “to hear”) and
the concluding arguments on God’s incorporeality in I:46.
Plotinus gives rise to the desire for its contrary and the discipline necessary for eliminating it from the soul, the discussion of privation in Maimonides gives rise to a discussion of how to conquer privation by nearing God through cognitive apprehension—through prophecy.

Even as a member of the list of equivocal terms, "nearing" is by no means clear in the *Guide*. There is no firm answer to the question of whether the goal of nearing is union with the telos, or whether nearness to God is in itself own goal. At the opening of I:18 (G 44), Maimonides writes that approach and nearing refer in the figurative sense to "the union of cognition with what is cognized, which is, as it were, similar to the proximity of one body to another." Spatial nearness thus seems to be a code for cognitive union. There are certain points in the *Guide* at which Maimonides seems to define all cognition as unitive; at I:68 (G 164), Maimonides argues from the example of cognizing an object within the field of vision as a piece of wood:

The thing that is intellectually cognized is the abstract form of the piece of wood, that this form is identical with the intellect realized in actu, and that these are not two things—in telos and the intellectually cognized form of the piece of wood... Whenever, therefore, you assume that an intellect exists in actu, that intellect is identical with the apprehension of what has been intellectually cognized.

Maimonides takes the Aristotelian view, found most readily at *De Anima* III:5 (430a17–18) that when the mind successfully apprehends an object, its essence is its act (G 164): "the act of the intellect, which is its apprehension, is the true reality and the essence of the intellect." The cognizing subject is nothing outside of its acts of apprehension. Yet this apprehension is nothing else than *poiesis*, the creation as re-presentation within mind of the pure abstract form of the cognized object, stripped away from its material substrate. If the intellecting subject is no more than the content of its acts of intellectual apprehension, and if the content of each act of apprehension is the formal nature of the cognized object, then by syllogistic reasoning, successful cognition is the union of subject and object.

Yet I:18 at certain points moves away from the unitive model of I:68. The
figurative meaning of drawing near is later (G 44) described as "union in/of knowledge and drawing near through apprehension." If knowledge is nothing outside of its acts of apprehension, as 1:68 tells us, then the reader should rightly ask, "Which is it: union or drawing near?" Presumably, it cannot be both. The situation is further complicated by Maimonides' use of phrases such as "nearness through cognition, I mean cognitive apprehension" and the condemnation of all such spatial vocabulary in the name of the non-spatial nature of the cognitive relationship (G 44): "there is no nearness and proximity, and no remoteness, no union and no separation, no contact and no succession." At the same time that the unitive model is decried as linguistically falling short of the mark, the spatial language is still necessary, given that Maimonides claims (G 45) that "there are very many gradations in being near to or far away from Him [in respect of apprehension]." While this most probably simply states that every actual cognition of God still contains a potential for a more complete cognition of God, this statement raises the disturbing corollary that this more complete cognition would involve the cognition of another part of God—and God, as absolutely simplex, cannot have parts.44

I stated above that the claim that we come to know privation calls forth a discussion of nearing God through the literary structure of the Guide. This does not mean that Maimonides has no argument to back this up; it simply means that this argumentation is not to be found in 1:17 or 1:18. Instead, it is necessary to turn to 1:55. There (G 128)

43 The same uneasy co-habitation of the rhetoric of nearness and union can be found in Neoplatonic writings. At The Life of Plotinus 23.15–16, Porphyry writes that Plotinus’ "end and goal was to be united to, to approach (henothemai kai pelasai) the God who is over all things."

44 In personal communication, Edith Wyschogrod asks me whether Maimonides' theory of gradations of apprehension might refer to a scale of the intensity of knowledge. My impression is that cognition in Maimonides is an all-or-nothing affair—one either cognizes the wood or one doesn’t—although the cognition of objects further back along the causal chain is more intense then the cognition of a mere piece of wood. A fuller discussion of this issue would need to take the following path: a) a discussion of whether the cognition of the piece of wood in 1:68 is a compound of cognition of each of the wood’s essential attributes; b) a discussion of whether the cognition of God in Maimonides is a compound of operations that no attribute from A to Z and beyond is appropriate to God, and thus contains "parts" in a unique sense; c) a discussion of the relationship between Maimonides and Spinoza and the distinction between numerical and intensive infinities in Spinoza's Ethics.
Maimonides makes the claim common to both Aristotle and Plotinus that “privation is necessarily attached to all potentiality.” Potentiality contains its teleological vector within it; potentiality is always potentiality-for-something-actual. But what is this actuality in the case of the self mired in the prison-house of the material world? I:18 claims that nearing God is the answer to the question of what constitutes the human’s passage from potentiality to actuality. Yet in this very answer, Maimonides once again reveals his Plotinian colors. As stated in the above analysis of I:17, Maimonides interprets the realm of generation and corruption as a realm eternally deprived of form at least in some respect.\footnote{The similarities between the distinction of material and immaterial realms in Maimonides and Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal realms lies outside of the bounds of this chapter. I hope to deal with the Kant-Maimonides relationship in far fuller detail at some point in the future.} As long as an object possesses matter, it will stand essentially opposed to the form that is intellection in actuality. True enough, some of my potentialities may become actual. I may start moving, and thus actualize the potentiality of rest; I may even cognize a piece of wood. Nevertheless, in Maimonides’ view the self can never become complete pure actuality. Actuality is the province of God (G 128): “all His perfections must exist in actuality, and nothing may belong to Him that exists potenti-ally in any respect whatever.” The privation of actuality is the province of humankind and the material world. The central claim of Maimonides’ “negative theology” in Guide I:58—that in discussing divine attributes, any attribute signifies (G 136) “the negation of the privation of the attribute in question”—is a further corollary of the claim in I:55 that “one must likewise of necessity deny, with reference to Him, His being similar to any existing thing.” God and humankind could not be more different.

Existing things—including humans—are thus completely dissimilar from God. In the exploration of Maimonides’ appropriation of the Greek doctrine of to me on, one conclusion cannot be avoided. Maimonides follows Greek thinking to the utmost insofar as meontology is not a study of God. To me on is not opposed to being in the same sense as Levinas’ au-delà de l’être. For Maimonides, God is in no sense deprived of being, but
is rather being in the most pure actuality. God's essence is hyperessential with reference to what goes by the name of essence in the material world, and God's existence is hyperessential with reference to what goes by the name of existence in the material world. Meontology in Aristotle, Plotinus, and Maimonides is a study of the world as utterly deprived of being in any meaningful—i.e. absolute—sense. For any philosopher who uses God as the yardstick of being, there is no choice but to look upon the material world as meontological, as inferior if not evil. Insofar as this is the case, Maimonides follows standard Plotinian accounts of matter as concomitant with to me on and hence "evil" insofar as it is not completely actualized. At the opening of the discussion of providence in the third part of the Guide, Maimonides affirms (III:9; G 436) other philosophers' belief that "matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is. It does this even if it is the matter of the heavenly spheres." Matter is always associated with privation (III:10; G 440): the nature of the matter created by God "consists in matter always being a concomitant of privation, as is known." And "all evils are privations," as Maimonides writes earlier in the same chapter (G 439), because evils have no essence of their own, but are only evils in privative relation to some good. Thus, matter and evil share a strong family resemblance. Insofar as human existence is material existence, it would seem to be as separate as possible from the goodness that Maimonides associates with God.

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48 On the other hand, it is equally important to allay despair by noting that human existence is not only material existence. Insofar as the objects of the world are created through the actualizing power of God's thought (III:21; G 485), they are hylomorphic beings, containing form as well as matter, and are hence good at the level of their true reality (III:10; G 440: "Accordingly the true reality of the act of God in its entirety is the good, for the good is being"). However, the particular material substrate of God's acts prevents the objects of the world from being good as the hylomorphic objects that they are. A full resolution of this issue must broach the question of whether God knows particular objects and acts upon them.
This separation would seem to be heightened by Maimonides' refusal to include attributes of relation within the list of acceptable attributes of God. At I:52, Maimonides argues that positing a relation between God and humankind would place them in the same species, and thus would presumably begin a slippery slope downward to the attribution of corporeality to God. Maimonides argues that "if a relation subsisted between them [God and humankind], it would necessarily follow that the accident of relation must be attached to God." The danger of this passage for theology is not what one might think. It is not that the accident under question would necessitate thinking of God as a whole with parts, and hence no longer completely One. Rather, the danger lies in positing too great a nearness between God and spatiotemporal existents. Both God and humankind exist, but for Maimonides (G 118) "existence is in our opinion affirmed of Him, may He be exalted, and of what is other than He merely by way of absolute equivocation." For humankind, existence is spatiotemporal and embodied; to say the same of God is blasphemous. To speak of God as related to humankind is to assign the accidents of the relata—time and space—to God himself. When God enters history and embraces time, he embraces (G 117) "an accident attached to motion"; this echoes the Aristotelian definition of time as "a measure of motion and of being moved." Yet motion is only applicable to bodies, and God cannot be a body. Hence God cannot relate to spatiotemporal beings. The absence of relation between God and humankind is greater than the absence of relation between knowledge and sweetness (G 118): "How could there subsist a relation between Him, may He be exalted, and any of the things created by Him, given the immense difference between them with regard to the true reality of their existence, than which there is no greater difference?"

Nevertheless, these claims cannot be all-encompassing. What is important in the

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believe that this is not the case, and cite II:12 later in part as evidence for this. One might also point out that Maimonides' prooftext for the goodness of the objects of the world is Genesis 1:31, which states that God sees objects as good only insofar as he sees them as a totality: "And God saw all that he had made (vayar 'elohim et kol asher 'asah).

49 Physics Δ.12, 221a1.
denial of attributes of relation, or in the claims of I:52 and I:55 that God is not similar to creatures, is not the denial of similarity tout court but rather the denial of similarity to a thing, i.e. to a substance. If it is possible to think of certain of God's creatures in non-spatiotemporal ways, then the language of similarity can creep back in to the Guide in another fashion. This is not very difficult; obviously, a human individual is more than simply material substance—and even more than formal qualities existing within or imposed onto material substance. The similarity between God and humankind lies on a completely different axis than that of substance: that of act.\footnote{Diana Lobel, "Silence is Praise To You: On Negative Theology and Religious Experience" (forthcoming) is a necessary condition of the reflections below, and I am greatly indebted to her for sharing it with me.}

Maimonides defines God at I:68 as pure intellect, divorced from the spatiotemporal world. Intellect here is not reified; for Maimonides, the definition of God as pure self-apprehension is a description of God's life (G 122): "life and knowledge form in this case one notion."\footnote{Cf. Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} A.7, 1072b26–27: "Life belongs to God, for the actuality (energeia) of the intellect is life, and He is actuality."} If one were to risk blasphemy and reduce God to a grammatical particle, one would have to say that in the Guide, God is not a substantive noun, but a verbal particle. God does not possess knowledge as some sort of faculty, but simply knows; God is not the knower but knowing. God does not possess life, but is simply living. God does not possess intellect, but is simply intelligencing. To define God as intellect is to define God as pure actuality and acting, and thereby to highlight the difference between God and his creatures by refusing to stain God with the language of reification of substance. This is not a philosopher's dictum in the same sense that the eternality of the world is, i.e. an opinion which can be countered with some authority. Rather, this is a "demonstration" of God's essence (G 165), a stronger term because it is used in the Guide to refer to both philosophical and Jewish sources: for example, Maimonides sees the Talmud as a series of demonstrations of the rational validity of the Written Torah (III:54; G 633).
It is by now a commonplace within studies of Maimonidean “negative theology” that the only attributes allowed of God are attributes of action; we cannot speak of what God is—as when we say that John Doe is a weaver—but only of what God does—as when we say that Mr. Doe masterfully wove these 400-thread pillowcases. To speak of God as a weaver is not only to attribute ontological multiplicity to God (for God would thus have qualities/properties and no longer be simplex) but also to introduce motion and hence embodiment into our language.\textsuperscript{52} When we speak about humans in terms of attributes of action, we speak in terms of attributes (G 119) that are “remote from the essence of the thing” of which said attributes are predicated. Thus, Maimonides gives the example of an attribute of action in I:52 of Zayd as a carpenter. This refers to Zayd’s action of (for example) door-making, while his essence (as a man) remains hidden behind this action. Knowing that Zayd made the door tells us nothing about what it means for Zayd to be a rational animal. By analogy, one would conclude that knowing God’s actions tells us nothing about God’s essential attributes. Arthur Hyman gives the following example, which remains the clearest in the secondary literature:

Suppose that (a) a being $X$ exists in an otherwise empty room; (b) wood, nails, and other materials are introduced into the room; (c) nothing miraculous happens in the room; and (d) after some time a finished table is handed out of the room. From these conditions we can infer that $X$ has the ability to make a table, though we do not gain any knowledge of what kind of being $X$ is or of any property that enables $X$ to make a table.\textsuperscript{53}

This is an apt description of what Maimonides is aiming at when he writes at I:58 that God is not a creator but that (G 136) “His existence suffices for the bringing into existence of things other than He.” However, Hyman’s example seems to assume that God’s essence or properties remain hidden behind our material veil, whereas Maimonides asserts over and over again in the \textit{Guide} that God cannot have any properties whatsoever because


\textsuperscript{53} Hyman, 186.
the language of quality with reference to God introduces ontological multiplicity. This would also have to include hidden properties. The essence of God is not hidden to humans; Maimonides baldly tells the reader at I:58 that the essence of God is existence (G 136).54 This is the only “property” which God has, and an analysis of the divine life (existence) leads to certain claims about divine knowledge, divine eternality, creation, etc. It would therefore seem that the limiting of divine attributes to attributes of action does not posit a set of hidden divine attributes that we cannot know. Rather, to speak in terms of attributes of action is a consequence of a greater degree of knowledge, because this language reflects our knowledge that only for God are essence and existence equal. In speaking of God’s actions instead of God’s properties, we do good theology, because God’s “being” is nothing outside of God’s acting.55

This interpretation of I:58 is, on the surface, at odds with direct claims that Maimonides makes at I:54 (G 123), primarily the pithy statement that “His essence cannot be grasped as it really is.” Maimonides bolsters this claim through narrating the conversation between Moses and God at Ex. 33:20–23. Here, Moses asks to see the divine glory, which Maimonides interprets to be identical to the divine essence; God responds by only assenting to Moses’ request from Ex. 33:13 to see God’s ways and rebuffing the request for vision of God’s essence by informing Moses that His face cannot be seen. (There are similar interpretations of this conversation at I:21 [G 48] and I:37 [G 86].) Nevertheless, it

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A comparative analysis of the essence–existence relationship in Maimonidean theology and Heideggerean anthropology—an analysis which is absolutely necessary in order properly to distinguish between the religious and the pagan—lies outside the bounds of this chapter.

55 Likewise, Philo associated the properties of God with His actions, arguing that this must be the case because God’s properties must be simplex as he is, and actions cannot be converted into the language of substance and attribute which threatens the incomposite nature of God. Cf. Harry Wolfson, Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 130ff.
may be the case that the contradiction between I:54 and I:58 is only apparent. Alexander Altmann has noted that Maimonides oscillates between two notions of essence in the Guide: On one hand, essence can refer to the true reality of an object, and be expressed in the language of a definition which notes the genus and the specific differentiae of an object. On the other hand, there is the essence of God which is His existence, as expressed in the name of God of Ex. 3:14 ‘ehyeh asher ehyeh, “I am that I am.” Thus, when God responds to Moses’ request to see the divine essence by showing Moses His ways, by which Maimonides understands the totality of the beings which are the result of the act of creation, this does not contradict Moses’ request to see God’s essence if “essence” is understood in the sense in which it applies to God. Moses asks to see God’s essence; God responds by showing him His existence, the objects of the world which are the result of his life of intellecting action (III:21; G 485): created things “follow upon His knowledge, which preceded and established them as they are.” This is not to say that one can imagine how God is that He is; one cannot map out the mechanism by which thought in and of itself is creative. If “you cannot see my face” means anything, it is this. This would appear to be the upshot of Maimonides’ statement in III:21:

For through knowing the true reality of His own immutable essence, He also knows the totality of what necessarily derives from all His acts. For us to desire to have an intellectual cognition of the way this comes about is as if we desired that we be He and our apprehension be His apprehension. He who studies true reality equitably ought accordingly to believe that nothing is hidden in any way from Him, may He be exalted, but that, on the contrary, everything is revealed to His knowledge, which is His essence, and that it is impossible for us to know in any way this kind of apprehension. If we knew how it comes about, we would have an intellect in virtue of which an apprehension of this kind might be had.

But this does not mean that we cannot know that God’s essence is action, and that creation of the world is the result of divine self-apprehension. To deny this would be to deny that the descriptions of God’s actions in the Torah give us any insight into God’s existence, and hence God’s essence, and would therefore undermine the very project of the Guide to reconcile the Torah with philosophy. Maimonides only means to say that we cannot know

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how God is that he is; even describing this “how” as a mechanism of creation would risk assigning “parts” and hence materiality to a putative creative structure. Certainly it is the case that one cannot explain the process by which thinking happens to be creating through recourse to hidden attributes such as those of a machine (gears, cogs, computer chips, etc.), since this would already mark a reversion to the language of part and whole which Maimonides associates with materiality and not with the immaterial and incomposite intellect.

Intellect qua action is the axis on which theology is allowed to posit similarities between God and humankind. It is in this sense that Maimonides, in the opening chapter of the Guide, explains that the relationship of image between man and God—as expressed in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image”—as one of intellect. Genesis 1:26 speaks the way that it does (G 23) “because of the divine intellect conjoined with man.” If image, in the Bible, refers to (G 22) “the true reality of the thing in so far as the latter is that particular being,” then the true reality of humanity is intellect. However, this is veiled by the material shape in which this intellect lies. Intellect is thus the most perfect part of human nature—it is the divine part of human nature—but the rhetoric of intellect in Maimonides is essentially a rhetoric of action, of intellecting. The intellect is not a thing, as the brain is, because its essence is action (I:68; G 164): “And it has become clear that the act of every intellect, which act consists in its being intellectually cognizing is identical with the essence of that intellect.” And this is true for both humans (G 164) and God (G 165).

The evidence examined thus far points to a bifurcation in the essence of humankind. On one axis, as seen above, humankind is matter and God is not, and never the twain shall meet. God and the human are infinitely distant, and God is absolutely transcendent. To threaten this supreme distance in any way would be to imagine God as a body, which would be both heretical and false. On the other axis, God and humankind are both intellect. God and the human are infinitesimally close, and exist in some sort of intimate
relationship. This double viewpoint is suggested by Simon Rawidowicz: "Maimonides envisaged both the maximum of remoteness and the infinite[esimal] nearness between God and man." 57

This bifurcation is at stake in much of the secondary literature on Maimonides in the last fifty years, which has dealt with the extent of the role of the intellect in the description of the human telos in Maimonides. Is human perfection intellectual perfection or moral perfection? Given the equivalence which Maimonides draws between intellect and act, I am puzzled as to why this has to be a choice. In any case, the fact of this choice has long been taken for granted, and lies at the bottom of the now-famous debate between Shlomo Pines and Alexander Altmann on the nature of ultimate human perfection in the Guide. 58 For Pines, the ontological gap between the completely transcendent God and the finite individual is never bridged in the least. The divide between the two poles is so great for Pines that he argues Maimonides to be fundamentally anti-Aristotelian on the issue of human perfection. Whereas for Aristotle in the final book of the Nicomachean Ethics the perfectly human life is a life of theory, for Maimonides human perfection is oriented toward the practical, and primarily political, life. Pines’ argumentation from within the material of the Guide itself (there is additional evidence from al-Farabi and ibn Bajja)—is primarily twofold. First, Pines cites the passage from III:9 in which Maimonides makes a blanket statement about the limitations of human reason in all contexts (G 436), since matter “is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate” from the material world.


58 Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82–109; Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and Scope of Metaphysics," in Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 60–129. An excellent survey of the issues can be found in Menachem Kellner, Maimonides on Human Perfection (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); I disagree with its conclusion (64) that the Guide is "a guide leading us from the view of God as intellect to the view of God as active in the world." I do not see any reason why these views should be seen as mutually exclusive.
Second, Pines interprets Maimonides' description of divine attributes as attributes of action in the same way that Arthur Hyman does. The knowledge of God is in no way positive knowledge, but only negative knowledge limited to “the natural phenomena and their causes,” having only to do with divine science as traditionally understood. Altmann does not argue against Pines that there are no limitations to human knowledge—for example, Altmann claims that Maimonides does not believe in the possible conjunction of the human intellect with the Active Intellect (the intellect that governs the tenth and lowest sphere, according to medieval cosmology)—yet he does argue that there is a theoretical perfection which is described in Maimonides' theory of the actualized “acquired” human intellect. This perfection is, in Altmann's view, a state of similarity to the Active Intellect. This view, unlike Pines', allows for humans to have some metaphysical knowledge by achieving perfection in divine science. Because there is some apprehension of the divine in Altmann's view of the Guide, one can describe his viewpoint as positing a greater degree of ontological intimacy between the human and the divine than the viewpoint of Pines.

The range of views on what exactly constitutes human perfection for Maimonides is due in great part to the difficulty of III:54, the final section of the Guide, in which Maimonides describes human perfection in apparently opposite manners. In a sequential ranking of four perfections, the fourth and highest perfection (G 635)

is the true human perfection; it consists in the acquisition of the rational virtues—I refer to the conception of intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning divine things. This is in true reality the ultimate end; this is what gives the individual true perfection, a perfection belonging to him alone; and it gives him permanent perdurance; through it man is man.

Intellectual perfection is the perfection of man's essence, and it lies higher than moral

59 Pines, 98.

60 Altmann, 84.

61 Neither Pines nor Altmann subscribe to such a position as that taken by David Blumenthal, "Maimonides' Intellectual Mysticism and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses," Studies in Medieval Culture 10 (1977), 51–67. Blumenthal claims that Maimonides is a figure within an Arabic tradition of "intellectualist mysticism," which argues for the possibility of an experience of "contact and communication" between the human intellect and the divine intellect.
perfection (the third perfection in the sequence). This stance resonates with many passages in the Guide, particularly III:27, where Maimonides flatly asserts (G 511) that human “perfection is to become rational in actu”, and III:51, where Maimonides describes (G 623) the exalted ranks of the Patriarchs and Moses within Jewish tradition as due to “the union of their intellects [with God] through apprehension of Him.” Yet shortly after this passage —almost at the very end of the Guide—Maimonides seems to change his mind and switch the hierarchy of perfections to one in which moral or practical perfection is superior to intellectual perfection. Using Jeremiah 9:23 as a prooftext, Maimonides claims (G 637–38) that devotion to God is not merely an intellectual delight, but also a delight in God’s attributes of action. The way of life of this really truly perfect person “will always have in view loving-kindness, righteousness and judgment, through assimilation to His actions, may He be exalted, just as we have explained several times in this treatise.” Here it does seem, as Cohen will argue, that morality is the essence of God, and a family resemblance with Levinas’ dictum “ethics is first philosophy” comes to the fore.

But to view the poles of this dichotomy as mutually exclusive would be a mistake. At III:53 (G 632), the divine actional attributes of loving-kindness, righteousness and judgment are described in intellectualist terms, thus forestalling any distinction that commentators might want to make between the theoretical and the practical.

When refuting the doctrine of divine attributes, we have already explained that every attribute by which God is described in the books of the prophets is an attribute of action. Accordingly He is described as chasid [one possessing loving-kindness] because He has brought the all into being; as tzaddiq [righteous] because of His mercy toward the weak—I refer to the governance of the living being by means of its forces; and as shophet [Judge] because of the occurrence in the world of relative good things and of relative great calamities, necessitated by judgment that is consequent upon wisdom.

With this description, only the actional attribute of mishpat (judgment) is described in explicitly intellectualist terms; judgment is consequent upon the wisdom that constitutes God’s essence as self-intellecting existence. Yet the description of the other two attributes can also be recast into intellectualist language; for this it is necessary to follow Maimonides’
advice (Dedicated; G 15) to his student Joseph that “if you wish to grasp the totality of what this Treatise contains, then you must connect its chapters one with another.” Here in III:53, the divine chesed or lovingkindness is expressed through God’s creation of the world. Thus we have a link between a practical perfection and creation. However, in the first part of the Guide, in the very discussion of the divine attributes to which Maimonides directs his reader (I:58; G 136), Maimonides interprets creation to be a necessary corollary of God’s intellectual essence. This is a consequence of God’s being described as the negation of all privations associated with the material realm. Thus when God is described as “powerful,” this means that God is the negation of all privations associated with powerlessness. For Maimonides, this entails that God is ultimately powerful, that “His existence suffices for the bringing into existence of things other than He.” To repeat, the chain of reasoning is as follows. First, Maimonides states at I:68 that “it has been demonstrated that God is an intellect in actu. Second, it is necessary to describe this intellect through the language of “negation of privation,” as Maimonides claims at I:58, since privation is always concomitant with matter, as I showed above in my analysis of I:17, and it is necessary to protect the transcendence of God by protecting our conception of Him from the material realm. Third, the language of “negation of privation” necessitates our speaking of God as Creator, not only because God is so powerful that he has the power to create, but also because the actuality of divine self-apprehension entails creation. Here it is important to cite the engimatic passage from III:21 in which Maimonides describes God as knowing things into being, insofar as (G 485) “through knowing the true reality of His own immutable essence, He also knows the totality of what necessarily derives from His acts,” which, according to I:68, are His essence. The creation of the world is a corollary of God’s ultimate intellectual perfection. There is no difference between cognition and action when speaking of God.

With regard to divine tzedaqah/rightness, a similar chain of reasoning reflecting
the collapse of cognition and action in the Godhead can be made. First, it is apparent that the Arabic word for "governance" in the above passage (tadbir) should call the reader back to the discussion of providence ('inaya) in sections III:17 and following. For in that section, Maimonides' discussion of divine providence is also rooted in a biblical verse (Deut. 32:4) which describe God's ways—i.e. actional attributes—as judgment. Second, divine providence is seen by Maimonides as an intellectual overflow (G 471–72):

"According to me, as I consider the matter, divine providence is consequent upon the divine overflow, and the species with which this intellectual overflow is united ... is the one accompanied by divine providence."62

In the above, we have seen that human perfection is always intellectual, but that this intellectual perfection can be described as lying in two dimensions or axes. On the one hand, looking at the intellect abstracted from its base in the material world, each intellection of God is a union that takes place outside of this world, since the human and divine intellects operate in analogous fashions according to what Maimonides states at I:68. On the other hand, from the broader perspective of the intellect seen within the material world, the teleological process is a gradual nearing to God in which the base of the material world is gradually shed. Here, teleology is always thisworldly (if not only because we are embodied intellects) and must be situated within a social, political, and moral context. Yet

62 The arguments of this paragraph expand upon a general consensus in the secondary literature that an interpretation of Maimonides that separates intellectual and moral perfection would be a misreading. Three examples:


David Novak: "Since contemplation [of God] is of an active, transitive, and intelligent power, that contemplation can—indeed must—overflow into active, transitive, intelligent human action," Natural Law in Judaism, 118.

this context is fitting, since it allows humans to imitate God's actional essence, which mere contemplation of God cannot accomplish; true intellectual worship of God has an actional component. Each political or moral human action appears in this world to be a step on a path of nearing God; yet because action is, in essence, intellectual, imitation of divine actional attributes marks an intellectual (and hence unitive) perfection on the part of the individual.

To conclude, Maimonides opens up a teleological path towards the actualization of human intellect; political and/or moral action is part of this path. The privation that constitutes matter is a privation of intellect, and we can speak of this privation as the absence of something that belongs to humankind naturally, essentially. Rawidowicz' description of the God-human relationship in the Guide is a new expression of the meontological conundrum. There is the relationship of infinite distance: God is the opposite of humankind, the negation of all meontological privations associated with human materiality. And there is the relationship of infinitesimal nearness: the analysis of meontology as potentiality shows the hidden essence of intellect, shared with God, that humans must actualize on their teleological path.

This parallels the conundrum of dialectical vs. critical meontology seen in Chapter 1. The description of human perfection as intellectual perfection points to the telos of human existence as a relation with that which lies beyond that existence. This shares a family resemblance with Levinas' phenomenological demonstration of the God beyond being. Yet the moral and political dimensions of human perfection would seem to support the view that it is what is of primary importance to Maimonides is a Fackenheimian self-making process of a community—the dialectical relation between an individual and others. The choice between these two in Maimonides is positively Solomonic. Are we enjoined to let go of our own sociopolitical and moral creations (communities and other relationships), or of the relation to the Creator? What comes to the fore, then, is the inadequacy of leaving
one of the dimensions behind, and the necessity of holding both in an authentic
togetherness, in which the drive toward an intellectual worship of God of the sort described
in Guide III:51 suffuses our relationships with others.

In the following section, I shall show that Maimonides tries to do exactly this, yet
falls prey to a moral critique which charges him with insufficient attachment to the world.

The Extirpation of the Passions in Maimonides

Debate about the extent to which Maimonides approves of an extirpation of physical
and passionate desire is rampant in the secondary literature. Much of this is rooted in the
problematic juxtaposition of two passages in Hilkhot De'ot ("Laws of Psychological
Characteristics"), an early section in the Mishneh Torah, the summary of Jewish law which
Maimonides wrote ten to fifteen years before the Guide of the Perplexed. On one hand,
Maimonides is completely Aristotelian with regard to the emotions, saying that the good life
is one that cultivates a disposition that lies at the mean between two extremes. 63 Thus, with
regard to anger, Maimonides writes that "a man should not be choleric, easily moved to
anger, nor be like the dead without feeling, but should aim at a happy medium: be angry
only for a grave cause that rightly calls for indignation, so that the like shall not be done
again." 64 On the other hand, there are passages which could be described as Stoic, insofar
as they argue for the extirpation of all passions. 65 Moreover, these passages are at times

63 Maimonides' account here adheres to that of the Shemonah Peraqim (Eight Chapters), the section of his
Commentary on the Mishnah (c. 1168) that deals with the tractate Pirkei Avot. There, Maimonides writes
that the goal of Torah is "for man to be natural by following the middle way." Cf. Ethical Writings of
University Press, 1975), 70.

The locus classicus of the Aristotelian account of the mean is Nicomachean Ethics II:5–II:9. Also
see J. O. Urmson, "Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean" in Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics, ed. Amélie

64 Hilkhot De’ot I:4; trans. Moses Hyamson in A Maimonides Reader, ed. Isadore Twersky (West Orange,
NJ: Behrman House, 1972), 52.

65 This distinction should not be drawn too solidly. In De Ira 1.1.3, Seneca claims that his account of
anger is quite close to Aristotle’s. Nevertheless, Maimonides’ distinction in Hilkhot De’ot I:5 between the
mesotic ideal of the wise man (hakham) and the supererogatory ideal of the pious man (chasid), involves a
similar difference in the role of the passions in decision-making as that between Aristotle and the Stoics.
disturbingly proximate to those of the more Aristotelian tenor. In the very next chapter of Hilkhon De'ot, Maimonides writes that "anger, too, is an extremely bad passion, and one should avoid it to the extreme. . . . The sages charged us that anger should be avoided to such a degree that one should train oneself to be unmoved by things that naturally would provoke anger; and this is the good way." These two opposing attitudes can be found in the Guide as well.67

However we might try to solve this problem within the corpus of Maimonides itself, the fact remains that the Stoic aspects of Maimonides' ethics are not easily dismissed; indeed, commentators usually transform these passages into an argument that the Stoic ethic of supererogation is nearer to actual rabbinic teaching than the Aristotelian ethic that is its bedfellow. Yet at the same time, current readers of Maimonides should question whether the extirpation of the passions is truly part of a good life, Jewish or non-Jewish, in this world. Martha Nussbaum, in The Therapy of Desire, has severely critiqued the Stoic radical detachment from the world, a detachment "that greets slavery and even torture with equanimity," as follows:

The state that Seneca describes is indeed called joy. But consider how he describes it. It is like a child that is born inside of one and never leaves the womb to go out into the world. It has no commerce with laughter and elation. For wise people, we know, are harshly astringent . . . [and] intolerant of idle pleasure in themselves and in others. [The shift from the Aristotelian to the Stoic account of joy] is the change from suspense and elation to solid self-absorption; from surprise and spontaneity to measured watchfulness; from wonder at the separate and external to

66 Hilkhon De'ot II:3; Twersky, 54–55.

67 The Aristotelian viewpoint can be found in II:39; the Stoic in III:8. Cf. Davidson, 46–52.


security in that which is oneself and one's own.\textsuperscript{70}

Maimonides' account of the intellectual love of God in the final chapters of the \textit{Guide} in no way mark a departure from the Stoic account of joy described here. For intellectual love is rooted in the actualization of the human intellect—that which is essential to the human, properly "one's own." One can restate Nussbaum's critique in a more theological fashion: the move inward that is typical of religious teleology is a move which only sees the created realm as the necessary framing environment in which God's revelation takes place. It refuses to see the external world as intrinsically good. It does not know how to make the argument that if God is essentially goodness, then that which he creates (whether or not it is endowed with reason) must also have a good essence. Rather, the world is seen only as good-for: good for the individual who is on the path of actualizing her intellect and performing those actions that are advance her along that path. The world is seen only through the lens of \textit{utility}, as that which my intellect transcends, the necessary precondition for a future felicity that will be commensurate with God's goodness. One might think that this critique reads a medieval text through the filter of modern sensibilities, but readers still must come to terms with the ethical force of this critique.

An exploration of the tendency of Maimonides toward a utilitarian view of the world can be shown through an analysis of two themes: the relation between the messianic age and the world-to-come (with particular attention paid to how this affects the arguments of the \textit{Epistle to Yemen}), and the nature of perfect ethical action in the \textit{Guide}.

Maimonides always draws a strict distinction between the messianic age and the world-to-come. The essence of the distinction is that the messianic age is not a true telos of human action, whereas the world-to-come is. In the \textit{Mishneh Torah, at Hilkhot Teshuvah} (Laws of Repentance) 9:2\textsuperscript{71}, the difference is epigrammatically codified as follows:

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 400–01.

\textsuperscript{71} Translation from M. Hyamson, reproduced at Twersky, 83.
The ultimate and perfect reward, the final bliss which will suffer neither interruption nor diminution, is the life in the world to come. The Messianic era, on the other hand, will be realized in this world; which will continue in its normal course except that independent sovereignty will be restored to Israel. The ancient sages already said, "The only difference between the present and the Messianic era is that political oppression will then cease." (B. Sanhedrin 91b)

The Messianic era is a corporate concept; the world-to-come is individualized. In Perek Heleq—a section of the early Commentary on the Mishnah—Maimonides describes the world-to-come as the individual soul's bodiless participation in the "supernal fellowship ... with the existence of God the Creator."\(^2\) The calm and freedom from suffering that suffuses Maimonides' descriptions of the Messianic Era, however, is not an intrinsic good. It is instrumental; the Messianic Era is always the penultimate stage in Israel's hopes and aspirations. This is clear from passages in Perek Heleq and the final sections of Mishneh Torah, in Hilkhos Melakham (Laws of Kings). In Perek Heleq, Maimonides writes that the conditions of the Messianic Era "give powerful [assistance] for attaining the life of the world-to-come; the purpose is the world-to-come, which one must strive to attain."\(^3\) The Mishneh Torah passage reads similarly:

The sages and prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the world, or rule over the heathens, or be exalted by the nations, or that it might eat and drink and rejoice. Their aspiration was that Israel be free to devote itself to the Law and its wisdom, with no one to oppress or disturb it, and thus be worthy of life in the world to come. (Hilkhos Melakham, 12:4)

The Messianic Era thus has no intrinsic value; it is no more than (and of course, no less than) a time for halakhic contemplation.\(^4\) Maimonides believes that this contemplation is dependent upon the restoration of national sovereignty, yet national sovereignty is only the last historical stage before the onset of the utopian world-to-come. Gershom Scholem's

\(^2\) Ibid., 412.

\(^3\) Translation from Weiss and Butterworth, 167. Arnold Wolf (at Twersky, 416) translates: "Thus [through the fulfillment of the messianic promise, described in the previous paragraph] men will achieve the world to come. The world to come is the ultimate end to which all our effort ought to be devoted."

classic either/ or typology of restorative vs. utopian messianism—a renewal of a bygone Golden Age or the onset of an unfathomable new era—thus reveals itself to be inadequate. Scholem described Maimonidean messianism as merely restorative\textsuperscript{75}; yet the fact that Maimonidean teleology places the world-to-come as the telos of even the Messianic Era implies that utopianism cannot be excluded from the picture, by fiat, for the sake of an elegant binarism.\textsuperscript{76} Hence Maimonidean messianism has been described by Amos Funkenstein as a "realistic utopianism."\textsuperscript{77} Politics is surely important, but only as a means to a personal intellectual end: the rational perfection of the individual soul, aided by halakhic praxis that is useful\textsuperscript{78} toward this end. As Aviezer Ravitzky has noted, the political aspect of messianic hopes is always subservient to the intellectual hope for the world-to-come.\textsuperscript{79} The activity of Jews during the Messianic Era is an intellectual one; as Maimonides states at the end of the \textit{Mishneh Torah}, during that time they "will attain an understanding of their Creator to the utmost human capacity, as it is written (Is. 11:9): 'For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."\textsuperscript{80}

Maimonides deploys this instrumentality curiously in \textit{Iggeret Teman}. While on the surface, he supports the messianic longing of the Jews of Yemen in the face of Islamic


\textsuperscript{76} To be sure, Scholem (24) states that in Maimonides, "a utopian content of this vision is preserved, since in the Messianic age ... the contemplative knowledge of God will become everyone's principal concern." Nevertheless, Scholem minimizes the importance of the utopian in Maimonides, and certainly does not see it as the overriding telos that it is.


\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Guide} III:27 (G 507): "the multitude of the Sages believe that there is indubitably a cause for them [the commandments], I mean to say a useful end."

\textsuperscript{79} Ravitzky, 105.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Hilkhot Melakhim} 12:5; translation from Twersky, 226.
power, his support is also couched in the rhetoric of his intellectualist proclivities. He assuages the sufferings of the Yemenites by a neutralization of their messianic impulse associated with a call to rational perfection. The function of this rhetoric is no less than to extirpate the messianic passions among his audience. I therefore disagree with David Hartman's claim that the *Epistle to Yemen* "totally ignores the instrumental interpretation of messianism expounded in [Pereq] Heleq and the Mishneh Torah." 81 While it is true that the rhetoric of messianism in the *Epistle to Yemen* differs from that found in the *Mishneh Torah* because the epistle is written to a community in a determinate context, I will show that the instrumental interpretation of messianism is equally present in both texts.

Addressed to Jacob b. Nathaniel al-Fayyumi, the leader of the Jewish community in Yemen, Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen* was written in 1172 at a time when the Yemenite community was besieged by proselytizing efforts on the part of the Shi'ite community there, which included Jewish apostates. These efforts had risen to the point that the leader of the Shi'ite community, 'Abd al-Nabi' ibn Mahdi, had (EY 95) "decreed forced apostasy of the Jews." Maimonides' immediate response (EY 96) is to declare that "there is no doubt that these are the messianic travails concerning which the sages invoked God that they be spared seeing and experiencing them." This inaugurates one strategy of consolation by which Maimonides argues that the current tribulations of the Yemenites actually forebode the coming end of those very tribulations. This strategy is *parental*; the first response of a parent to a child in pain is to assure the child that respite from pain is on its way, that "it will be over soon." Likewise, Maimonides leads his audience to believe that the Messianic Era, and hence their freedom from forced apostasy, is imminent: "From the prophecies of Daniel and Isaiah and from the statements of our sages it is clear that the advent of the Messiah will take place some time subsequent to the universal expansion of the Roman and Arab empires, which is an actuality today." Belief in the imminence of the

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Messianic Era is thus presented as the best coping mechanism for the “messianic travails.” This strategy culminates in Maimonides’ passing on of “an extraordinary tradition” (EY 122) allegedly handed down to him patrilineally, which claims that the return of prophecy to Israel (and hence the imminence of the Messianic Era) will occur in less than forty years, in 1210 CE. The rhetorical power of this family tradition is emphasized in the following paragraph, at which Maimonides introduces evidence against other calculations of the onset of the Messianic Era, presumably to bolster his own. Lastly, in the final pages of the epistle, Maimonides responds (EY 130) to reports of Messianic pretenders by stressing that “the prophets have predicted and instructed us, as I have told you, that pretenders and simulators will appear in great numbers at the time when the advent of the true Messiah will draw nigh.” Here, Maimonides seems to be engaged in a fine-tuned perception of the particular needs of the Yemenite community and its leaders, and responding in a correspondingly attuned matter.

Nevertheless, there is another strategy of consolation, which appears less frequently in the Epistle to Yemen, and may be more ethically troublesome. Here, Maimonides appears more as the sort of teacher who tells a student that he is an “underachiever” who can solve his problems simply by “applying himself”—as if an increase in the student’s force of will could easily be mustered to conquer and avoid the particular situation in which she or he is ensconced. Directly following Maimonides’ claim that the acts of the Shi’ite

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82 Maimonides’ argument is rooted in a midrash on Balaam’s prophecy at Numbers 23:23 (“Jacob is told at once/Yea Israel, what God has planned”). The “at once” (ka’et) is retranslated literally as “a like period of time,” and the whole verse is interpreted to mean that prophecy will return to Israel in a like period of time as that from creation to Balaam’s utterance (2485 years). Kraemer, op. cit., 119, notes that Maimonides does not actually calculate the year, but instead leaves it to the reader to perform the difficult mathematical operation of doubling 2485. Thus Maimonides protects himself from violating the halakhah (in B. Sanhedrin 97b) against calculating the date of the onset of the Messianic Era. Both Kraemer and Halkin (at Crisis and Leadership 145n. 223) note that Maimonides’ supposed family tradition is in fact rooted in Y. Shabbat VI, 9.

83 It was Leo Strauss who proposed that, when faced with two mutually exclusive trains of thought in Maimonides, that which appears less frequently reflects Maimonides’ true position. Cf. “The Literary Character of the Guide of the Perplexed,” in Persecution and the Art of Writing (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 73.
Yemenites are doubtless the prophesied messianic travails, he continues by summarizing Jacob's reports of apostasy among some members of his community and also linking this apostasy to prophetic writings, particularly in Daniel. But these prophecies are no longer linked to messianic expectation. Rather, Maimonides' response follows another rhetorical path entirely. Maimonides telescopes his argument vehemently.

And now, brethren, it is essential that all of you give attention and consideration to what I am going to point out to you. Teach it to your women and children, so that their faith, to the extent that it has become enfeebled and impaired, may be strengthened, and that enduring certainty may be reestablished in their hearts. It is—may the Lord deliver you and me—that ours is the true and divine religion, revealed to us through Moses. (EY 96)

Within the narrative structure of the epistle, it appears that the solution to the apostasy of certain Yemenites is simply to stress—yet again—the (rational) truth of Judaism, and the place of halakhic observance within the true life. Thus, Maimonides is no longer saying that the solution to the Yemenites' problems lies in religious ritual alone, and will come to those who patiently wait; the solution to the difficulty of the Yemenite situation takes place in the arena of truth and reason, not in that of halakhic observance alone. Apostasy can be prevented only by stressing the philosophical value of the halakhic life.

Here Maimonides makes claims about the utilitarian value of Torah that will appear again thirteen years later in the Guide. Basing his argument on a belief that apostasy is facilitated by an understanding of all religions as formally similar and hence equal—the commandments of the Torah are fungible with the commandments of Islam—the insertion of a teleological element into the halakhic life becomes the wedge between Judaism and the other monotheisms.

If he [the Jew tempted by apostasy] could only fathom the inner meanings, he would realize that the essence of the Torah lies in the deeper meaning of its positive and negative precepts, every one of which will aid man in his striving after perfection and remove every impediment to the attainment of excellence. They will enable the masses and the elite to acquire moral and intellectual qualities, each according to his ability. Thus, the godly community becomes preeminent, reaching a twofold perfection. By the first I mean man's leading his life in this world under the most agreeable and congenial conditions. The second will constitute the gain of the intelligibles, each in accordance with his native powers. (EY 100)
The deeper meaning of the mitzvot is their teleological role. By being useful in and for the striving after excellence, the mitzvot reveal themselves as true and divine. By contrast, the other monotheisms are atelic, aimed at present self-satisfaction and nothing more (EY 100): “The pretentious religions contain matters that have no inner meaning, only imitations, simulations, and copies by which the inventors aimed to glorify themselves ... however, their shameful action is an open secret to the learned.” Teleology is the criterion by which the truth of religion is judged. And since the goal of teleology is broadly understood as intellectual perfection, then training in speculative matters also becomes a criterion of whether or not a putatively revealed way of life is divine or not. As Maimonides writes at Guide II:40 (G 383), a law that does not contain “attention...directed towards speculative matters” cannot be God-given.

At the surface of the text, Maimonides tells the Yemenite community to turn back (or at least turn with a renewed vigor) to Torah-observance. But at a deeper level, at least in certain passages of the Epistle to Yemen, the reason lying behind this exhortation has little to do with fostering hope in the political stability concomitant with the advent of the Messianic Era and much to do with increasing the intellectual capacity of the community. Their rational perfection will lead them to attain the knowledge of God that is itself redemptive. Nowhere in the epistle is this more apparent than the broad strokes by which

84 Isadore Twersky cites this passage as a summation made for a popular audience of the viewpoint found on numerous occasions—at least 30, with Twersky’s crossreferences to at least as many other passages—in the Mishneh Torah. Twersky, Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 417–430.

85 Likewise, Maimonides differentiates between living the life of Torah on the basis of knowledge of its ability to lead one to true knowledge of God and living the life of Torah on the basis of heteronomous religious authority (taqlid). For Maimonides, Job exemplifies the difference in these two ways of living (II:23; G 490–91): Job said all that he did say as long as he had no true knowledge and knew the deity only because of his acceptance of authority, just as the multitude adhering to a Law know it. But when he knew God with a certain knowledge, he admitted that true happiness, which is the knowledge of the deity, is guaranteed to all who know Him and that a human being cannot be troubled in it by any of all the misfortunes in question. While he had known God only through the traditional stories and not by the way of speculation, Job had imagined that the things thought to be happiness, such as health, wealth, and children, are the ultimate goal. For this reason he fell into such perplexity an said such things as he did.
Maimonides inculcates the value of skepticism in his audience. The majority of the final three chapters of the epistle consist of brief lesson plans for identifying pretenders to divine knowledge. Instructions for identifying prophets—no prophet will abrogate the Torah, he will be an Israelite, he will perform a miracle as corroboration of his prophetic testimony—constitute the second chapter of the epistle. Instructions for identifying false calculations of the onset of the Messianic Era constitute the third chapter. Instructions for identifying the Messiah—he will be the most superior of prophets, and his status is independent of familial lineage—constitute the majority of the fourth and final chapter. What Maimonides is doing, then, is arming the Yemenite community with a hermeneutics of suspicion, and by extension, the rational facility that comes with being able to identify astrological miscalculations and theological misinterpretations. As Funkenstein writes, "skepticism is not a mark of disbelief in the coming of the Messiah, but rather the foremost duty of the learned."  

The hermeneutics of suspicion is not merely rooted in proper interpretation of the Bible and in realizing that Torah-observance is now and will be in the messianic future the central element of Jewish life. In the third chapter, Maimonides makes it clear that this suspicion is also rooted in knowledge of the natural sciences. (Thus, the suspicion that cultivates the ability to identify the Messiah also cultivates the ability to know God. As Maimonides claims in the Epistle Dedicatory of the Guide, expertise in astronomy, mathematics, and logic are prerequisites for expertise in the divine science.)

It appears from Maimonides' comments (EY 116ff.) that the leaders of the Yemenite community believed that human affairs were subject to astrological convergences. Rather humorously, Maimonides takes Joseph to task for this: "Dismiss such [astrological]...

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The existence of this intellectualist rhetoric in both a supposedly elite text such as the Guide and a popular text such as the Epistle to Yemen should lead interpreters of Maimonides to question the assumption that Maimonides thinks it impossible for the masses to attain true knowledge of God.

86 Funkenstein, 135.
notions from your mind. Cleanse your mind of them as one cleanses dirty clothes." Later, Maimonides urges Joseph and the other Yemenite elites to substitute true scientific knowledge for his false astrological beliefs.

I have observed your statement that in your country science is little cultivated, and that learning does not flourish, and you attribute it to the influence of the conjunction in the earthly trigon [of constellations of the Zodiac, during which elite culture allegedly is dormant]. Remember that this low state of learning and science is not peculiar to your country, but is widely prevalent in Israel today. (EY 117)

Maimonides proceeds (EY 118–20) to outsmart Joseph in astrological and astronomical matters, coming to the conclusion that such calculations are of no use in predicting the beginning of the Messianic Era. And Joseph is bluntly scolded (EY 119): "it is essential for you to know that these and similar assertions are fabricated and mendacious. Do not consider a statement true only because you find it in a book." If Joseph himself cannot muster the rational resources against Muslim (or Christian) astrologers and other proselytizers, then what hope is there for the masses that look to him for guidance, the blind who submit "to an individual having power of sight for intelligent direction"? There can be no hope for the return of prophecy to Israel if its leaders do not perfect themselves intellectually, for the only possibility of perfection on the part of the masses is their receiving overflow from the elites of their community. If there is nothing to trickle down, according to Maimonides' supply-side model of social relations, then all hope is lost.

Thus throughout the epistle, we see some evidence that the salvation of the Yemenites from their sociopolitical troubles will not come at the hands of King Messiah, but at the hands of their own rational powers (at least those of the elites), aided by Torah-observance. The deep-seated passionate desire for the arrival of the Messianic Era is thereby neutralized. For the concept of honing one's intellectual skills and aiming at intellectual excellence, as laid out in the Mishneh Torah (which Maimonides was working on during the time he wrote the Epistle to Yemen) and later in the Guide of the Perplexed, is associated with the world-to-come; not at all with the Messianic Era, which is merely political
and important only for the leisure it gives for the development of one's rational faculties. If Maimonides is arguing that the best way to deal with messianic longings is to cultivate learning and science, then he is also arguing that the best way to deal with messianic longings is to let go of the yearning for the Messianic Era, extirpate the passion of that yearning, and keep one's heart focussed on the world-to-come. In short, it seems to me that Maimonides has addressed the concrete situation of the Yemenite community at the same time that his prescription for the community's healing seems to irrevocably elide it. The prescription of striving after intellectual excellence to the best of one's capability is the same one which seemingly is given to all of Maimonides' patients.

This peculiar elision of the Messianic Era is reinforced by a closer look at the so-called “family tradition” (EY 122) by which Maimonides predicts the renewal of prophecy among the sons and daughters of Israel\footnote{The prooftext that Maimonides gives for his claim that the return of prophecy to Israel announces the imminence of the Messianic Era is Joel 3:1 "After that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh: your sons and daughters shall prophesy." Hence, it seems that the eschatological prophecy is certainly not limited to the elite, but is found in the community at large. Here, the elitism found in the Guide is absent. The return of prophecy to Israel is contingent upon making philosophers out of the masses, since intellectual perfection is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for prophecy. Cf. n. 84.} to occur in 1210 CE. Notably, this calculation is only of a date when the “approach of the messianic era” will become known.\footnote{For another interpretation, see Hartman at Crisis and Leadership 169ff. Hartman is correct to claim that the Messiah is an idealized prophetic figure, but ignores both the pesher of the verse from Joel (in which the number of prophets is plural) and the rhetorical and pedagogical functions of the calculation in the epistle as a whole.} Yet the renewal of prophecy in Israel is not dependent upon exterior forces, but on interior ones, specifically the intellectual perfection of the community (EY 124). “Transcendent wisdom is the \textit{sine qua non} for inspiration. It is an article of our faith that the gift of prophecy is vouchsafed only to the wise, the strong, and the rich. Strong is defined as the ability to control one's passions. Rich signifies wealthy in knowledge.”\footnote{This summary of B. Shabbat 92a is duplicated both in the seventh chapter of Shemonah Peraqim as well as chapter II:32 of the Guide. Cf. G 361–62 and Ethical Writings of Maimonides, trans. Butterworth, 81.} This is curious. In the \textit{Mishneh Torah}, Maimonides claims that the Messianic Age will be a time in which wisdom
can be cultivated within the community. Yet here it seems that the Messianic Age cannot even begin unless the community has already cultivated the intellectual perfection necessary for prophecy.90 And if it has already done so, then the very function of the Messianic Era which Maimonides lays out in other writings is already accomplished. The community has become worthy of the world-to-come without assistance from any outside messianic or kingly agency. The members of the community have become their own Messiahs. They have freed themselves and awakened to the worship oriented around the love of God; their intellects become a conduit of the divine overflow and thus serve to make God manifest, just as the residence of the messianic king on Mount Zion (Ps. 2:6) serves to manifest divine rule and proximity to Israel.91

As such, the instrumentality of the Messianic Era is shown to be even more of a hortatory tool in the Epistle to Yemen than it is in the heavily instrumentalist accounts of the Mishneh Torah and the introduction to Perek Heleq. Contra Hartman, it is certainly not given any intrinsic value.

To find such a heavily intellectualist Maimonides in a document in which he is not customarily found is more than a little surprising. Traditionally, the Epistle to Yemen has been read as Maimonides hearkening to the call of a particularly troubled situation and leaving his philosophical self behind in order to be a better source of consolation. While this is undoubtedly one strand of the epistle, it masks another strand which is a more straightforward application of the halakhic-philosophic model that is so readily apparent in

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90 There is one hint in the Epistle to Yemen that Maimonides also subtly encourages the community to develop the perfection of its imagination as well (EY 104): "It is imperative, my fellow Jews, that you make this great spectacle of the revelation appeal to the imagination of your children. Proclaim at public gatherings its nobility and its momentousness." As Maimonides makes clear at Guide II:37 (G 374), perfection of both the intellectual and imaginative faculties are necessary for prophecy. Those who have only one or the other perfection are either philosophers or politicians, not prophets.

91 It is therefore not philosophically extraneous that Maimonides counsels the Yemenites (and other persecuted Jews) leave their cities and go to a region where they can observe Torah in peace. This is the first step in self-sanctification. Cf. EY 106, and the fourth chapter of the Epistle on Martyrdom, in Crisis and Leadership 31ff.
other writings. All of Maimonides' rich and particular observations of the Yemenite situation must be taken in the context of the substantive advice he gives to the community. Maimonides' hearkenings to the tribulations of the Yemenite Jews conceal the same model of intellectual perfection (which the Messianic Era is supposedly instrumental in attaining) that is found in other of his writings. His attentiveness to their suffering under the pressure for apostasy is pedagogically valuable, but the rhetoric of consolation is only a mode of Maimonides' wily graciousness by which he leads the Yemenite community to a life lived in accordance with his intellectual model of religious teleology. There is no difference between Maimonides' advice to R. Jacob in the Epistle to Yemen and the advice to his student Joseph in the Guide. In short, the content of the epistle belies its ultimate formalism. One might seek to hold up Maimonides as a paragon of liberal Jewish ethics, as Hermann Cohen does. But this falls prey to the critique that this ethics is only an application of general rules, and ignores the rich particulars of the situation.

David Novak has recently critiqued the Maimonidean God-idea for being overly formalist and insufficiently covenantal. On his reading, Maimonides' God is incapable of relating to Israel throughout history, and is thus closer to the God of Aristotle than to the God of Abraham. Novak sees Maimonides' ethic as passionless, aimed at humanity as a whole, and hence completely formal. While Novak's critique may be true, one must admit that Maimonides' position is well-grounded, for example, when one examines the model of imitatio Dei in the Guide of the Perplexed. There is much written on the human path of imitatio Dei itself, but more has been written on the imitatio than on the Dei. Given Maimonides' radically transcendent nature of God, this is understandable. Even if we can determine God's actions, and describe them in the language of practical perfections such as lovingkindness, this language is risky because it is human language about transcendence, and therefore risks reducing transcendence to an idolatrous image of God. An earlier

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92 Novak, Natural Law in Judaism, 135.
section of the *Guide* (II:12) manages to engage the reader’s imagination on this very issue through the simile of “overflow.” The simile begins by referring to the separate intellects, but Maimonides continues by emphasizing that the same simile is appropriate for God-talk. Hence the action of the separate intellect is always designated as an overflow, being likened to a source of water that overflows in all directions and does not have one particular direction from which it draws while giving its bounty to others. For it springs forth from all directions and constantly irrigates all the directions nearby and afar. . . . In the same way it is said that He caused His knowledge to overflow to the prophets. The meaning of all this is that these actions are the action of one who is not a body. And it is His action that is called overflow. This term, I mean “overflow,” is sometimes also applied in Hebrew to God, may He be exalted, with a view to likening Him to an overflowing spring of water, as we have mentioned. . . . For the mental representation of the action of one who is separate from matter is very difficult . . . the imagination cannot represent to itself an action taking place otherwise than through the immediate contact of an agent or at a certain distance and from one particular direction. (G 279–80)

The temptation of the human imagination is to think of God as a personal God, but the action of God, directed as it is as the totality of creation93, does not differentiate between persons. The uniformity of the divine overflow is a function of the transcendent actuality of divine life. If one were to describe the action of God, or of any other separate intelligence, as on the scale of actions of this world—in terms of vectors of physical force originating from a determinable spatial site—this would immediately contradict the very definition of God (and the other separate intelligences) as non-corporeal. Qua non-corporeal being, God is non-spatial. Hence, God’s actions can neither be aimed at a specific point, a specific individual, or even a specific group of individuals. God’s action is equally directed in all directions, and occurs at the same constant rate throughout time, knowing no variations in direction (or even perhaps intensity). Novak is correct to describe the Maimonidean God as unresponsive. But how powerful is this critique? If the Maimonidean God were responsive, His actions would participate in the spatial matrix of the world. For Maimonides, this would be identical to the blasphemous assertion that God is a body. If one is to strive after this kind of action, then the goal of Jewish action would appear to be the cultivation of a similarly unresponsive and dispassionate demeanor in

which one overflows one's own wisdom to others equally, refusing to tailor it to the specific worldly situations of different individuals. If God is formal, intellectual, and separate from the world, why should Jews be any different? Indeed, the models of human perfection that the Torah gives us—Moses and the patriarchs—are curiously dispassionate ones (III:51; G 624): they perform their worldly actions "with their limbs only, while their intellects were constantly in His presence."

Given this choice between formalism and blasphemy on account of Maimonides' strictly negative valuation of nonbeing/matter, what is needed is a reinterpretation of to me on that values matter as the starting point that reveals and inaugurates the ethical/messianic path of nearing God. The desire concomitant with privation would thus have an aspect of intrinsic goodness. Although Levinas' solution to the ethical problem (to be detailed in Chapter 4) is in my opinion stronger, Hermann Cohen does offer an interpretation of nonbeing that, in part, avoids this problem due to his interpretation of the Greek sources. As a result, the ethics that is part and parcel of the teleological arc in the writings of Cohen come closer to satisfying the desire for a rich particular vision that takes joy in the world that we find in Nussbaum's critique of Stoic ethics.

Meontology in Cohen's Logik der reinen Erkenntnis

The secondary literature on Cohen within the discipline of philosophy of religion has rarely examined the methodology of neo-Kantian thinking that determines Cohen's religious thinking. This is the result of Franz Rosenzweig's postulation of a "turn" in Cohen's thought from the systematic philosophy to the later writings on religion.94 (Of course, Rosenzweig's postulation obviated him from the obligation of contextualizing his view of Cohen's posthumously published Religion of Reason within the 1700 difficult pages of the systematic writings published in Cohen's prime.) But as Alexander Altmann

94 Franz Rosenzweig, "Einleitung" to Cohen, Jüdische Schriften, I:xiii–lxiv, esp. xlv f. which claims that "correlation" is a new concept in the later Cohenian works.
first demonstrated, Rosenzweig's account of Cohen is easily debunked.\textsuperscript{95} If hardly any secondary literature has tried to amend this situation, it is due to the monumental nature of the task at hand, which can only be reasonably done in fits and spurts.\textsuperscript{96}

Therefore, before turning to Cohen's analysis of Maimonides in "Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis," it is necessary to examine in some detail the context that Cohen has established for to me on in his earlier System der Philosophie. By the time the "Charakteristik" essay was published in 1908, the first two systems of Cohen's system had already been published: the Logik der reinen Erkenntnis in 1902, and the Ethik der reinen Willens in 1904. The concept of to me on appears explicitly in the second volume only briefly.\textsuperscript{97} On the other hand, the Logik shows to me on to be a metanarrative for Cohen's methodology during this time period.\textsuperscript{98} I will first summarize Cohen's explicit presentation of to me on in the Logik, and then contextualize it within the text's larger project of elucidating a philosophy of origin (Ursprung).

Cohen's first mention of to me on in the Logik is a brief account of its historical progeny. According to Cohen, the pre-Socratic atomist Democritus was the first thinker to depart radically from the Parmenidean doctrine that prohibits all speech about that which is


\textsuperscript{96} For attempts to read Cohen as a unified thinker, see Altmann ibid., and Reinier Munk, "The Self and the Other in Cohen's Ethics and Works on Religion," in Moses and Wiedebach, 161–81, which does not only deal with the writings on ethics and religion, but also sets them within the context of the Logik.

\textsuperscript{97} Hermann Cohen, Ethik der reinen Willens, 4th ed. (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1923), 210. (This corresponds to 208 in the second edition, which is the same pagination used for the edition of the Ethik in Cohen's Werke, vol. 7 [Hildeseim: Georg Olms, 1981].)

\textsuperscript{98} An analysis of to me on in Cohen's 1879 Platos Ideenlehre und die Mathematik lies outside the bounds of this chapter. According to Andrea Poma (The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen, trans. John Denton [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997], 28f.), the concept of to me on in this text appears only in the context of Cohen's idealist appropriation of Democritus. As we shall demonstrate below, this is the same appropriation which girds Cohen's account of to me on in the Logik.
not. It is in Democritus that being and nonbeing are both seen as principles of existence (LRE 85):

With the bravado of basic thinking, Democritus (using this particle [mel]) proclaimed nothing [Nicht] to be a fundamental term of the highest intrinsic value. And he put it on a par with something [Etwas]. . . "There is no more reason for the thing to be than the nothing." ["Nicht mehr ist das Ichts als das Nichts" (me mallon to den e to meden einai).]

The fragment of Democritus which Cohen cites is a classic. 99 It radically undermines Parmenides by questioning whether there is indeed any sufficient reason as to why the Eleatics would have to believe that the existence of the non-existent is impossible. This fragment also forms the basis of Aristotle's understanding of Democritus at *Metaphysics* A.4, where the language of nothing as *meden* is transformed into an explicit meontological dictum: the atomists Leucippus and Democritus "say that what is [to on] is no more than what is not [to me on], because the void is no less than body is." 100 Cohen's interpretation of Democritus is thus attested to even in the writings of the enemy Aristotle. Whereas Aristotle argues against the Democritean pairing of being and nonbeing as principles (specifically in *Physics* ∆.7), Cohen sees it as the first great philosophical advance. Being and nonbeing are the basic elements of the world in which we live; it is in their belonging-

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99 In the Diels-Kranz classification of Pre-Socratic fragments, this is DK 68B156. I have used the translation in Richard D. McKirahan, Jr. *Philosophy before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 314. The first edition of Diels' *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* appeared in 1903, after the first edition of Cohen's *Logik*; Cohen's familiarity with Democritus undoubtedly comes from Lange. Cf. Poma, ibid. Nowhere in the *Logik* does Cohen grapple with the difficulties of Democritus' theological fragments, in which gods seem to be atomized into fantasms (*eidola*).

For a fairly dense logical analysis of this Democritean fragment (what he calls the "ou mallon principle", noting that *ou* and *me* are interchangeable), cf. Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1979), 2:103, 251–57. Barnes seems to understand Democritus here as supporting a Protagorean relativism. This is certainly not Cohen's understanding.

100 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A.4, 985b7. This is DK 67A6; trans. McKirahan, 305.

There is no reason to think that Aristotle is reading something into Democritus which is not there. According to a fragment of the Eleatic philosopher Melissus of Samos (DK 30B10) equates *meden* with *me on*. Cf. Barnes, ibid., 101.

Given Cohen's hyperattentiveness to the *melon* distinction (see above), and his critique of Aristotle for ignoring the distinction, it is intriguing that Aristotle retains the language of *me* in the *Metaphysics*. This is not always the case in testimonia of Democritean principles: at DK 68A37 (McKirahan, 305–06), Simplicius supposedly quotes Aristotle's now-lost treatise *On Democritus*, and the word for "nothing" here is *ouden*, not the *meden* of DK 68B156. In short, Cohen's imineral relationship to Aristotle obscures the fact that Aristotle is in part responsible for transmitting Democritus as a meontology thinker.
together that the world is most clearly understood.

Unfortunately, Cohen has put the cart before the horse in this paragraph. The bravado is laid out, without any previous argument as to why this insolence is justified. Cohen supplies this argument retroactively, continuing with a brief elucidation of the function of this apparently insolent, oxymoronic, counter-intuitive, and generally unphilosophical dictum that pairs being and nonbeing as principles (LRE 85). It is not simply the case that Democritus is laughing in the face of Parmenides; rather, Democritus argues that the existence of nonbeing is necessary for good scientific work.

Through these monstrous abstractions, he [Democritus] has defined his fundamental principles, which have been maintained in science throughout the centuries and have been steadily reduced to a smaller scale. This is especially true of the void, which he has placed alongside his atoms. And by defining the void as that which is not [das Nichtseitende] he has come across the expression of truth for beings themselves. The void is that which is not because it eludes perception, as do the atoms that are removed from it. But this is precisely the reason why the void and the atoms are, in truth, being (etê on) [sind das Leere und die Atome das wahrhaft Seiende]. Thus, in Democritus that which is not is led to true being; the nothing is led to something.

Democritus performs his critique of Parmenidean monism (and the serious problems concomitant with thinking of the One simultaneously with and without parts) by theorizing that the world is composed of an unlimited (apeiron) number of eternal building blocks too small to be perceived—atoms. These atoms move about irregularly and combine in various ways as to create perceptible objects. Yet there cannot be only atoms in the world; Democritus claims that without positing a void alongside the atoms, the challenge to monism fails. There cannot be many atoms unless there is some empty space between them that keeps the atoms separate, and hence many. If there were no void, there would be no space between the atoms; or more precisely, there would be no atoms at all, but rather the Parmenidean One. (Democritus posits an infinitesimal space between atoms even in compounds in order to fully solve this problem.) Furthermore, if there were no void,

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101 The argument for the unlimited number of atoms can be found in Aristotle's De Generatione et Corruptione 315b9, DK 67A97, trans. McKirahan 305. "Since they [the Atomists] held that the truth is in the appearance, and appearances are opposite and unlimited, they made the shapes unlimited." Today we could describe Democritus' atoms in terms of the subatomic particles of quantum physics.
change and atomic motion would be impossible; there would be no place for the atoms to go. The void is a necessary condition for motion, and for all generation, corruption, cohesion and re-arrangement on the part of the atoms. Thus one can say that the void is, insofar as it is a necessary condition for the appearance of objects within the empirical world. It serves as a mediating concept between the principle of the single atom at the base of reality, and the compounds which we see in our daily lives.

Nonetheless, the existence of the void is not existence in the sense of the existence of real beings, the atoms. Democritus' pairing of the atoms and the void as the principles of existent things is equivalent to a pairing of being (to on) and nonbeing (to me on) as principles, as stated by Aristotle at Metaphysics A.4. Thus, when Cohen writes "sind das Leere und die Atome das wahrhaft Seiende," we should not understand this to mean that Cohen is arguing that the void is just as real as the atoms are. Rather, Cohen is simply recapitulating the Democritean dictum that there are both atoms and void in the world. In this manner, Democritus "leads" or guides the ordinary Parmenidean understanding of nonbeing as absolute nonbeing (that which does not exist) into an understanding of the being of nonbeing as a void which exists insofar as it must be in order

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102 Aristotle, Physics Θ.9, 265b24: "They say that motion occurs on account of the void."

There is some debate as to whether the void should be seen as the same as space. Aristotle defines the void as the "place" in which the atoms move (DK 68a37). McKirahan 315, following D. Sedley, "Two Conceptions of Vacuum," Phronesis 27 (1982), 175–93, argues that both the atoms and the void exist in the space, much as fish and the water in its fishbowl both take up space. Yet McKirahan's argument seems to be too sophisticated for the Atomists. Would one not then have to posit three principles of generation and corruption: namely atoms, void, and space? And what is the relation between void and space, then?


104 In other words, just as the Greek etéé is an adverb in the passage which Cohen cites (a passage which I have been unable to find), so is the German wahrhaft. To read wahrhaft as an adjective is to go completely against what Democritus says. If Cohen is doing this, he is simply misreading Democritus. Yet the German fully allows for wahrhaft to be read as an adverb. Barnes, ibid., claims that the void "is" only in the sense of Frege's Esgibtexistenz, not in the sense of Wirklichkeit. And this would seem to have to be the case: if the void were wirklich, it would no longer be a separate principle from to me on, and this would ridiculously render Democritus a monist.

I have been unable to find any passage of Democritus which argues that the void and the atom are equally because they are both imperceptible, as Cohen claims here.
for compounds, or even atoms, to exist. If something has a necessary condition in order to exist, that condition must also exist.

Cohen goes on to assert (LRE 86) that Plato “displays the deepest relation with Democritus,” apparently simply because the *Sophist* also argues against Parmenides for an account of nonbeing in which it has a certain kind of being (in Plato’s case, as otherness). To put it bluntly, from a historical perspective this is nothing less than foolish. Reference to the pre-Socratics abound in the Platonic dialogues, yet there is not a single mention of Democritus. One would think that if Plato saw himself as appropriating Democritean themes, he would have said so. And even philosophically, the account of the nature of nonbeing in the *Sophist* is quite different from the Democritean account. In Chapter 2, we saw that Plato argues that beings can be thought of as “not” from the perspective of seeing them as different from other beings. Yet Democritus is incapable of making such an argument; what would it mean to say that the atoms are not insofar as they are different from other atoms? What would be left of the void? The Platonic argument that “nonbeing is” qua otherness is nothing like the Democritean argument that “nonbeing is” as a necessary condition for the existence and motion of atoms. While it is true that being and nonbeing somehow belong together in both thinkers, the similarity stops there. For Plato, beings are and are not; for Democritus, that-which-is cannot be spoken of in terms of that-which-is-not, yet nonetheless there is being and nonbeing in the world.

Cohen’s interpretations of the Greeks are misinterpretations. Plato is not a Democritean, and Aristotle has not willfully substituted *ou* for *me* in a fit of anti-idealist pique, contrary to what Cohen asserts in the “Charakteristik” essay and in the *Logik* (LRE 86). Yet is there any hope of salvaging something from Cohen’s interpretation of Democritus? Perhaps; Cohen himself sees (LRE 86) the link between Democritus and Plato in terms of “the development of relationships [*Beziehungen*] among types of beings.”

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105 McKirahan, 304 and 342, allows for the possibility that some Democritean themes may appear implicitly in the *Timaeus*. 
there is some true insight. As seen in the previous chapter, the *Sophist* account of nonbeing assists in the larger epistemological project, insofar as justified true knowledge of a being X must necessarily involve knowledge of the other beings to which it is related. Seeing an object X in terms of its difference from other objects further determines its nature, and the concept of nonbeing is an important detour in this epistemological project. Likewise for Democritus, because nonbeing is a necessary condition for motion to occur and for compounds to exist, it is only through the development of the existence of nonbeing that science can see the objects of the world as pluralities of atoms. For both Democritus and Plato, it is only through the development of the concept of nonbeing that objects can be seen as both one and many, as a single whole with many parts; only in this way can philosophy navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of Parmenidean monism and Protagorean relativism. Nonbeing is a necessary stop on the path toward knowledge of the whole qua knowledge of the reciprocal interrelations (Cohen's *Beziehungen*) of its parts. Epigrammatically: nonbeing lies on the path to *harmony*.

Democritus' philosophy was not successful; its metaphysics was hardly corroborated by empirical evidence, and this led to insuperable problems, especially when Democritus attempted to explain sensation and vision through postulating that atoms jumped off surface objects onto my hands and eyes. But by Cohen's time, the atomistic worldview had become completely vindicated. With the rise of physical chemistry (LRE 33, 242, 322ff) and particularly in Michael Faraday's discovery of atomic energy (LRE 33, 442ff), Democritus' description of atomic motion as random—what we now term "Brownian motion"—is justified. Yet the most resounding confirmation of a view of objects as composed of indivisible points of infinitesimal magnitude occurs within mathematics and the rise of the infinitesimal calculus. According to Cohen, this mathematical revolution begins with Gottfried Leibniz (LRE 124–26). This is true in a limited sense. The concepts

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106 McKirahan, 330–33.
of indivisibles and infinitesimals had been problems in mathematics and philosophy since
the pre-Socratics; after all, it was Zeno's paradox which "proved" motion to be impossible
by noting that if a line of finite magnitude were to be split into an infinite number of points,
it would take an infinite period of time to traverse the length of the line. By the seventeenth
century, the use of infinitesimal quantities to calculate areas and volumes had taken the
mathematical and scientific worlds by storm, culminating with the publication of Johann
Kepler's *Nova stereometria* in 1615. Yet these calculations were still dependent upon the
diagrammatic construction of curves and tangents. It was Leibniz, in the 1670s, who was
the first to construct theorems for the solution of problems in plane geometry by using a
simplified notation (still used by high-school and college students today) that obviated the
use of diagrams.\footnote{For an account of this history in full detail, cf. Margaret Baron, *The Origins of the Infinitesimal Calculus* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1969). It is perhaps too specialized for those who are not mathematicians, but the account (270ff.) of how Leibniz, in 1672, was able to derive the sums of geometric series (1/2 + 1/4 + 1/8...) from A=A is exemplary.

In 1883, Cohen published *Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte*, in which he interpreted Leibniz' monadology in terms of Democritean atomism. Cf. Poma, 41. The philosophical appropriations of Leibnizian calculus in 1883 resonate through the end of Cohen's career, including the *Religion of Reason.*

107} So if the science of Cohen's day justifies a return to Democritus, what function
does the Democritean concept of *to me on* —the void that separates infinitesimal
qualities—serve in Cohen's *Logik*? I claim that it is the engine of the pansophist quest, the
desire for universal knowledge. Such a hypothesis may strike the reader as strange. After
all, Cohen is a neo-*Kantian*, and Kant hardly strove after universal knowledge. The ideas
of reason—God, the world, the subject—are *noumenal* for Kant; they are limiting concepts
with a merely regulative validity, "the function of which is to curb the pretensions of
sensibility."\footnote{Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B 311, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's, 1965), 272.} Especially with regard to the idea of the world, Cohen departs from Kant
on this point. What separates Cohen's neo-Kantianism from the Kant of the *Critique of*
Pure Reason is the status of the noumenal and ideal thing in-itself (an sich). For Kant, there is no intuition that can render the an sich intelligible; rather, the true nature of the object exists beyond the bounds of experience. Cohen, taking account of the new science of his day—Planck, Boltzmann, Hertz, Einstein (e.g. LRE 296–98)—had evidence of how mathematics and the natural sciences were able to transcend these allegedly impenetrable epistemological barriers. Kant's Newtonian worldview was now obsolete. Hence, Cohen developed the view that logic could indeed determine the nature of objects. After all, if the world becomes intelligible through higher math and science, and if this science operates according to laws that are independent of sensible intuition, then there is no longer any sufficient reason to remove the an sich from the realm of intelligibilia.109 Scientific knowledge thus becomes the paradigm for all knowledge; what we can think is seen as what we can experience. The distinction between a priori and a posteriori vanishes as if through prestidigitation; the a priori laws of mathematics end up constructing and producing all objects of experience. Since we can think the ideas of reason, we can therefore know them. The processes and rules of the subject's thought is thereby made into the source of objective validity. Cohen collapses the subject/object distinction as early as his very first published article (a psychologistic reading of the Platonic forms) in 1866.110 In so doing, he also collapses the distinction between thinking and knowing which is paramount for Kant in the second preface to the first Critique.111

Cohen's Kantianism lies only in his apriorism and his belief in the primacy of practical reason; otherwise, his thought bears the marks of a pansophism which is more


110 Köhnke, 183.

111 Kant, B xxvi and n. Trans. Kemp Smith, 27.
reminiscent of Leibniz, Comenius, and possibly the occult movements associated with Rosicrucianism and Kabbalah.\textsuperscript{112}

This is not to argue that Cohen's Kantianism is somehow merely exoteric; it makes no sense to use this term in relation to a figure who almost single-handedly shifted the dominant direction of German philosophy for thirty years and whose intellectual gifts in and of themselves gained him the respect even of his elders whom he vigorously critiqued, such as F. A. Lange (not to mention his prestigious chair at Marburg). It would be silly to claim that the Cohen of the Logik and earlier does not see himself in the shadow of Kant. Nevertheless, Cohen's return to Kant is not as pronounced as that called for by German philosophers of the 1850s such as Hermann von Helmholtz and Jürgen Bona Meyer.\textsuperscript{113}

For Cohen does not see Kant, or at least Kantian epistemology, as a novum in the history of thought (LRE 25–26). Kant is viewed through a Leibnizian lens.

\textit{Kant} specified thought as \textit{synthesis}. And through synthesis, he defined and formulated all his systematic concepts... And he differentiated types of synthesizes. Therefore the objection was raised against him that he debased thinking to the level of mechanical assembly [\textit{Zusammensetzung}]. Indeed the objection, in all its enormity, would not have become possible had one not ignored ... the end [\textit{Ziel}] in favor of the means. Assembling does not amount to synthesis; but the result of assembly should rather first mean synthesis. But this excludes every remotest appearance from assembly; it is unity. \textit{Synthesis is synthesis of unity}. And it was not necessary to first learn from Kant that unity is the antithesis to every type of assembly; one could have learned this from Leibniz.

In Kant's first \textit{Critique}, the function of understanding (\textit{Verstand}) is to put together the manifold of representations in an intuition, or to assemble concepts in the act of judgment. This is not simply an association of various aspects of the intuition or of various concepts. Kant is clear that the nature of the understanding reveals that the synthetic unity of the manifold (i.e. the \textit{a priori} adherence of sense-intuitions to the categories of understanding) is not something that the understanding's judgment imposes upon intuitions; rather, the


\textsuperscript{113} Köhnke, 96ff.
unity of the manifold is already the ground of the diverse representations and concepts
which the understanding synthesizes.\(^{114}\) Although Kant claims that this unity is not intel-
ligible, Cohen seems to be arguing that with each conceptual advance, the understanding
achieves this qualitative unity and is self-reflectively aware of it. Thus the result of the
synthesis is more important than the act of understanding itself, since the result is what is
transcendently prior to the act of synthesizing, and hence of higher value. Cohen’s
reading of Kant marks a return to a Leibnizian epistemology in which “all knowledge, in
any domain, can be regarded as the result of combinations of certain primitive concepts or
ideas.”\(^{115}\) The act of philosophizing thus begins with the manifold of disorganized pieces
of knowledge, and works back (for Cohen, through transcendental logic) to these basic
concepts which are then shown (through formal logic) to govern the manifold of acquired
knowledge.

The goal of synthesis is to resolve the perennial philosophical problem of the one
and the many. Cohen here explicitly turns away from the moderns (LRE 26).

Already by the early time of Greek mathematics ... two expressions for unity \([\text{Einheit}]\) had
developed: [numerical] unity \((\text{hen})\) and monad \((\text{monas})\). The first [sense of] unity is that of the
beginning of the series of numbers; the other lies outside this... The first type of unity continues
to plurality \([\text{Mehrheit}]\). But each type of plurality and each individual within plurality must be a
unity. For this, the other type of unity is obliged to make an entrance. How is this entrance to be
understood? Is the concept of unity also to be extended to plurality? Or should plurality be
simply taken as the precondition \([\text{Voraussetzung}]\) of unity? But the case is the latter; therefore the
difficult reflection, which arises against \(\) the ordinary understanding of\(\) synthesis: synthesis
\textit{certainly aims at unity, but it has plurality as its precondition.}

In this passage (which contains the first mention of the important concept of plurality in the
\textit{Logik}), synthesis is seen as flowing in two opposing directions. While the epistemological
project operates teleologically, it seems to bind together the unity that is to-come with the
plurality that given to the understanding to synthesize. Mathematical unity leads to plurality
leads back to monadic unity. This movement is not the movement of a Fichtean or Hege-

\(^{114}\) Kant, B 130–31, trans. Kemp Smith, 151–52. Kant’s account of synthesis is far more complete in

\(^{115}\) Rutherford, 100.
lian dialectic, which Cohen describes as superficial (LRE 112). But neither is it Kantian; plurality is the precondition of unity in Kant only insofar as it is given to it. For Cohen's neo-Kantianism, the Kantian concept of givenness leads to nothing but contradictions. Experience is dependent upon given intuitions for Kant, yet the complexity of nineteenth-century mathematics demonstrates that thought can proceed upon pure intuition alone, without anything having to be given to it empirically. If mathematics is pure in the Kantian sense, i.e. if it is not derived from anything empirical\footnote{Kant, B 3; trans. Kemp Smith, 43. Kant here explains how certain propositions can be \textit{a priori} but not pure.}, and if mathematics exemplifies the nature of thought in general, then thought itself must always be pure, \textit{pace} Kant. The Kantian rhetoric of givenness only (LRE 27) "indicates the frailty through which Kant is connected to his English century [and] damages the innate independence of thought."

So how can Cohen describe the plurality-unity relationship without falling into the trap of the language of givenness? As if out of nowhere, Cohen shifts (LRE 28) to the rhetoric of \textit{Erzeugung}, of generating, producing, or bringing-forth. (It is only later that the reader discovers that this rhetoric is associated by Cohen with Democritus, Plato, and Leibniz. As noted in the introduction, the concept is the \textit{Leitmotif} of Schelling's response to Hegel.) This bringing-forth must have a non-empirical origin (\textit{Ursprung}), which perpetually fuels itself through its own action (\textit{Tätigkeit}), leaping from concept to concept in the philosophical jungle. Cohen writes that the generative process only aims at furthering itself (LRE 29): "Production itself is the product," and "Thinking itself is the goal and the object of its activity." Each moment of thinking engenders a new moment of thinking, which in turn engenders a new moment, etc. Only in this manner, independent of all empirical givenness, can thinking have "creative sovereignty" (LRE 28). To translate \textit{Ursprung} as "origin" (as is usually the case\footnote{Cf. Denton's translation of Poma, and Kaplan's translation of \textit{Religion of Reason}.}) is to miss the sense of activity inherent in Cohen's elucidation of thinking as an \textit{Erzeugung}; Reinier Munk has captured this sense in
his phrase "act of origination."  

This movement of thinking is the metaphilosophical interpretation of Democritean atomism and Leibnizian calculus. For Cohen, each moment of thinking is parallel to an infinitesimal point on a curve. This point has a conatus within it so that, in an instant (according to the Leibnizian gloss on Newton's \( F=ma \)), it engenders the next point on the curve, etc. According to the calculus, the magnitude of an area \( X \) is determined through the summation of an infinite number of infinitesimal points inside that area. In relation to the quantitative magnitude of a line or curve, the infinitesimal point is a nothing, a \textit{me on} that possesses its own kind of existence, even if it without the quality and quantity that characterize actual objects. Cohen's interpretation of Democritus (LRE 84–85), in which a being is truly determined by being "led [\textit{geführt}]" on a "detour [\textit{Umweg}]" through nothingness\(^{120}\), is formally equivalent to the interpretation of the infinitesimal calculus in which the determination of the area of a plane surface is determined by being led through a detour through a series of infinitesimals (LRE 33). Yet this is the only way in which an entity can be truly determined. The immediacy of empiricism betrays the spirit of mathematics, while the immediacy of speculative idealism collapses the difference between being and the nothing that is its precondition.

For Cohen, as for Maimonides, the essence of thinking/intellection is creation—either action or generation. Maimonides is not mentioned here, and certainly the rhetoric of "negation of privation" is not invoked; yet the view of philosophy as creative and stretching across a teleological arc establishes a necessary context for the interpretation of the "Charakteristik" essay. Yet what lies at the end of the teleological arc, on the meta-philosophical level? Although Cohen would shudder, in hindsight one suspects that there

\(^{118}\) Munk, 166.

\(^{119}\) Rutherford, 246.

\(^{120}\) Cf. Munk, 168–69. Some of what follows is indebted to Munk's elucidation of the methodology operating in the \textit{Logik}. Also cf. Poma, 94ff.
is perhaps more than a qualitative difference between using the infinitesimal calculus for the purposes of calculations in fluid mechanics, and using the infinitesimal calculus to map the path of thinking. Differential equations in the sciences have answers as concrete teloi; the volume of a sphere is \( \frac{4}{3} \pi r^3 \), and that's that. Cohen, on the other hand, claims that philosophical answers must always still be questions, or else the process of *Erzeugung* collapses.\(^{121}\) To treat a philosophical answer with the self-sufficiency of a mathematical one is to treat thinking as if it were finished. So how is thinking different than a sphere? Or, in other words, what exactly is the object of which Cohen wants to calculate the volume of? Unfortunately, Cohen is not clear on this in the early pages of the *Logik*. The spiral structure of *Erzeugung*—thought determining itself with gradually more exactitude—would imply that nothing except the *Ursprung* could be the goal of the thought-process which it institutes. This is Reinier Munk's interpretation of the matter: origination is its own task.\(^{122}\) Yet Cohen never explicitly states this in the *Logik*, as far as I can tell. When Cohen uses the phrase "bringing-forth of the origin [*Erzeugen des Ursprung*]" (LRE 53), it is impossible to tell at first glance whether this is an objective or subjective genitive, whether one is bringing something out of the origin, or whether one is bringing the origin itself forth. An earlier passage (LRE 31) is not much more helpful. At one point, Cohen asserts that if the *Ursprung* "should be located beyond being," it must then exist in thought. Four sentences later, however, Cohen writes that "thinking can, thinking should discover being." These two sentences appear to be mutually exclusive. If thinking is thinking of the origin (LRE 36), and if this origin is located beyond being, then a statement that posits being as the goal of philosophy would also posit being in an undetermined form as the originating act of philosophy. Yet it is difficult to see how being

\(^{121}\) LRE 30: "Above all, it was the question-form, in which Socrates formulated the concept, that appealed to him and encouraged him. 'What is it?' (*ti esti*;) This question, at the same time, was supposed to be the answer." LRE 84: "The question ... is the lever of origin. ... It is the temporal starting-point [*Anfang*] of knowledge."

\(^{122}\) Munk, 166.
could be the goal of philosophical discovery when the *Ursprung* simply does not truck with being, according to Cohen's own definition thereof. By common sense, being and that which is beyond being are completely disjunctive; either the *Ursprung* is beyond being, or it is being-itself. How can Cohen have it both ways?

Help for this puzzle arrives in Cohen's methodological meditations on the infinite and the infinite judgment. In alleging Aristotle's misinterpretation of the Platonic and Democritean concept of *to me on*, Cohen at least realizes that there was nothing in his misinterpretation that was "irretrievable" (LRE 87). For the Aristotelian definition of nonbeing as simply indeterminate being has in the history of philosophy given rise to the logical category of the infinite judgment. In the modern era, Baumgarten, Wolff, and Kant defined the infinite judgment simply as a proposition which appears to be negative but is actually affirmative. Kant's example in the first *Critique* is that of the soul: "by the proposition, 'The soul is nonmortal,' I have, so far as the logical form is concerned, really made an affirmation. I locate the soul in the unlimited sphere of non-mortal beings." But in Cohen's Platonizing interpretation of Kant, what is important is not the grammatical structure of the proposition, but the fact that that such propositions are in themselves evidence for the belonging-together of the infinite and the finite, of the unlimited (*apeiron*) and the limit (*peras*). Cohen interprets pre-Socratic thinking, in its deepest speculation, to claim that infinite is already constituted with an orientation [*Richtung*] towards the limited finite.

For Cohen, this orientation originates in the infinite. As a result, there appears to be a conflation here between the infinite and the infinitesimal (similar to what Rawidowicz observed in Maimonides). Cohen describes the various Greek conceptions of the infinite in

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124 Ibid., 554.

125 Kant, B 97, trans. Kemp Smith, 108.
the same language of origination that he describes Leibniz' and Democritus' conceptions of the infinitesimal. Cohen avers that Plato's first principle of the good that is beyond being (epekeina tes ousias) comes to light through an authentic use of the infinite judgment, and thereby grounds the determination of ethical principles (LRE 88). Similarly, the concept of the immortality of the soul (the Kantian example) is said to determine that which is mortal. Since both the infinitesimal and the infinite are apeirontic, without the boundaries that would given them magnitude, the structure in both cases is parallel to the examples adduced above from the Greek texts and from Maimonides, in which the nothing qua to me on is seen as the condition of the possibility of being. To me on is here described as both above being and below it; what is important is the absence of quantity in either case.\footnote{Hence, while Munk is correct to point out that Cohen's concept of nothing is privative and below being, it can also be infinite and above being. In the Logik, Cohen strictly differentiates between infinite and privative judgments in a way that neither Kant nor the Arabic Aristotelians did. Cf. Cohen's quotation of William of Ockham on this distinction at LRE 90, and Munk 168–69.} The function of infinite judgment is thus

\begin{quote}
\textit{to bring the originative-act [Ursprung] of the concept which forms the problem into definition.}
Thus, the so-called nothing (but in no way to be understood as such) becomes the operative means \textit{in every case} for bringing the uncertain something into its origin, and thereby really into generation and determination. (LRE 89)
\end{quote}

This recalls Plato's desire in the \textit{Sophist} to determine being through its nexus of interrelations with various determinate othernesses, yet Plato has here been inserted into the mathematical anti-sensibility context of neo-Kantianism. Nevertheless, it seems that in both cases the function of the infinite judgment is not simply to lead philosophy upwards towards the infinite. Rather, the function of the infinite judgment seems to be to lead philosophy upwards \textit{and} outwards, in order to show how the limit and the unlimited are related together. \textit{Cohen's philosophy is a calculus of the world, in which its magnitude is seen in terms of the sum of the infinite series of its parts}. In this mathematical belonging-together, the whole of being is brought to the fore, both as a monadic unit and as the entirety of the many interrelations that it includes. To return to the apparent contradiction of
LRE 36, thinking does indeed discover being. But the being that it discovers is seen in the light of the apeironic whole that conditions it and is hence "beyond being" in the sense that it stretches across the bounded one and the boundless many, like Plato's concept of being in the later dialogues as a mixture of limit and unlimitedness lies beyond that of the Republic. The determinate being that is the goal of thinking is one which includes, in a highly intimate relationship, both being in its ordinary sense and the various nothings (void, infinitesimal, goodness) that are usually thought to be completely external to being.

One of Cohen's names for this intimate relationship, already in 1902, is correlation. It allows for "the activity of pure thinking ... to come to a clear determination" (LRE 60). It stands against a model of dialectic as the "exchange [Wechsel]" (LRE 61) of apparent opposites. Although Hegel is not mentioned here, it seems clear enough that he is the target of this charge. Rather, correlation is described as a "preservation [Erhaltung]" of the apparent opposites. When thinking establishes a correlation between two contraries (something/nothing, unity/plurality), each contrary simultaneously remains separate from and related to the other; the two are always both same and different. Thinking demands that preservation maintain unity in plurality and plurality in unity. . . . [But] plurality should not collapse into unity. And unity should not separate itself [by being maintained] in plurality. Plurality should, indeed as unity, remain plurality. And unity should preserve itself as unity. And both should not rest next to each other, so much as overflow [übergehen] into each other. (LRE 62)

127 While this term is scattered throughout the Logik, and not yet codified as a Cohenian Leitmotif, it still retains the same meaning that it will have in Cohen's late writings. Robert Gibbs, in his Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 17–18 and 86, doubts whether Cohen's use of this term is parallel to that of Paul Tillich. After all (86), "Cohen is claiming that ... because any conceptual answer is complete, systematic thought is always a task, never a totality." Tillich's theology, on the other hand (18), possesses a "knowledge of the answers." While Gibbs' caution is certainly called for, Tillich does write that "God answers man's questions, and under the impact of God's answers man asks them... This is a circle which drives man to a point where question and answer are not separated." If this is a totality, it is certainly not one that leads to contentment or stability; and the equation of answer and question here is rather close to Cohen (cf. LRE 30). Cf. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 61.

128 Readers of Cohen must be open to the possibility that his reading of Hegel may be completely unfair. Hegel is clear, at least in the Encyclopedia Logic, that his famous equation of being and nothing is meant to express both unity and diversity under the rubric of the task of becoming. Cohen is not opposed to this statement, despite what he states throughout his writings. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopedia Logic, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 143.
The first sentences of this quotation imply that this overflowing of the contraries is certainly not a complete merging of the two poles. Plurality is maintained, or else there is no real correlation. Correlation is indeed a synthesis of unity (LRE 26), but this philosophical concept of unity is aware of the plurality that was its precondition, and respects that plurality by calling attention to the history of the development of its structure. No moment of unity, no moment of plurality is aufgehoben into a higher moment. In the later sections of the Logik which apply the methodology of the opening ninety pages of the text to the history of math and science, Cohen claims (LRE 284) that the typical example of the preservation of opposites is the mathematical concept of function, as expressed in the equation $y = f(x)$. The relationship of function in Greek mathematics expressed the potency of the quantity $x$; in Leibniz, it signifies (LRE 277) “the mutual dependence of two variable quantities.”

As regards to the something/nothing dyad, this refusal of Hegel would mean that no moment of nonbeing is consumed in the process of the determination of something, and no infinitesimal is absorbed into the integrative calculation. The conatus of the infinitesimal perseveres throughout the various progressive developments of thinking which preserve the relationship between the one and the many. Thus, thinking sets itself up as a task which is always oriented towards the future and is not satisfied with the present, which for Cohen (LRE 62) “contains an illusion, an impulse toward error” and hence “must become future” (LRE 63) in the act of orignative thinking. We cannot stress enough how Cohen's resolute focus here on the perdurance of conatus temporalizes the Greek notion of me on, in a move which bears at least a family resemblance of the shift from “privation” to “approach” in the first part of Maimonides' Guide. In Cohen's version of this strategy, the transcendental status of the various senses of me on (void, infinitesimal) is converted into the sign par excellence of history. Meontology states that the present moment is always to be conceived as a not-yet. Thinking is future-oriented; at some point in the future, the
correlation between unity and plurality will be brought into relief. Here (LRE 63–64),
Cohen never uses the Hegelian language of sublating and dissolution (aufheben), but stays
on its perimeter in his use of the verb heben (to bring into relief) or even hineinheben, a
neologism that implies that the bringing into relief occurs through a motion of
interpenetration.

The goal of this interpenetration is not an attaining of the infinite by an act that
would conquer and transcend the material finite world. Rather, it is the fully determined
interpenetration of the infinite and the finite, the nothing and the something, the one and the
many. Cohen calls this determinate interpenetration “totality (Allheit)”; and here the
pansophist undercurrent of the Logik bursts into the open. In one of the many analyses of
infinite number series in the Logik (LRE 182f), Cohen states that the value of an integral is
“nothing else than the totality in which the infinite series is bound up with the infinitesimals.” In this relation, “continuity flows through [these] discrete pluralities,” and the
movement of abstraction from plurality to unity neither leaves plurality behind nor does it
depend upon these pluralities in any mode of empirical givenness. Through this
continuity129, the category of totality is established, along with the real possibility of giving
it determinate content. The infinitesimal sets forth the possibility of totality. But since the
laws of mathematics also serve as the ground-rules for thinking, one thereby gains the right
to claim that nonbeing sets forth the possibility of universal knowledge.

Cohen goes on to close the circle between totality and the infinitesimal, between
universal knowledge and nonbeing (LRE 183)130: “The infinitesimal would not have been

129 Cohen here is referring to Leibniz’ law of continuity, which Rutherford (29) characterizes as the rule
that "the movement from any one element of a series to another must always occur through the smallest
possible increment, with no abrupt change of value. Changes of time, place, or motion are always
'continuous,' in the sense of occurring through an infinite series of smaller gradations." Also cf. LRE 90ff,
in which Cohen amplifies Leibniz' law of continuity into a general law of thinking, in accordance with the
scientific method. Also cf. Munk 170 and Poma 96–97.

130 For another geometry of Cohenian teleology that focusses on the concept of line, cf. Robert Gibbs,
"Lines, Circles, Points: Messianic Epistemology in Cohen, Rosenzweig and Benjamin," in Peter Schäfer
and Mark R. Cohen, eds. Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco (Leiden
invented, if not for the goal of totality. Thus totality is the true goal and the true subject-matter [Sache] of the infinitesimal.” According to the logic of the generation of originative thinking, the goal of thinking is already included in its origin. Thinking has itself as its task. As a result, one cannot with sincerity state that the totality and the infinitesimal are different; totality is only the fullest abstraction from and determination of the infinitesimal. But formally, they are the same. Totality is present in the infinitesimal as that which is to be generated; it is a seed waiting to awaken and come to fruition. The conative impulse with which Leibniz and Cohen typify the infinitesimal, then, is totality in miniature.

Certainly one would have no right to say, according to the parameters of Cohen’s thinking, that totality is exterior to the infinitesimal. The goal is present now; the task of thinking is to articulate it in life and thereby bring it to actuality.

From Teleology to Messianism: Cohen’s Interpretation of Maimonides

The argumentative path of Cohen’s “Charakteristik” essay does not turn away from the path of thinking that is laid out in the Logik. One might object to this; Cohen’s main argument here is that the concept of God is inherently an ethical concept, and therefore ethics supersedes metaphysics. But this does not mark a turn away from the scientism of the Logik. Rather, the method of Erzeugung, of generation (out) of the origin which Cohen develops in the Logik is seen to be the operative method in all philosophical disciplines. Even if this method is developed theoretically, through an analysis of current mathematical trend, this theoretical principle makes ethics (and aesthetics) possible as the logical treatment of a different set of data. Thus, in the Logik, Cohen defines ethics as “the logic of the human sciences” (LRE 253). Logic serves as the foundation of ethics insofar as it lays down the method by which ethics searches for and establishes laws (LRE 607).

The data in which ethics makes its way are not the scientifico-mathematical data of the

Logik, and thus give ethics its independence as a field of thought. Yet the method by which ethics analyzes its data are completely determined by logic. As shown above, this method is constructed out of generalizations made from Leibnizian mathematics, specifically the infinitesimal calculus. As a result, Cohen is able to epigrammatically state in the "Charakteristik" essay (CEM 227) that "idea links ethics and logic; the idea of good distinguishes ethics from logic." Insofar as Cohen has rejected the primacy of sensible intuition in Kant, his thought is idealist in its orientation (LRE 5-6) and his methodical reflections, which determine both ethics and logic, are thereby written in the context of the Platonic search for a first principle from the construction of hypotheses.132 Yet the idea of the good is useless for logic itself; it would be quite odd to say that one differential equation has more ethical value than another. The idea of the good, made possible by logic, has its applications in ethics alone. If ethics trumps metaphysics in any meaningful way, it is only because its principle—the idea of the good (LRE 88)—is deduced from within the logical system itself, and to this extent, it stays within the methodological ambit that logic has established. This saves ethics from falling into the trap of a utopian realm of wish fulfillment, grounded merely in imagined "blueprints ... some philosophers have dreamed up."133 Instead, ethics is rooted both in the present nature and the future which logic constructs.

If ethics and logic share the same methodology for Cohen, one would expect that Cohen's analysis of Maimonides would parallel the path of thinking that Cohen learned lead to a view of the ethical life as a gradual and continual path which develops the origin of this ethical life into a completely determinate structure. It will be applied ethics, moving

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132 The category of hypothesis is key in Cohen's thinking. Yet it is also extremely opaque, mixing together reflections on Kepler (LRE 311ff) with the Platonic account of hypothesis in the image of the Divided Line in Republic 509d–511e. This leads to the odd location that "the idea is hypothesis" (LRE 87–88). Cohen's expression fails to differentiate between the use of hypothesis in mathematical-dianoetic and dialectic-noetic thinking. Cf. Smith, "Plato's Divided Line," Plato: Critical Assessments (London: Routledge, 1998), 2: 298–99.

133 Margaret Thatcher, "Wrong turn to utopia," Houston Chronicle, May 30 1999, 1C.
forward into analyses and prescriptions of determinate interpersonal and international structures. And it will also be philosophical ethics, doing the transcendental backstroke toward the first cause that serves as an exemplar for how applied ethics should model itself. This Erzeugung of the originative act into a totalized structure, as in the Logik, begins with the concept of the me on.

As seen above, the concept of the me on in the Logik serves a dual purpose as the nothing that transcendentally grounds something. On the one hand, it is the infinitesimal that serves as the basis upon which all areas and volumes are calculated—the nothing that is less than being. On the other hand, the example of the idea of the good in the Logik, arrived at through the infinite judgment (dependent upon the formulation of the Esgibtexistenz of the me on), is nonbeing in a different manner. It is the nonfoundation (Ungrundlegung) that grounds those principles which are customarily taken as the rational foundations of thinking (LRE 88f.; CEM 226).

In the "Charakteristik" essay, Cohen is slightly more explicit than in the Logik about the relationship between God, the infinite judgment, and to me on. This explicitness allows Cohen to flesh out further consequences of the meleological starting point of his thought. Not only is the teleological arc of existence revealed, but here we can also read Cohen applying this teleology in two different arenas. First, there is the performance of this teleology in the Erzeugung of the community; this transforms teleology into ethics. Second, Cohen reconfigures the telos of human existence in light of the insight into God as the Ursprung; this transforms teleology into messianism.

Cohen realizes that to draw a strict dichotomy between intellectual and moral perfection in Maimonides is to think simplistically (CEM 245): "For Maimonides, [scientific] knowledge is the task and goal of religion and hence ethics." 134 The knowledge that is

134 Cohen has already described Maimonides' concept of knowledge as a scientific and Aristotelian one at CEM 244. Note that these two pages challenge the dichotomous reading of intellectual vs. moral perfection—i.e. either theory or praxis—which has often been found in the literature. Cf. Kellner, Maimonides on Human Perfection, 8–9, and Leo Strauss, Philosophy and Law, trans. Eve Adler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 131.
specifically the province of religion is knowledge of God, given in terms of the divine attributes. Cohen rightly points out that the divine attributes for Maimonides are attributes of action, not attributes which describe God's essence as substance (CEM 246). This is a straightforward reading of the close of Guide I:52 (G 118–19) and the first half of I:54 (G 124–25), at which Maimonides claims that his theology parallels the account of Exodus 33, at which God grants Moses' request to see his ways but refuses the request to see his glory. Cohen appears to be of two minds as to whether Maimonides is claiming that God is essentially action or not. As argued above, if one reads Maimonides here as arguing that the Aristotelian definition of God as that which intellects itself leads to a concept of God as essentially action, Cohen would not be on shaky ground if he were indeed making this claim. Yet the matter is quite opaque. On the one hand, Cohen writes, with apparent approbation, that Maimonides "concentrates and limits the concept of God to the ethical concept of God," thereby implying that there is some ineffable content to God that the discussion of attributes cannot reach. Humankind is denied knowledge of the attributes of God's substance, and the attributes of action are really only attributes in the sense that they "serve as standards for human action." (CEM 246). The real attributes, the ones of God's substance, are simply not touched. But if this were Cohen's opinion on the matter, Maimonides would indeed be a negative theologian in the classic sense. Nevertheless, Cohen refers to discussions of Maimonides' negative theology as discussions of "the so-called negative attributes" (CEM 248, emphasis mine). Indeed, Cohen writes (CEM 257) of the attributes of action that they are "more positive, because they are more fruitful, than the positive [essential attributes]." Action and ethics do not simply skim the surface of an unknowable God; they go right to God's basis (Fundament). Cohen is wary of stating that God is essentially morality and nothing more; this would reduce God to a simple Grenz-begriff, the limiting-concept of Kant's first critique.135 The most which one can explicitly

135 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B669ff.
gather from Cohen's interpretation of Maimonides is that the idea of morality is the basis of God from the vantage-point of our understanding rather than being the objectively definable essence of God.

Nevertheless, this will not do. For the reading of Cohen in the paragraph above operates on the basis of the standard Kantian opposition between appearances and things-in-themselves. God appears to our knowledge as the idea of morality, while his true essence transcends this. But it is this very opposition which Marburger Neokantianism does away with on the basis of its appropriation of Leibnizian mathematics. Our knowledge of God, according to rigorous Neokantian epistemology, cannot be the knowledge of an appearance, but must rather be the knowledge of a thing-in-itself. Hence, if we know God in terms of the idea of morality, this must be what God is an sich. This view is necessitated by the re-contextualization of the following sentence of Cohen's (CEM 247) within Guide I:54: “Therefore, knowledge [of God] can only be that in which and through which the human being [Mensch] can develop himself toward [his of her] ethical essence [Wesen], in imitating God—that is to say, the actions of God—in his own actions.” Cohen's link between the attributes of action and imitatio Dei is authorized by Maimonides himself at the close of I:54 (G 128): “For the utmost virtue of man is to become like unto

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136 In the Ethik der reinen Willens (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1981), 445, Cohen claims that his God-idea is rooted both in Leibniz and in Kant. However this ignores Kant's own distancing of his transcendental thought from Leibniz, at times with reference to the God-idea, throughout the Critique of Pure Reason. Most notably, B320: "Leibniz took the appearances for things-in-themselves..."

137 On the other hand, cf. Cohen's following remark in the posthumously published Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism, trans. Simon Kaplan (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972), 95: "these norms [the middot, the qualities of God which for Maimonides are the same as the attributes of action] are encompassed by the essence of God, but it is impossible to imagine that they could exhaust this essence: they could have been conceived for man only, could be valid for the actions of man only." Cohen cites Guide I:54 on Exodus 33 at this point; yet this statement is more Kantian than anything which Cohen says more than a decade earlier in CEM.

For David Novak, this is the one passage of Cohen which could possibly allow for a rehabilitation of Cohen's God-idea in terms of the covenant over and above the Kantian regulative ideal; yet as only one sentence in the thousands of pages Cohen wrote on God, Novak reads it as an exception to the rule. Cf. Novak, The Election of Israel, 59n. 30. Undoubtedly, the entire legacy of neo-Kantianism and the issue of a "turn" in Cohen's thought from the philosophical system to the later writings on religion rests on this single sentence.
Him, may He be exalted, as far as he is able; which means that we should make our actions like unto His, as the Sages made clear when interpreting the verse, ‘Ye shall be holy [as I am holy].’ (Lev. 19:2)’ We can then construct the following series of inferences. If imitating God’s actions brings out our ethical essence, and if this ethical essence makes us more like God, then God’s essence must be ethical. And this is closer to Maimonides’ actual view. If Maimonides were a Kantian on this matter and believed in a hidden essence in the Godhead, then there would be no need for Maimonides to state in Guide 1:57 that God’s essence is his existence.\(^{138}\)

For Cohen, the most interesting part of the section of the first part of the Guide on the divine attributes is not simply that the claim of the primacy of practical reason, but rather the argument which Maimonides makes to get there, an argument which Cohen (falsely) associates with Plato. The negation of the essential attributes of God in Maimonides is for Cohen bound up with the infinite judgment (CEM 250), which as seen above, is for Cohen associated with the particle me as opposed to the simple negation of ou. In the “Charakteristik” essay, for the first time Cohen associates the infinite judgment not simply with Plato’s procuring of the idea of the good as the nonfoundation beyond being, but also with the Maimonidean concept of the “negation of privation” which procures a similar status for God.\(^{139}\) Meontology for Cohen is based upon “not a negation, but rather ... an

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\(^{138}\) Cohen cites this sentence at CEM 251.

\(^{139}\) Zvi Diesendruck, followed by Shubert Spero and Almut Sh. Bruckstein, has challenged Maimonides’ and Cohen’s use of the phrase "negation of privation," charging that "privation of privation" would be more reflective of the emphasis, in both Maimonides and Cohen, on the higher positivity of divine attributes. However, Diesendruck implies that predicates applied to God operate similarly as when applied to human-kind, and that the difference, for example, between God’s wisdom and human wisdom is merely that God’s wisdom is apodictic. The problem here is theological (how does this escape the problems of Saadia and the Mutakallimun which Maimonides thinks he has conquered?), and philosophical (Diesendruck too quickly assumes that the Kantian understanding of the categories is applicable to Maimonides, an argument that Harry Wolfson has dismissed). The Maimonidean category of the "negation of privation" means simply that God does not lack, God is not potential; according to the Maimonidean schema, "privation of privation" would mean that God is potentially potential, which is nonsense. Cf. Diesendruck, "Maimonides’ Theory of the Negation of Privation," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research 6 (1934–35), 139–51, esp. 146–47; Spero, "Is the God of Maimonides Unknowable?" Judaism 22:1 (1973), 67–78, esp. 72–73; Bruckstein, Hermann Cohen’s "Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis", 26–29; Wolfson, "Infinite and Privative Judgments," 554.
apparent negation” that is indeed ultrapositive. It serves as the basis for a “true and firm standing [Position] for God,” (CEM 250) for a rational theology of God as creator.

Cohen's argument here may indeed not be Maimonidean, as Zvi Diesendruck charged\textsuperscript{140}, yet it must also be said that Maimonides left a knot of problems on this issue which Cohen could perhaps only have unravelled by going outside the bounds of Maimonides' thought, if not of medieval philosophy altogether. Maimonides contextualizes his theory of divine attributes as negations of privations as follows (G 136):

It has thus become clear to you that every attribute that we predicate of Him is an attribute of action or, if the attribute is intended for the apprehension of His essence and not of His action, it signifies the negation of the privation of the attribute in question. Moreover, even those negations are not used with reference to or applied to Him, may he be exalted, except from the following point of view, which you know: one sometimes denies with reference to a thing something that cannot fittingly exist in it. Thus we say of a wall that it is not endowed with sight.

These sentences are puzzling, for three reasons. First, this passage occurs directly following the aforementioned sentence in I:58 in which Maimonides equates the essence and existence of God earlier in the same chapter. This implies that the attributes of essence (intellect, power, attentiveness) are indeed attributes of action (apprehending, creating, ordered governing). So for what reason could Maimonides suddenly revert to distinguishing between attributes of action and attributes of essence? Secondly, if the attributes of action and the attributes of essence are one and the same, how can the rhetoric of “negation of privation”, which serves as a project of excessive remotion of God from human understanding, serve to render God something that can be the object of human imitation? Thirdly, the example of the not-seeing wall, taken from Alexander of Aphrodisias\textsuperscript{141}, is described by Maimonides as a negation, but it is unclear from the works of Aristotle whether this can also be seen as a privation. I claimed above that Maimonides, at least, had solved this problem by incorporating a Plotinian worldview; Cohen, however, does not

\textsuperscript{140} Diesendruck, 150: "of this Ursprung, nothing can be found in or even read into Maimonides."

seem to have such a luxury. This is especially true in a post-Aquinas world, since Aquinas does allow for words with the Latin parallels of alpha-privative prefixes to be attributed to God, such as "incorporeal" or "infinite."\textsuperscript{142} (Arabic has no privative prefixes.)

So Cohen needs to make some decisions. Unfortunately, the first one he makes is on historically shaky ground (CEM 252).

In Aristotelian logic, there is a primer to the distinction between negation and privation (\textit{apophasis} and \textit{stereisis}). Privation, however, is in the first place ambiguous. According to this model, one can say, "the wall does not see [sieht nicht]," or more exactly "the wall is a not-seeing thing [ein Nichtsehendes]." Aristotle referred to this nonbeing as a \textit{ouk on, not as me on;} or as an undetermined (\textit{aoriston onoma}). [\textit{De Interpretatione} 2; 16a32] Privation must therefore be limited to those relationships which let lack [\textit{Mangel}] appear not as a theft [\textit{Beraubung}], but which let the absence of the predicate in question appear as grounded.

Now according to the example taken from Alexander of Aphrodisias, the example of the not-seeing wall is not privation at all, but is an "absolute negation"; Maimonides uses this example in the same manner at \textit{Guide} I:58. There is no denying that Cohen has drastically misread the \textit{Guide}. And this leads to more than a little confusion; Cohen has associated the particle \textit{me} with the "other type of negation" (CEM 250) that is really positive and only appears to be negative, a point of view derived from Democritus and Plato. On the other hand, Cohen also reads privation in conjunction with potentiality and possibility and thus, along with Maimonides and Plotinus, reads the all-highest as the negation of privation, a repelling [\textit{Abwehr}] of lack (CEM 252). In other words, Cohen never settles his mind in the "Charakteristik" essay as to whether \textit{me} refers to privation or the negation of privation, the nonbeing below being or the nonbeing above being. What could possibly justify such apparent sloppiness?

The answer, it seems to me, is that Cohen is here struggling with the problem of the question of where the relation between God and his creatures falls on the continuum between transcendence and immanence. To make the relationship between God and human-

kind completely immanent would be to fall into pantheism, and although Cohen has several positive things to say about pantheism in the "Charakteristik" essay, remaining within pantheism would not only be false to Judaism, but also to the lacks and privations which are empirically observable in the world. Yet Cohen also does not want to construe God and humankind as being so distant that imitatio Dei is no longer possible; the knowledge of God that Maimonides has furnished is indeed the ground of some sort of immanence of God to human consciousness (CEM 253), obviating the need of a divine-human mediator. The misreading, or double reading, of me on in the "Charakteristik" essay allows Cohen to stake out a middle position in this Scylla/Charybdis problem. To see either God or the created realm as me on is to argue that neither pole has its full meaning without the other; it is only in the relation between them that each can be understood as fully as possible. The me on as described in the Logik calls out for a foundation that lies beyond being (what Cohen terms a nonfoundation, Ungrundlegung) that stops the infinite regress of the series of preconditions, and it too serves as the foundation for a more exact understanding of its (non)foundation. In Democritus, the void is both grounded in an understanding of the atom (because there must be something besides atoms), and is the ground of a more sophisticated understanding of the atom. In Leibniz, the point on the curve is both grounded in a simple understanding of the point as a part of the whole curve, but also grounds a fuller understanding of the magnitude under the curve itself through the infinitesimal calculus. For Cohen, as shown earlier with Maimonides, the concept me always operates in both of these directions simultaneously. Meontology speaks to the belonging-together of the infinite and the infinitesimal.

Thus, it is not simply the case that Cohen uses Maimonides to explain how meontology works. Rather, Cohen uses meontology to explain how Maimonides works. For without meontology, Maimonides would not work for Cohen; there would be no resolu-

143 Cf. CEM 230, for example.
tion between the transcendence of God's nature and the immanence that is necessary for him to be imitated by humans. The relation which Maimonides institutes between humankind and God in *imitatio Dei* is one which is correlation in the Cohenian sense, even if "correlation" is a forbidden word in the *Guide*. The understanding of meontology from Democritus and Leibniz is used in the "Charakteristik" essay to claim that relation is the central point of the *Guide*; that every privation is necessarily predicated upon a nonfoundational ground that is its negation, a ground that is completely without lack and without potential. Maimonides, on the other hand, gives a fuller determination of what the stakes of meontology are by his argument that the Creator-God is the origin of the world, and thus takes on the role of the *Ursprung* in the *Logik*. Not only does the doctrine of God's attributes being attributes of action mean that the path of *Erzeugung* will be an ethical one, but it also posits God as the telos of the ethico-religious life. We live hoping for apotheosis, for a return to the Godhead which we originally were, Cohen seems to claim (CEM 253). In arguing why Aristotelian God, construed as thought thinking itself, is nonsensical according to the Jewish tradition, Cohen writes: "[The God of Judaism] must think men, insofar as he thinks himself; but indeed he must think them from within, out of himself [*aus sich selbst heraus*], and by no means out of the essence of humankind." This would imply that humankind, before being embodied, was "part" of the Godhead; humankind is not created *ex nihilo*, but emanated. This would allow Cohen the relationality between God and humankind which he seeks, and which he finds in Maimonides' doctrine of the attributes. The doctrine of the "negation of privation" is read by Cohen explicitly (if perhaps incorrectly, according to the letter) as the negation of *its* privation (CEM 258), thus positing the belonging-together of the privation that is below being and the infinite which is above being.

In the *Logik*, the telos of human existence, determined by the method of the *Erzeugung* of the *Ursprung*, was totality, which Cohen interpreted to mean the full
determination of the nexus of unities and pluralities. Unity must be shown in plurality; plurality must be shown in unity. The numerical plurality must open itself to unity in some manner, in every sphere in which there is plurality. How does this occur when one thinks of the unitary individual as part of a social plurality, and of this plurality as part of the unitary category of “humankind”? For Cohen, this is through the constitution of the ethical community. Maimonides helpfully fills in the gaps in Cohen’s apparently wild deduction of ethics from mathematics through the description of divine attributes as attributes of action. The usually static understanding of the knowledge of God is thus only a metaphor, an abstraction away from the dynamic and actional essence of the divine. This turns imitatio Dei into ethics, and God into the standard-bearer for human conduct:

Thus, the love of man originates in the love of God: the love of the neighbor, of the stranger, and thereby of man. And the love of man radiates back into the love of God, for God is the exemplar of man. To love God means to foster ethics, which constitutes the essence of God.
(CEM 240–41)

This fostering of ethics is not simply the cultivation of virtues, as in Aristotle, but rather the humble placing of oneself into relationships with others, in accordance with the Talmudic concept of lifnim mishurat ha-din (CEM 269), traditionally understood by the rabbis as a principle of supererogation (equivalent to “outside the limits of the law”) and by Cohen as a principle of justice and fairness. Cohen writes that Maimonides is “never so moving” as when he describes humility (CEM 270), and claims that Maimonides places it at the center of the ethical life. Yet because of Cohen’s interpretation of the attributes of action as exemplary for humankind, Cohen is forced to claim that human humility must be an

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144 Of course, this argument is only true iff all God’s actions are ethical actions.

145 Cohen’s willingness to read Maimonides’ discussions of supererogatory ethics in Hilkhot De’ot in terms of the modern discourse of justice and emancipation is striking. Indeed, the passage that Cohen cites as evidence for his conclusion (1:1), does not even mention the concept of lifnim mishurat ha-din. The reader again has to do outside work in order to attempt to justify Cohen’s conclusions: cf. Hilkhot Avadim 9:8, in which Maimonides concludes that supererogation is incumbent upon Jews so that Jewish and Gentile slaves can be treated equally. Cf. A Maimonides Reader, 177. For a Kantian link between justice and humility, cf. Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 230–31.
imitation of a divine humility. Hence, humility must be one of the attributes of action, although Maimonides never mentions it as such in the *Guide*. Cohen does not attempt to interpret a section of Maimonides to bolster his interpretation. Here, despite his opposition to rabbinics elsewhere in the "Charakteristik" essay (cf. CEM 249), Cohen's one traditional source for such a view is an *aggada* (which I have not been able to find) that "expounds upon the humility of God and its coherence with magnitude [Größe], just as if it were the grounding of magnitude through humility." Cohen finally gives the true, philosophical, reasoning behind this (CEM 271): "Because man is obliged to think humility through and carry it out, realize it [durchführen]; for that reason alone must God be, as it were, humbled with this attribute."  

The philosophical framework of a gradual realization of a task, exemplified both through the *Erzeugung*-motif of the *Logik* and the above expression of the moral law as a process of creating ethics, defined as "the relation [Verhältnis] between man and man" (CEM 268)  

147 casts the ethical path as a path of ontological nearing. One could describe this path, with reference to the themes of the *Logik*, as one in which the infinitesimal *me on* is gradually taken up into the geometric line as a whole. Cohen describes the ethical path, with specific reference to the figure of a line (CEM 275) as one of an act of making oneself complete (*Selbstvervollkommnung*).  

148 In ethics, the individual makes herself whole, makes herself infinite in the pre-Socratic sense of the word *apeiron*, as noted above. Cohen imagines individuals as points on a surface. Ethics develops itself along this surface, through the interpretation of all the points along it as interrelated: the unified line/group is a plurality of unitary points/individuals. Placing his own Maimonidean conception

146 Bizarrely, Cohen seems to be deducing the attributes of God from the categorical imperative.


148 I translate this word as "self-completion" and not "self-perfection" in order to show the resonances with Greek thought and mathematics, alongside the resonances with Maimonides and Judaism that are Cohen's primary purpose in the "Charakteristik" essay.
of ethics over and against Aristotelian eudaemonia, Cohen argues (CEM 275):

It is an engaging illusion [to think] that the solitary thinker in his eudaemonia could most certainly mature to selfhood [zum Selbst]. To the contrary, we know that this lonesome self of thought can not be the ethical self, because the ethical self is the self of action. For this self, there can be no I without a You. The other person is called re'a [the Hebrew word used in “Love your neighbor as yourself”]; he is like you, he is the You for the I. The self is the result of the eternal relation [Verhältnis] between I and You; the infinite ideal of this eternal relation. The ideal, to be sure, remains ideal; the task remains task. But the ideal is only ideal insofar as it demands emulation, and hence makes nearing feasible.

These sentences are a brief summary of a more extended passage in Cohen’s 1904 Ethik des reinen Willens. As for every X there is a not-X, so for every I there is a not-I, a You. Just as Cohen interpreted the nonbeing of the void as the ground of the fuller concept of the atom in Democritus, Cohen sees the ethical You is the ground of the more fully determined concept of the I, its relative Ursprung who in turn is grounded in the absolute Ursprung that is God. In this way the unity of God that serves as the original unity transmits itself down a chain of thought into the quest to establish the unity of humankind (Menschheit). Yet as in the Logik, this process of integration stretches in two directions simultaneously, both in the direction of unity and in that of plurality. Thus the task is infinite, since the act of unifying cannot go so far as to be at the expense of plurality, and the task of recognizing plurality cannot simply fall into irredeemable Protagorean diversity. As soon as one moves in one direction, a move must again be made backwards, and vice versa. Progress is certainly made, but the whole surface is not yet determined, and hence the task of producing the surface in the light of its simultaneous unity and plurality is an infinite one. Nevertheless, it would be false to charge Cohen with completely

149 Cohen, Ethik, 218ff contains the explicit Biblical reference; the entire argument for Cohen’s mathematical conception of interpersonal ethics and its consequences for political identity stretches from 201–257.

150 Ibid., 208.

151 Ibid., 212.

152 This argument is not necessarily satisfying. In the Platonic account of the dialectic of collection and division at Philebus 16–17, dialectic is not an infinite task. For example, dialectic is finished once the unity of spoken sound has been broken into the plurality of different consonant and vowel types, themselves unities; the one and many of music (one sound, many pitches) has been organized through the
imposing the Leibnizian epistemology of Neo-Kantianism onto Maimonides. At one point, Cohen equates self-perfection or self-completion with tzedaqah, the traditional concept of righteousness which Maimonides, as seen above, places as one of the suprarational virtues named at the close of the Guide. Cohen, however, cites no passage either in Maimonides or elsewhere in the tradition to bolster his claim, and his argument is therefore somewhat baffling. Yet Maimonides' aphoristic summation of the meaning of tzedaqah at the close of III:53 does move toward Cohen’s conceptualization of the issue (G 631): “tzedaqah [is applied] to every good action performed by you because of a moral virtue with which you perfect your soul.” Maimonides' view of the responsible life as ethical teleology and self-perfection is undeniable; Cohen is undertaking the difficult task of systematizing it.

In the closing pages of the “Charakteristik” essay, Cohen makes the understandable move from a somewhat demythologized description of life as a process of nearing God to a more determinate description of this demythologization as messianism. As we saw above in the analysis of Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen, the instrumental value which Maimonides always gives to the Messianic Era in the Mishneh Torah is in this letter reduced to being a merely heuristic device. It is used as a pedagogical tool for his audience to increase its scientific knowledge; there is no function for any messianic personality to play in the worldview given there, and the Yemenites must redeem themselves. Cohen's conceptualization of the Messianic Era serves a similarly heuristic function, insofar as the idea of such a time serves as a stimulant for the increase of human intellectual capacity. Although Cohen does not make any explicit comparison to Kant here, one could say that the Messianic Era serves

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measure of the scale, etc. There are three possible responses to this. First, the number of individuals who must be integrated into a society is far greater than the number of notes in a scale, or even the number of phonemes in a language. Yet this would only make the task of integration one of indefinite length, not of infinite length. Second, history has shown that the measures which organize those things that are one and many are at times false; the six-tone scale of the Greeks has become the eight-tone scale of modernity, and then the twelve-tone scale of Stravinsky, while Asian music confounds this system. Yet this is a rather weak argument for Cohen. It is best simply to say that since the Ursprung is infinite, so must be the task of its Erzeugung.

the same function as the category of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*; it shows the human mind the capacity to "surpass every standard of sense"\(^{154}\), to achieve its purpose by transcending its meontological existence bereft of apeironic stability.

In other words, the Messianic Era is a heuristic code for intellectual perfection, as in Maimonides' use of the concept in the *Epistle to Yemen*. As seen above, intellectual perfection for Cohen is always an ethical concept, and hence messianic anticipation becomes the narrative by which my drive for ethical perfection gains cosmic meaning. As such, messianism is not about the Messiah for Cohen, but about selfhood. With each of my ethical acts in this world, I perform one of an infinite number of integral summations. In other words, redemption is placed into my hands and heart, and insofar as I hasten it through my actions, I am the Messiah.\(^{155}\)

In the "Charakteristik" essay, Cohen sets the stage for this vision by deploying various ideas derived from Maimonides, ideas which he will organize more deftly in the *Religion of Reason*. For Cohen, the Messiah is always and everywhere a thisworldly concept, and has nothing to do with the world to come (CEM 281): "The Messiah is not the redeemer of humankind in the beyond, but the redeemer of humankind in this world." Yet Cohen departs from the Maimonides of the *Mishneh Torah* who insists that the Messianic Era will be led by a King Messiah. Everywhere after the above passage, Cohen refers to the messianic idea, and never again to the messianic person (except when quoting

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\(^{155}\) One must take note here of Steven Schwarzschild's revolutionary 1956 essay "The Personal Messiah—Toward the Restoration of a Discarded Doctrine." Schwarzschild's usual pro-Cohen stance is here muted, charging that Cohen's reduction of the personal Messiah to the Messianic Age is not only without sufficient reason but also authorizes the pseudo-messianic stance of religious Zionism. Yet this argument ignores the fact that messianism is not completely demythologized for Cohen, but rather made both one and many, in accordance with Platonic dialectic. The Messianic Age is the sum of the community of personal Messiahs (i.e. ethical Jews). If religious Zionists were/are unable to realize that the integration of the community is not limited to the Jewish community, this casts no shadow upon Cohen's thinking.

Cohen writes in 1910 that "wherever religion is closely linked to a personality, it faces a major problem: it is in danger of being mythologized." Schwarzschild's view makes the operative word in this sentence "personality"; I see it as the "a" which precedes it. Cf. Schwarzschild, *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, 15–28; Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, I:24.
Maimonides). Yet messianism is not totally reduced to an idea existing in the philosophical stratosphere, but only reduced to an idea that encompasses human action (CEM 284):

Maimonides could make use of [the concept of] the beyond (ethicized onto the shore of self-completion) for the messianic age insofar as he converted the messianic age into the precondition for that beyond. Realizing and recognizing [erkennen] the idea of the Messiah means anticipating this preparation and ensuring of self-perfection.

This latter sentence is somewhat obscure. At least it is clear that the final genitive is objective: since self-perfection has already been defined as a task, seeing as the self is to be created through the I-You relationship (CEM 280), the concept of preparing for a task seems rather nonsensical. What we are anticipating, then, is the self-perfection that is itself a preparation for universal knowledge of God (CEM 286) perceived as ethical humanitarian action (CEM 287) on the part of a unified humankind (Menschengeschlecht, CEM 288)—an ethical totality. It is less clear from this sentence alone whether the messianic idea refers this telos of a completely integrated humanism, or it means that the messianic idea is realized now insofar as one anticipates that telos. Yet insofar as Cohen appropriates Maimonides’ instrumental concept of messianism in the previous sentence (“only a precondition for that beyond”), it seems that the latter possibility must be the case. Messianism is thus anticipation of the world to come; the idea of the Messiah serves as the impetus for my ethical action by postulating the real possibility of the unity of humankind, otherwise understood as the immortality of the human (CEM 288).

The teleological arc of human knowledge of God, which Cohen has opened up through his analysis of Maimonides’ attributes of action in terms of the me on and the infinite judgment, can only proceed through interpersonal relationships. To speak in Levinasian language, the otherness which is beyond being is actualized through an infinite task of interactions with other beings. Yet in Cohen, the relationship between these two different kinds of othernesses is itself governed by the meontological analysis. The analysis of me on as the point on a surface or as the void between atoms serves as the precondition for the construction of the ethically responsible self on the path to perfection.
In the language of the *Logik*, the (ethically significant) something is only created by taking a detour path through the relative nothing—the other individual who is also a point on the surface of community.

Yet I cannot form relationships with individuals on the other side of the globe; no, not even in this age of CNN and real-time hyperlinks. The community into which I integrate myself is necessarily limited, by neighborhood or formal and informal rules governing association. Yet there are means of further integrating these communities: municipal organizations, councils, and larger representatives of the State. For Cohen, these are necessary pit-stops on the ethical-teleological path (CEM 284):

> the human individual can only ripen in a precise nexus with the ethical development of the human race. State and law [*Recht*] must lead [the way] to this self-perfection of humanity, but in their isolated historical materializations, they can only bode nearings to this goal of theirs.

Here serious questions arise. Exactly how much power should the individual hand over to the state in order to accomplish a still ever more close nearing to Cohen's humanistic goal? To what extent are concrete individuals preserved in his maddeningly brief vision of the state? What is the relationship between the state of which I am a member and the universal human community? These questions are not answered in the "Charakteristik" essay, and neither are they answered in Cohen's political writings in which he contradicts himself by giving the Reich of World War I the status which he had given to universality in the 1908 essay.¹⁵⁶ Yet they must be answered, for if Cohen ends up absorbing the individual into the state, then there can be no richly particular vision, and hence Cohen's claim to have constructed an ethical system of philosophy is rubbish. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to Cohen's most detailed examination of communal relationships in the light of the God-idea, to be found in the posthumously published (1918) *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*.

The Integration of the Community: Religion of Reason

If the Logik introduces the me on as the foundation of the teleological arc of human life, while the "Charakteristik" essay serves to apply this arc to the concepts of ethics and messianism, then the Religion of Reason brings the dialectical interplay between the divine and the human to the forefront of the discussion. This occurs in two notable loci: 1) the discussion of privation and the attributes of action in the "Creation" chapter, and 2) the discussion of ethics in the light of the individual's love for God. With these situations fleshed out, one can then move to an examination of the place which a rich particular vision, as described by Martha Nussbaum, may or may not play in Cohen's thought.

The primary difference between the account of the me on in the Religion and in the earlier writings lies in the end to which it is put. In the "Charakteristik" essay (CEM 257), Cohen only briefly bypasses Maimonides' example in Guide I:58 (G 136) that "the meaning of our saying that He is not powerless [inert] is to signify that His existence suffices for the bringing into existence of things other than He." Within his Leibnizian-Kantian framework, Cohen interprets this to mean that God is the Ursprung of all existent things. This example reads as part of a long list of infinite judgments which Cohen believes Maimonides to be making. It is definitely not the case here that Cohen views this passage as proof for a concept of God as Creator; indeed, at this point in his thinking, Cohen believes (CEM 253) creation to be a problematic concept for Maimonides. But by the time of the Religion of Reason, this sentence has become the benchmark citation for Cohen's account of Maimonides' doctrine of attributes; it "points the way" (RR 63) for all discussion of divine attributes. This is due to its demonstration of the correctness of the Biblical narrative insofar as it denies Aristotelian arguments for the eternity of the world.

Creation can no longer be in contradiction to reason. In this logic the religion of creation itself has become reason. God is not inert; this means: God is the prime cause of activity. God is the creator. His being can be determined in no other way than by the immanence of creation in his uniqueness. Creation is not a heterogeneous concept in—or in addition to—God's being. (RR 64)
Thus, it is not simply the case that meontology, through its place in infinite judgment, leads to an argument for the existence of God; it leads to an argument for the existence of God as creator.

In addition, Cohen's arguments against Greek pantheism are more strident in this section of the *Religion* than in his earlier writings. Whereas the "Charakteristik" essay speaks of the "the ethical motif of pantheism" (CEM 234), Cohen is more explicit in the *Religion* that any such language threatens the very teleological project which he is trying to establish (RR 67): if "God were not creator, being and becoming would be the same; nature itself would be God." If God is identical with the world, there is no longer any need to improve the world. It is already the embodiment of the All-Highest, and is thus scandalized by any conception of ethics.

Yet with this stridency comes an equal measure of ambiguity. From the context of Maimonides, Plotinus, and Aristotle, we are able to parse each of the words in the phrase "negation of privation." Privation refers to the earthly material-potential world of coming-to-be and passing-away, whereas its negation refers to the incorporeal noumenal realm which is fully actualized in every respect. "Privation is totally foreign to God's essence." Cohen shifts around on this issue on numerous occasions in the "Creation" chapter of the *Religion*; at times privation is what is to be removed from the Godhead, while at other times it is the God-idea itself which is characterized by privation. On the more orthodox Maimonidean side, Cohen gives the standard interpretation of the doctrine of attributes when he writes (RR 64) that predicating "not inert" of God is an operation which "negates the negativity contained in a privation." This lays side-by-side with more heterodox phrases (RR 66) such as "logically, chaos is merely the undetermined, not the infinite, which is designated by privation." Out of context, this sentence does not necessarily demonstrate anything, since the antecedent of the "which" could either be "unde-

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terminated" (in line with Maimonides and Plotinus) or the "infinite" which directly precedes the relative pronoun.¹⁵⁸ But Cohen is far clearer on this issue four sentences later when he writes that "creation as a problem of thought finds its solution in ... the infinite, privative Ursprung." Now, the very origin which has been warded off from privation is described as privative! And "infinite" and "privative" are equated, although Cohen's analysis of the infinite judgment in the earlier writings tells us that the two words should be perceived as contraries.

Moreover, Cohen gets into further problems when he claims that the doctrine of creation he has deduced from the infinite judgment is amenable to the Biblical account of creatio ex nihilo, insofar as it does not postulate the existence of an eternal matter which is independent of God.

Assigning the concept of Ursprung for the divine being also settles [the issue of] the Nothing, which is a stumbling block for the thought of creation. The Hebrew word that seems to correspond to “nothing” (’ayin), in no way means merely nothing, but rather the relative infinity of privation. Privation, however, is not situated within [bei] becoming, within matter, within the desire for essence that characterizes primeval substance [dem Desiderat des Urstoffs], but rather only within [innerhalb] the unique being of God.¹⁵⁹

This is even more confounding to the Maimonidean reader than the previous passage. Here, the very privation which had in Maimonides and elsewhere in Cohen been successfully prevented from infecting the God-idea is not only a descriptive term for the God-idea, but now also a spatial term (even if to speak spatially of privative nonexistence is bizarre), denoted by the use of innerhalb rather than bei, which risks two dire theological consequences. For if privation, i.e. potential, is located within God, then God is not a fully actualized being (and hence incorporeal, since body and potential are equated in Maimonides and Plotinus). There is no longer anything prohibiting one from concluding that God could be a body, that God might indeed have incarnated himself in an obscure

¹⁵⁸ Cohen, Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums, 2nd ed. (Köln: Joseph Melzer, 1959), 76.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 76; translation mine, but cf. RR 66.
village some 2000 years ago. Furthermore, Cohen appears to have pre-emptively cut off any attempt at theodicy. For if there is nothing external to God—that is, if Cohen does not try and make the concept of nothingness into a thingless subsistence of pure potentiality, completely deprived of being, that lies outside the Godhead, as Maimonides does—then God is responsible for having created all the suffering within the world as well as all the good. No longer would one be able to say, along with Cohen himself (RR 208), that God is der Gute, “the Good one,” a moral ideal. In short, once privation is included within the Godhead, there is no longer any substantive difference between God and the world (which is also characterized by privation), and it does not take long to hop over to a pantheistic worldview.

Nevertheless, there are philological, philosophical, and theological explanations for Cohen’s vacillation on the nature of privation. At the level of philology, Cohen has every right to describe that which is “infinite” as a privation, since Latin grammar has assigned privative status to words beginning with “in” or “un” (LRE 87). Philosophically, one can simply charge Cohen with conflating the Maimonidean-Plotinian view of to me on (sensible matter qua potential) and the Democritean understanding of the concept (the Esgibtexistenz of the incorporeal void that is the precondition for actual sensible objects) in such a brusque manner that the material realm seems to be equated with the incorporeal. Or one can point to the difference between the Greek conceptualization of the infinite as apeiron and Cohen’s need to envelop this into the modern association of the infinite with the All-Highest. Yet

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160 Ivry, op. cit.

161 The reader will by now have noticed the numerous critiques of Cohen’s handling of the history of ideas; he mixes up thinkers, he reads them selectively, he flagrantly misreads them, and he has a tendency to believe that a concept has the same meaning throughout the history of its philosophical usage. All of this leads to contradictions or faulty arguments on almost every philosophical page of Cohen. (And some of the “Jewish” pages as well; cf. the scandalous ellipsis of Micah 4:5 at RR 271.) To have a thinker of such brilliant originality as Cohen be such a bad reader of the philosophical sources is traumatic for Cohen’s own readers. I hypothesize here (but leave the details for a future analysis of Strauss’ Philosophy and Law) that such a trauma can lead a reader to develop a theory of esoteric writing, in which these contradictions and misreadings are purposefully deployed for a higher purpose.
a theological explanation is more interesting. To ascribe privation to God is to ascribe some sort of lack to him before the moment of creation. It is to assert that not only does the definition of God as infinite activity mean that he can create ("his existence suffices for the bringing into existence of things other than He"), but that he needs to create. This does not mean that God's freedom is compromised; but just as humans have a conatus to create within them and are still free, so does God (understood essentially as activity) have a conatus to create.

This mutual conatus lies behind the God-man correlation in the Religion. Correlation is defined in the Religion as "reciprocal relation" (RR 86); yet if we are to understand this term in the sense in which it is used in the Logik, this must be more than a descriptive term or a "methodological reciprocity." Rather, it must be a term which describes the essence of the concepts involved in the correlation. For in the system, correlation refers to the task of thinking the relata as preserved within each other. It is not simply the case that I need one pole to understand the other; correlation is not simply an epistemological concept. Its force goes as deep as being itself; I must somehow think the unitary object in terms of its differentia, its parts. I must think of the one object insofar as it is (in some limited respect) simultaneously many; not simply in terms of how it differs from an object perceived in terms of "the many" or plurality. Cohen here goes far beyond Plato in his thinking of the concept of negation, no doubt thanks to the influence of Leibnizian mathematics which sees the single line as the sum of an infinite number of ta me onta, relative nonbeings of infinitesimal magnitude. To return to the relationship between God and man: if one is to think of the God-man relationship in terms of a correlation, then one must look for that concept which expresses the essence that is shared by both of the relata. Later in the Religion, Cohen will name this shared essence "holy spirit," that which God has placed into man through revelation (which, for Cohen, is the gift of reason). Yet

162 Gibbs, Correlations, 86.
already in these relatively early pages, Cohen is making a similar essential link through the
euontological attribute of privation. Both God and human-kind are lacking the complete
determination (and hence, the fullness of being) that exists as the telos of the process of
Erzeugung, insofar as neither has completely come into relation with plurality and differen-
tiation. The unitary individual must sees himself within plurality and hence forge ethical
relationships with others in order to become a true self. God must create and enter into
relation with the multiple differentia of the finite world in order to become knowable, a God
not simply in-Himself but also a God for-Others who is completely determined within the
limits of human knowledge. Prior to this endpoint, both God and the individual are
lacking, and can be fairly described in terms of privation. Although God remains for
Cohen completely transcendent, in this one respect God and the individual are similar.

The ethical encounter, for Cohen, is the site at which the individual actualizes his or
her knowledge of God. In the “Charakteristik” essay, Cohen moves from the discussion
of the attributes of God to the norms of human ethics as imitatio Dei without asking the
important question of what it is within the human that allows imitatio Dei to occur in the
first place. How do we know that ethics is not a ruse, a legal fiction, imposed upon the
singular individual by the state or by other repositories or authority? In the Religion,
Cohen solves this problem through the concept of the holy spirit, which he interprets as the
essence of God (RR 101). The argumentative strategy here is not philosophical, but
Biblical. There is no proof for the existence of the holy spirit in the human (a “sublime
moral destiny,” as Kant says); there are only prooftexts. It must be emphasized that the
citation which Cohen most often uses here, Leviticus 19:2 (RR 96, 103, 205: “Be ye holy,
as I am holy”), is still an insufficient prooftext, for even this word of God does not give
any evidence that holiness is potentially within my power now. From this verse alone, one
might conclude that even if this is the word of God, it still might be the word of a sadistic
God who issues commands which are impossible to obey. On the other hand, there is far
more substance in Psalms 51:13 in which David, responding to God's anger over David's indirect murder of Uriah the Hittite (Psalms 51:1, cf. 2 Sam 11:12), begs of God not to "cast me out of Your presence, or take Your holy spirit away from me." The very phrasing of the verse from Psalms within the 2 Samuel narrative implies that David possessed a holy spirit at the very moment that he sent Uriah to the battlefront. Given the presupposition of the truth of prophetic texts, Cohen (RR 103) has every right to deduce from this that "I have Thy holy spirit; sin cannot frustrate it within me."

Individuals therefore can be ethical in the Cohenian sense, and near themselves to God through actualization of the divine spirit within. This holy spirit, being shared across God and the human, must therefore possess the same conative force within the human individual as it does within God. This conatus expresses itself through ethical action; the element which expresses the correlation between man and God actualizes itself in the interpersonal correlation (RR 114). The conception of history as Erzeugung means that it cannot be otherwise. If the singular individual were to aim at mystical union with God, then the mystic would have ignored the fact that history is a series of mutual determinations of unity and plurality. In the intent for union between the one mystic and the one God, the category of plurality is completely elided. The religious concept of correlation thus guides the religious believer towards the existential instantiation of plurality (the social realm), and the task is to determine this plurality as a unity through the process of an ever-expanding formation of community. The unity of the holy spirit, split across both God and his creatures, seeks the return of its unity through the integration of the community. This return begins through the individual's conversion of his vision of the other person as merely spatially adjacent (Cohen's category of "the next man" [Nebenmensch]) into a vision of the other person as already related to me (Cohen's category of the "fellow-man" [Mitmenschi]).

Insofar as Cohen refers to the categories of the Logik in the ethical sections of the Religion (RR 113), one can conclude that the interhuman correlation is the sociopolitical instantiation
of the Leibnizian infinitesimal calculus. The other person is not discontinuous with myself, but I am related to him or her already in the same manner as two points on a curve, infinitesimal with respect to the infinite and apeirontic whole. As Cohen writes, echoing a passage from the “Charakteristik” essay quoted above,

Yet the I is only the I for a Thou... The I, as well as the Thou, are singular beings, but they are such only as members of a social plurality, or even totality, insofar as the latter can be established through social love... Only through the Thou is the I to be generated. This is the guiding idea of all of the prophets up to Ezekiel. (RR 165, 178)

Once I include the category of my plurality in my worldview, there is no logical resistance to the correlation between myself and any other individual. My detour through plurality allows me to more fully determine myself as an individual, as an Etwas in the terms of the Logik. Insofar as the social task is the creation and determination of the unified community (RR 141), the other person is formally similar to Cohen's earlier mathematical description of the me on in the Logik. As such, the neighbor (re'a) is like me insofar as s/he appears under the mark of the me on.

At this point, ethics seems to be just as easy as mathematics, with individuals reduced to elements in an infinite series. Yet it is essential to remember that the account of correlation in the Logik is one in which the parts are always preserved in the whole. Correlation is Erhaltung, preservation and not (what Cohen perceives to be) the reductive move of a Hegelian Aufhebung. The difference between the self and other can never be elided; in the sociopolitical realm, this difference is made manifest through the suffering of the other and my sinfulness in this regard. The distance between self and other is what allows community to take place; if the self and the other could both be sublated into the concept of the community, there would be no room for the reciprocal action in which "community comes to be and is achieved" (RR 137). Community can only be a telos if there is suffering now, as a symbol of the mere plurality of fungible individuals. The observation of suffering is thus the first step to the determination of the I, in the Religion.

When I see someone suffering in poverty (either financial or emotional, one might say
today), I may react with compassion, *Mitleid*, literally suffering with (RR 138ff). When I do this, I take responsibility for the other’s suffering and realize my guilt. The ability to have the affect of compassion proves indeed that the other is like me, that she is a *me on* like myself. But the fact that I have only noticed this now means that I have neglected this formal similarity and my own responsibility to integrate the community in this single case. I am guilty, but not only insofar as I have abdicated my responsibility to make concrete the formal structure of humanity. Because the telos of community is the desire of the holy spirit which God has placed within me, my social guilt also has meaning within the religious sphere, and is therefore sin. I atone for my sin through my cognitive recognition of it and my active suffering—with the other person, for in this action I convert him or her from the next-man into the fellowman, the person whom I exist *with*. Yet on the other hand, this atonement is not permanent, for there are an indefinitely large number of situations which display evidence of my abdication of responsibility; as long as poverty and suffering exists, I am still a sinful being. Cohen cites Psalms 51:7 ("Indeed I was born with iniquity; with sin my mother conceived me") as a prooftext for the individual’s constant sense of being “innately infirm and defective” (RR 211). Moreover, Cohen sees suffering as what it is to be human (RR 146): “suffering reveals itself to be the essence, as it were, of man... If you wish to know what man is, get to know his suffering.” As such, the negativity of the Thou never recedes after I have confessed my sin against her and against God; my atonement is never a completed act, but part of a larger process of self-sanctification.

In this manner, the other is always preserved in his or her otherness (although it may indeed be disturbing from a post-Holocaust viewpoint to think that suffering is what constitutes otherness). Yet at the same time, the incorporation of the other into the community through the confession of sin and the redress of suffering does lead to progress, for (RR 244) “out of non-being a higher being is to come forth.” This path from nonbeing to

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163 The previous four sentences are a summary of Chapters 8, 10, and 11 of the *Religion*. 
higher (i.e. more determined) being, which in the *Logik* is simply the mathematical process of an ever more exact determination of the correlative poles, is in the *Religion* (as in the "Charakteristik" essay), messianic ethics. Ethics must be messianic because it is situated along the path of *Erzeugung*; it is only complete when the unitary self sees him- or herself as part of a total community. As such, ethics is progressive; it (RR 289) "maintains the development of the human race" and places more worth in the value of the future over that of the present or the past. Ethics prophesies a perpetual peace of the future.\(^{164}\) Insofar as this prophetic voice is grounded in the analysis of the actional essence of God and the view of God as the standard-bearer of human moral conduct, this perpetual peace has a religious as well as an ethical meaning, and can therefore be equated (in Cohen’s view) with the classical descriptions of the Messianic Era.

Thus, ethical progress occurs through imitation of the Biblical descriptions of the Messiah. Of course, this idea was never unified, and was deployed for various ideological purposes both before and after the time of Jesus of Nazareth.\(^ {165}\) The messianic idea which Cohen chooses out of the possibility of ideologies at his disposal is, ironically enough, the concept of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 (RR 283ff), a Biblical passage which did not have messianic overtones in ancient Judaism or even in early Christianity.\(^ {166}\) What Cohen has done, then, is combine the messianic interpretation which Christianity has assigned to this chapter with the Jewish interpretation of the "servant psalms" in which the concept of the "servant of the Lord" is seen to refer to the suffering of Israel as a nation. This has the effect of simultaneously demythologizing the Christian understanding of messianism and lifting an idealized concept of the nation of Israel to the status of Messiah (RR 260): the


idea of Israel as “holy remnant” serves the function of proclaiming a “messianic call, its elevation into one humankind.” As the Messiah is the servant of God in Cohen's bizarre interpretation of Isaiah 53, so should “all Israel and finally all men ... become servants of God” (RR 261). How does the Jewish (or non-Jewish) individual become a servant of God? Through imitatio Dei, to be sure, yet Cohen more explicitly determines imitatio Dei in the Religion as constant humility and the taking on of the suffering of the poor. By representing in his own actions the suffering that essentially describes humankind, the ethical self announces that the ideal community has no bounds, that it is essentially as apeirontic and infinite as the God-idea (RR 266).

And while he suffers about [um] them, he suffers for them... The humble man is therefore the true sufferer; he is the representative of suffering. Only he is able to undergo suffering in its moral essence. He is not only the representative of suffering but even more the only true bearer of it... The ideal man suffers. The Messiah is seized by the distress of humankind in its entirety.

The idea of the Messiah is therefore an exemplar for ethical action, as God is. Nevertheless, Cohen insists that the Messiah is not immanent in God, but immanent in man (RR 255). This undoubtedly serves to safeguard a role for Judaism as a religion of reason, yet it also serves to justify the evil of suffering. If the suffering of the ethical self, emulating the messianic figure of Isaiah 53, is part and parcel of the progressive arc of history, then this suffering has value from a cosmic perspective. The evil of suffering for Cohen is not useless; but it is itself the nonbeing from which a higher being will emerge.

From the messianic point of view, a light of theodicy is cast even upon this riddle of world history [the misery of the Jews]... The messianic calling of Israel sheds another light upon its own earthly history. As Israel suffers, according to the prophet, for the pagan worshippers, so Israel to this very day suffers vicariously for the faults and wrongs which still hinder the realization of monotheism. (RR 268)

At this point, the fact that the personal Messiah is demythologized as the suffering nation of Israel should be clear. The incorporation of the community is not performed by an exterior agent, much less a God-man; this is the task of the nation of Israel, or of the

pious of the nations. However, a problem arises with regard to the Messiah-idea in Cohen, one which gets to the heart of the issue of the ontological (or meontological) intimacy between the human and God, between the infinitesimal and the infinite, which we have been exploring throughout this chapter. For it is never clear in the Religion what the relation is between the figure of the Messiah and its actualization in history. Is the Messiah to come in the infinite future, or is s/he here in some shadowy (or maybe even illuminated!) form now? Let us review the presuppositions from the Logik that inform this question.

From the description of the teleological arc inaugurated by the Ursprung, one would suppose that at each moment the infinitesimal bears a relationship with the infinite within its deepest recesses, the most intimate secrets of its crypts. Indeed, it should bear an indeterminate form of the infinite within itself, one which will become more determined over the course of the Erzeugung of the God-man correlation. Yet as we have seen before, correlation means intimacy, not identity. The absence of attributes of essence in the Godhead is one example; the difference between the atoms and the void is another. God and man are irreconcilably different; God is uniquely being, while the human realm is the meontological realm of becoming (RR 46). When this is applied to messianism, Cohen gets into thorny situations because the doubleness of this situation—intimacy without identity—cannot be easily expressed. For example, the omnipresence of suffering in the human world heightens the difference between God and the human, so that the intimacy is delayed until the end of time. As a result, certain of the references to the Messianic idea both in Cohen's Jewish interpretation of philosophy and his philosophical interpretation of the Jewish sources are always references to an idea, to a hope, to a heuristic device. For example:

The Messiah comes only at the end of the development of the soul, which is synonymous with immortality. In fact his coming is not an actual end, but means merely the infinity of his coming, which in turn means the infinity of development... the Messiah represents the time of the future, that is, the infinite development of the concept of the human soul. (RR 314)

The Messiah is here the result of the integration of the community, the ethical task which marks the development of the soul. The phrase that “his coming... means the infinity of
his coming” may imply that the idea of the Messiah represents the entirety of the ethical process, and is thus stretched across the historical bow. Yet even if this is the case, the fact remains that the range across which the Messiah is integrated is from zero to infinity. The Messiah is always to-come, for the integrative operation is not complete in the here and now. Even if I act ethically now, even if I have incorporated the suffering others into the social community (in its religious or political instantiations), I am not even close to being adequate to the Messianic idea. This would seem to be a corollary of Cohen's Platonic premise that the idea supersedes historical appearance; history can be appropriate to the idea (as the ethical self can be near to God), but “complete adequacy cannot be achieved” (RR 367). Yet the definition of the Messiah as the “infinity of his coming” is more radical; it states that history can not even be appropriate to the idea, that the soul on the developmental path is not appropriate to the idea of the Messiah.

This interpretation, however, has the rather shocking consequence, however, of equating the Messiah and God. For the Messiah is here defined as the end-point of the process of Erzeugung; it is the result of the soul’s development. Cohen claims in the Logik that the telos of the Erzeugung is the same as its Ursprung; according to Cohen's Platonic-Leibnizian account there, the process of dialectic serves to make the indeterminate origin fully determinate within the order of the real. Additionally, Cohen insists constantly in the opening chapters of the Religion and from the sections of the “Charakteristik” essay on Maimonides' account of divine attributes, that the Ursprung can be nothing other than God; this is the meaning of the infinite judgment. In sum: if the Messiah is the telos, and if the telos is the Ursprung, and if the Ursprung is God, then one can equate the Messiah and God simply through logical laws of transitivity. This is definitely something which Cohen does not mean to say, since it authorizes a Christian interpretation of the Messiah which he feels to exclude Judaism from any claims to rationality and truth.

This is the Messiah to come. But this is not the only messianic figure about which
Cohen writes. The Messiah is also immanent in humankind here and now, even with shadowy or undetermined content.

The Messiah is equated with the pious man. This is what we have previously said. . . Not only do the poor become the pious, but only through the mediation of humility, which is expressed in the poor, is piety manifested in them. Hence, humility becomes the foundation of messianic mankind. (RR 427)

Here, every humble act, every pious act, every moment of ethics, is equated with messianism, with a deep relation toward the messianic idea. The Messianic idea is not simply in the far-off future; but is actualized in some shadowy status through my proleptic anticipation of it. This is more than messianism existing merely as potential; my humility is completely actualized. True enough, this moment of intimacy with the Messiah is fleeting; a single act of humility on my part is never sufficient to engender a permanently unified and just human community. Yet this does not make the act any less actual. The argument in the passage quoted above in which Cohen finds theodicy in Jewish suffering is predicated upon the premise that Jewish suffering is evidence of Jews' participation in messianic ethics. Their piety here and now that makes them instantiations of the messianic idea, that makes them the Messiah before the inauguration of the single human community. Insofar as they engender, even in part, the integration of the community, they fulfill the function of the messianic concept.

This strange intimacy between the human and divine is nothing new within the

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168 Similarly to the double sense of “Messiah” in Religion of Reason is a doubleness in Cohen’s discourse about the I, the ethical self who has atoned for his or her sins against the impoverished fellowman. On most occasions in the chapter on atonement, Cohen writes as if the individual’s realizing interhuman correlation and becoming an I is a foregone conclusion after atonement: “through the possibility of turning away from sin, however, the sinful individual becomes the free I” (RR 193), “Now the individual comes to full fruition in the I . . . through the power to create for himself a new heart and new spirit” (RR 194), “The casting away of all sins is the new power in which the I comes to life” (RR 203). The I is, in all these citations, the person for whom sinlessness is really possible, and real in fleeting moments. On the other hand, near the end of the chapter, Cohen changes his tone and begins to imply that the I is only the person for whom sinlessness is actual (RR 204): “The I, too, can be considered as nothing other than a task . . . The I can mean nothing higher and certainly nothing other than one step, a step in the ascent to the goal, which is infinite.” This parallels the double sense of the Messiah as the goal of the ethical path and the momentary instantiation of ethics which demonstrates the real possibility of the world-to-come. The contradictions in both these cases could be elided if only Cohen were to have written that it is not the I or the Messiah tout court that is the goal of the development, but rather the complete realization and determination of these concepts across the totality of the community.
framework of the *Religion*, however. It is the telos of the religious life, the object of my affection (RR 378): “So intimately does prayer connect me as an individual with my God, with the God who in this prayer more than ever becomes my God.” But also, it is the origin of the religious life; divine-human intimacy is predicated in the description of the holy spirit that makes ethical action really possible for humankind. Every individual possesses, as a gift, God’s holy spirit. This is a precondition for ethical action. As such, every ethical action is an actualization of this holy spirit. When I act ethically, I have *already* attained the “nearness to God” which Cohen posits to be the basic desire of the religious individual (RR 163). I have momentarily actualized holiness in my ethical action, even though holiness is also for Cohen the task of self-sanctification (RR 303). Holiness thus bizarrely becomes its own precondition. I cannot attain God’s nearness unless I am already near to Him. This should not be seen as hopelessly paradoxical. Although Cohen is not clear on the issue, the nearness that is the goal of the ethical task is qualitatively different than the nearness that is reflected in my ability to act ethically. The difference between the two kinds of nearness (or holiness, or Messiah, or I’s) is the same as that between the *Ursprung* at the beginning of the dialectical process and that at its end. As expressed in the *Logik*, this difference is one of determination. At the beginning of the thinking process, the *Ursprung* is simply a bare unity; at the end, it is seen in conjunction with its plural parts, it is measured out across the totality of the meontological points which constitute it.

If the telos of the ethical life is the formation of a total community, what is the status of the singular members of this community? Are they indeed sublated into the category of totality, as appears to be the case with Maimonides’ advice to the Yemenites? The answer to this question is once again maddeningly twofold, because the philosophical method of the ethical life is at odds with the hortatory claims that Cohen wants to make to the Jewish audience of the *Religion*. On the one hand, the *Logik* dictates that the determination of the *Ursprung* does not sacrifice plurality for the sake of unity; indeed, the difficulty of this task
is part of what makes it infinite. In the Religion, this refusal to sacrifice the fellowman in the name of the community is expressed in the chapter on Yom Kippur. Redemption does occur on the Day of Atonement, but it is only an ephemeral redemption. It does not cancel the suffering that, for Cohen, dominates the present. Cohen's theodicy is formulaically expressed in the Religion as "No redemption without suffering" (RR 235). This has two senses: 1) there can be no final redemption without the temporally prior suffering of humankind, for it is in the taking on of suffering that nearness to God is achieved, and 2) in each and every temporal moment, redemption and suffering coexist. Redemption (RR 235) "clings to every moment of suffering, and constitutes in each moment of suffering a moment of redemption." The dyadic relationship between these two terms is yet another of these doubled descriptions of concepts in the Religion. Insofar as redemption is in every moment, the I is actual, here and now already free; insofar as it is always accompanied by suffering, the I has not yet fulfilled its task, and has only demonstrated that sinlessness is a real possibility in the infinite future. The dialectic between the two poles is never fixed and never becomes resolved (RR 230): "The feeling of joy in being liberated from suffering has its validity only as a moment. Such a moment is redemption ... only for a moment does the I have stability." At each moment, I see more suffering for which I have not atoned, and I realize that the freedom that I have attained was only of instantaneous duration. Therefore, as long as suffering exists—and Cohen believes that it determines what it means to be human—I still must continue in my conversion of the adjacent person into the fellowman, integrate him or her into the community at large. I must still observe and get to know his or her suffering, get to know the intrinsic worth of that person, determine the ways in this next re'a "is as me" (RR 119). This is the case even if all the evidence is to the contrary: if a gulf between myself and the other appears due to culture, class, politics, ethnicity, hygiene, disability, religion. In this way, the fellowman/re'a raises a challenge for me to cultivate my skills of discernment in a manner that is certainly not contrary to Martha
Nussbaum's vision of the moral life.

Yet there are other passages in Cohen which just as strongly testify to the merely instrumental value of ethics, as in Maimonides. Even as early as the "Charakteristik" essay, Cohen writes that the recognition of the correlation between the I and the You (which in this essay is described not as a correlation per se, but as an "eternal relation") is a means for me to "work on my self" (CEM 275–76), a means for me to near God. In the Religion, the act of atoning for my sin against the other person benefits only me, for it brings about a momentary reconciliation of the I with God (RR 189). At his most blunt, Cohen writes (RR 109) that "the knowledge of man becomes a means for the knowledge of God." This knowledge is always individual, always my knowledge. I am integrating the community for my own sake. But the most macabre instrumentalization of ethics lies in the structure of the Religion as a whole. For hundreds of pages, Cohen has led the reader into a determination of ethical messianism as true religion, and shown how this is just as rooted in the Jewish tradition, if not more so, than in the philosophical tradition. The reader is led to the expectation of a grand messianic ending, a description of the world-to-come rivalling that of Maimonides. But this expectation is shattered; instead, we get the grand telos of the text of the Religion as ... a notion of death that is no longer quite as frightening as it might have been 500 pages earlier. In one of the most lyric passages in the Religion of Reason, Cohen writes:

All the meaning, all the value of life is in peace. Peace is the unity of all vital powers, their equilibrium and the reconciliation of all their contradictions. Peace is the crown of life. Human life as its conclusion in death. Death is not the end but a conclusion, a new beginning. it is significant for the Jewish consciousness that it also thinks of death as, and calls it, peace... Peace takes away from death its sting. It also gives a solution to the riddle of death. The man who is torn from life is not removed from peace, but rather brought nearer to it... Death is the world of peace. One cannot praise death better and more blissfully than by distinguishing it from the world of struggle ... Life ought to seek peace; it finds it in death. Death is therefore not the actual end of human life but rather its goal, the trophy of life and all its striving. Whosoever loves peace cannot fear death. (RR 460)

While I cannot put myself in the place of an eminent philosopher during his final months, this passage does appear rather anticlimactic insofar as the rhetoric marks a return from the
rhetoric of the community to the rhetoric of the individual. Cohen is more convincing in an earlier lyric about the immortality of humankind which conquers “tragic life and incurable death” (RR 268). This concept at least links the telos of life with the ethical process of community-formation. In opposition, the closing sections of the Religion reduce the ethical life to a macabre selfishness; because my suffering has cosmic significance, I can die happy. I can even face martyrdom with courage, for my death will be “in the service of history” (RR 439). The fact that these teloi occupy the closing pages of the Religion give them a literary significance which is only rarely supported by the philosophical arguments of the first two-thirds of the text.

Conclusion

The doubleness of nonbeing—as both privation and transcendence—has become more pronounced in the move from Aristotle to Cohen. While Aristotle is uniform on his evaluation of nonbeing as only falseness or privation, the Plotinian interpretation of this text realizes that a conatus inheres within the privative state, that the nonbeing of the material world is always also a temporal not-yet. It is this temporalizing move that links teleology to nonbeing and institutes messianic ethics as a norm, which is of primary importance in the evolution of the concept of nonbeing from Plato to Cohen. Maimonides and Cohen cannot justify the place of ethics and messianism without their appropriation of the discourse of nonbeing from Plotinus and Democritus.

But there are metaphysical and ethical problems concomitant with this discourse. In reference to the metaphysical problem, Plotinus, Maimonides, and Cohen all agree that privation has an understanding of its goal within it, a conatus which leads it on its temporal path (either as desire, or through the natural conatus of the infinitesimal towards unity). In some sense, privation is not completely deprived; it possesses its goal at least proleptically. And because this telos is also the origin (the One or God), the telos shares the characteristic
of nonbeing with the privative state that the cultivation of reason and ethics conquers. While Plotinus, Maimonides and Cohen are usually clear that meontology is always a term that is used to refer to existence and never to what lies beyond this, there is a strand in which all three thinkers use meontological rhetoric to express the telos of human existence as well. The One is formless as nonbeing is; God is without essential attributes as sheer matter is; The *Ursprung* of existence is also its *Ungrundlegung*, and thus other than being. Because there is no criterion to differentiate between two kinds of nonbeing, this leads to confusion. This is especially the case in Cohen, for whom the telos of human existence which he describes as the Messianic Age is both in the far-off distance, and is also present in the present moment of my ethical act. The best that one can say is that the two kinds of nonbeing are correlated, or perhaps even non-independent; the nonbeing be-low being is always related to the nonbeing above being that is its transcendental condition. Yet the way in which a consciousness might come to know this correlation is unexpressed even in Cohen; here it seems that a phenomenological answer dealing with the intuition of the categorial in the sensuous (where here the category is one of nonbeing) is called for.

In reference to the ethical problem, I have shown that the philosophical deduction of teleology from the concept of nonbeing leads to an instrumentalist ethic for both Maimonides and Cohen (although this ethic is more pronounced in Maimonides). The sociopolitical world of existence is the privative order which I am trying to get beyond. My individual philosophical analysis tells me that my redemption lies at the end of the teleological path, and that a cultivation of rational perfection (along with the ethical principles that are corollaries of this perfection) is the way to achieve this redemption. Ethics is a side-effect of reason. The individual’s cultivation of philosophy comes first; ethics comes thereafter. What is needed, and what is hinted at in Cohen’s account of the interpersonal encounter—although even this is the result of the creation of the human individual in reason—is a situation in which the cultivation of philosophy arises from the interpersonal
scene. Again, here phenomenology can be of aid, since the sensuous world serves as the matrix from which all sense originates.

In the next chapter, I explore one proto-phenomenological and one phenomenological account of the relationship between nonbeing, teleology, ethics, and messianism. Rosenzweig will attempt (and, on my reading, fail) to give the world an essential role by viewing it as a stage in God’s self-development, while Levinas turns to the body as the site of ambiguity, where nonbeing and being meet. In this carnal encounter, in which nonbeing shows itself not simply as the contrary or the contradictory concept of being but is cognized through the interpersonal encounter, one finally sees a resolution of the metaphysical problem of nonbeing that does not fall into an ethical trap.
VOLUME II

BEING AND NONBEING:
The Appropriation of the Greek Concept of to me on in Jewish Thought

By

Martin T. Kavka
CHAPTER 4
CONSTITUTING THE BODY IMMEMORIAL:
Levinas vs. Rosenzweig on the Role of the Other in Messianic Anticipation

Introduction

The most dramatic development in American modern Jewish thought in the last decade has been the explosion of work on the writings of Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929)—the interpretive secondary works, the new translations, the scores of conference papers. Rosenzweig is an ideal standard-bearer for the task of formulating a Jewish philosophy for the postmodern era: his language evokes the texts of the Talmud, Kabbalah, and Maimonides, and is ahead of its time insofar as it anticipates the rise of phenomenology in Continental philosophy as well as the linguistic turn of recent French thought and American pragmatism. The multiple "Rosenzweigs" apparent in a reading of the Star of Redemption (first published in 1921) parallel the text's multiple Judaisms: the extensive evocation of the concrete life of Jewish ritual liturgy in the third book, as well as a demythologized view of revelation and religious ethics in the second book. The Star is a book for everyone.

Indeed, Rosenzweig may be even better suited for the task of providing an organic Jewish philosophy than Levinas. Levinas is definitely imbricated in both the Jewish and postmodern worlds by virtue of his ethical critique of the totalizing humanist systems which reduce the particular to the general, and by virtue of verifying this critique through a return to Jewish texts, both from the Talmud and from the ethico-kabbalistic texts of the Lithuanian musar movement.1 Yet for all of the devotion that Levinas shows to Jewish

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texts, and even for all the Torah-observance which Levinas showed in his personal life, it remains a question as to whether philosophy coexists with a thick and non-demythologized sense of ritual on completely equal terms in Levinas’ writings. It may be that the richness of concrete Jewish ritual, for example the life of the synagogue, can be trumped by the conversion of its content into philosophemese. In a 1972 reading of B. Berakhot 61a entitled “And God Created Woman,” Levinas discusses the Talmud’s enumeration of forgivable apostasies, and concludes that “a person may rebel against the synagogue because of the unbearable burden he carries. Let us forgive this revolt!”2 Yet when placed in the context of his philosophical writings, this sentence is amplified to surprising effect. For Levinas’s discussions of the responsibility for the other which lies at the knotty center of subjectivity often take on the language of burden and weight. The responsibility of and for the Other “is incumbent on me”3, bears down on me. Analyzed in terms of the ethical stratum that lies beneath all dispassionate rational accounts of subjectivity, the self “is under the weight of the universe, responsible for everything” (OB 116). Examined phenomenologically, there is no self who is not under a burden, and who therefore does not have a right to revolt against the synagogue. While Levinas does not contravene or ridicule Jewish ritual observance, it remains the case that ritual and the reasoning-structures built around it are taken out of their lived context. Rosenzweig, on the other hand, is able to speak both the languages of observant Jewish life and Jewish ethical monotheism. Ritual is not the enigmatic locus for the extrusion of ethical dicta for him; it is rather the unsurpassable context in which ethical actions are performed.

Jewish life can enter in a full and autonomous vitality into the Levinasian corpus only through reference back to Rosenzweig. Levinas authorizes this move in the one


sentence of *Totality and Infinity* which now seems to be omnipresent in the secondary literature (TI 28): “We were impressed by the opposition to the idea of totality in Franz Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*, a work too often present in this book to be cited.” If Rosenzweig’s work, including its emphasis on the lived stuff of Jewish tradition, is everywhere present in Levinas, then a traditionalist reading of Levinas suddenly becomes possible. Scholars can use this single sentence—which I find to be just as enigmatic as all of Levinas’s writings—to forge links between the two authors which remain unspoken in the primary sources themselves. This is apparent in the two books which will, for excellent reason and for a significant time to come, remain authoritative in scholarship on Rosenzweig and Levinas: Robert Gibbs’s *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* and Richard A. Cohen’s *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*. In their very titles, they argue for an ineluctable and telepathic link across the forty years that separate the *Star of Redemption* from *Totality and Infinity*. Gibbs argues that five primary themes of Levinasian thought—the importance of face-to-face dialogue, the independent self as the precondition for such dialogue, the primacy of social responsibility, the ability of language to communicate that which transcends it and cannot be spoken, and the passive election of the self that lies at the heart of experience—already exist in the *Star*. For Gibbs they are the five themes of correlational (i.e. postmodern⁶) philosophy. The Levinasian corpus is a *midrash*, an interpretation or (in Gibbs’ term) “adaptation”, of the Rosenzweigian corpus into the language of phenomenology. Cohen argues somewhat along the same lines, but concludes that Levinas uses the Rosenzweigian thematics of ethics and justice to *undo* the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger all the while using


⁷ Ibid., 26-32.
phenomenological language. For Cohen, the Levinasian project could not exist without its use of the *Sta* as a higher phenomenology which allows one to describe the event of transcendence in a language which forsakes representation, adequation, and ontology.\(^8\) The implication of both texts is, at times even despite their assertions to the contrary, that the primarily new thing about Levinasian thought is its context. Levinas writes after phenomenology has become the dominant current of European philosophy. Gibbs explicitly denies that he is doing anything of the sort: in Levinas, “Rosenzweig is nonetheless not merely presented in a new coat, nor is he simply dragged forward fifty years.”\(^9\) Nevertheless, while midrash does amplify the Biblical world-view through its narrative and philological inventiveness, it often does so at the expense of the literal meaning of Biblical verses: “Read not X, but Y,” where Y is a revocalization of the word X. Therefore, if the relationship between Levinas and Rosenzweig is truly to be midrashic, as Gibbs argues, then it is necessary to point out not only the moments of Levinas's direct adaptation of Rosenzweigian motifs, as Gibbs and Cohen do, but also the places in which the primary meaning of the Rosenzweigian base-text is denied by the Levinasian interpretation.

In other words, we must find the moments in Levinas in which Rosenzweig is critiqued, in order to keep to the spirit of Gibbs's and Cohen's analyses. Luckily, this is not too difficult. The connections which Gibbs and Cohen make are *formal*, at the level of genre. The Rosenzweigian and Levinasian dramas *sound* similar to the reader: they are narratives of ethical relation, of the ways in which transcendence is revealed, of the nature of the path to redemption. But making connections in terms of the content into which Rosenzweig and Levinas emplot these narratives is far more tenuous, as tenuous as an argument that a midrashic text uncovers the intended meaning of a Biblical text.

\(^8\) Cohen, 223-240.

\(^9\) Gibbs, 32.
In this chapter, I will argue both in terms of Levinas's similarity to and critique of Rosenzweig. Both Rosenzweig and Levinas are meontological thinkers; they include the entire realm of existence under the sign of the “not yet.” Yet the narrative deployment of this theme is different in the two thinkers. Let us return to the flitting reference to Rosenzweig in Totality and Infinity, and put it in a slightly fuller context. Although every sentence in this paragraph (TI 28–29) has important things to say about the limited parameters of the Levinas–Rosenzweig relationship, I have selected only a few of the neighboring sentences.

The relation between the same and the other is not always reducible to knowledge of the other by the same, nor even to the revelation the other to the same, which is already fundamentally different from disclosure.

We were impressed by the opposition to the idea of totality in Franz Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption, a work too often present in this book to be cited. But the presentation and the development of the notions employed owe everything to the phenomenological method. Intentional analysis is the search for the concrete. [...] The breakup of the formal structure of thought ... into events which this structure dissimulates, but which sustain it and restore its concrete significance, constitutes a deduction—necessary and yet non-analytical. [...] The signification that, in the present work, phenomenological deduction shows to underlie the theoretical thought concerning being and the panoramic exposition of being itself is not irrational. [...] We shall ... deal with both [theory and ethics] as modes of metaphysical transcendence. [...] Husserlian phenomenology has made possible this passage from ethics to metaphysical exteriority.

When one views the ephemeral encomium to Rosenzweig in this manner, it becomes quite puzzling. Why is Levinas suspicious of the category of revelation, a category which lies at the heart of Rosenzweig's Star, when discussing the same-other relation? Why does Levinas seem to be drawing a dichotomy between Rosenzweig's Star and the analysis of concrete structures? Why does Levinas present his phenomenology as a rational a priori deduction, when (as I argue below) Rosenzweig sees the first book of his Star as an irrational theosophy in the style of Schelling's Ages of the World? The final sentence of the paragraph is in the greatest tension with the encomium. Not only is Levinas here crediting Husserl, and not Rosenzweig, with the grounding of a viable metaphysics, but the “passage” of which Levinas writes moves in a diametrically opposite direction from the passage of Rosenzweig’s own thinking. Levinas’s passage moves from the ethical interpersonal scene to its grounding in a quasi-theological metaphysics. As I shall illustrate
below, Rosenzweig moves in the opposite direction, from a posited theological ground to a construction of ideal ethical behavior.

The objection of Richard Cohen, that Levinas is not really doing phenomenology, still needs to be addressed. Levinas is maddeningly obscure on this topic, going so far as to contradict himself. In an interview with several Dutch philosophers in 1975, Levinas saw himself as a phenomenologist, albeit on the border of the discipline: “I think that, in spite of everything, what I do is phenomenology.”

In a lecture later that year, the very concept which challenges the phenomenological concept of intentionality is described as a phenomenological concept:

What Descartes reifies [substantifie] while protesting the image of a guide in his boat, that from which Leibniz constructs [fait] a monad, what Plato posits as the soul contemplating the Forms, what Spinoza thinks as the mode of thought—all this is described phenomenologically as face.

But by the time of his radio interviews with Phillippe Nemo in 1981, Levinas has changed his mind on the matter: “I do not know if one can speak of a ‘phenomenology’ of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears.” In a 1985 interview, Levinas seems to have chosen the broken middle ground, stating that while he does indeed forsake much of Husserlian methodology, the “search for the concrete status” of the given object which grounds my intentional aims “seems to me to constitute phenomenology’s fundamental teaching.”

Here Levinas echoes Cohen’s distinction between phenomenology tout court.

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12 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 86.

13 Levinas, "On Jewish Philosophy," in *In The Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 180. Levinas’ departure from phenomenology comes down to the matter of the transcendental reduction—the abstraction of objects of the world from the very nature of the world and focussing merely on how they appear to consciousness without analyzing them in the modes of the natural or social sciences. The transcendental reduction, insofar as it establishes an absolute consciousness which is independent of the world, would be the sign of the very elision of the singularity of worldly objects which Levinas contests in his work. Later in this chapter, I argue that the result of the reduction in *Ideas II* reflects a more complex relation between consciousness and the world in that found in *Ideas I* (e.g. §53–55). Also cf. Timothy J. Stapleton, *Husserl and Heidegger*, 7–29.
and the higher phenomenology which serves to guide the nature of my phenomenological analyses. But Levinas explicitly credits this higher phenomenology to Husserl, not to Rosenzweig: the "privileged intelligibility of the concrete is developed as early as the third Logical Investigation, and the term 'concrete' keeps recurring in Husserl's phenomenological descriptions."  

The Levinas-Rosenzweig relationship is more complicated than the supposed intimacy between them, and that there is room for the elucidation of a way in which the Levinasian adaptation of Rosenzweig includes a moment of critique. In this chapter, I shall focus on the issue of the place of the concrete in Levinas's method. On the basis of the two sentences directly following the encomium to Rosenzweig—"But the presentation and the development of the notions employed owe everything to the phenomenological method. Intentional analysis is the search for the concrete."—it is valid to make two hypotheses, which the remainder of this chapter will attempt to verify. From the opening "but," we can conclude that the content in which Levinas will announce his opposition to totality will differ from that found in Rosenzweig. Levinas believes thought to be transcendentally grounded in a concrete given (i.e. phenomenological intentionality is rooted in given concrete sensations). This type of grounding is completely lacking in Rosenzweig, for whom thought is grounded in a revelation whose origin is not the created world.

The stakes here are large. On the one hand (what I hypothesize to be the Levinasian narrative), the move to the quasi-theological "metaphysical exteriority" begins with an analysis of human sensed life and then moves upward and outward to God. On the other hand (what I hypothesize to be the Rosenzweigian narrative), such a move does not need to be justified, since there is an immediate experience of God which then grounds our intentional aims. Simply stating that there are experiences of transcendence in both authors

does not help matters any. It still remains to pose a fundamental question: how does the event of transcendence occur to human consciousness? For the event can be an immediate relationship with a noumenal God who is hierarchically situated above and beyond the world of appearances. Or it can pass through the vague sieve of a relationship with a concrete and fleshy—sometimes nude—body, completely phenomenal yet still possessing shards of divinity within. The role of the human body, insofar as it may mediate human interaction, becomes very important for the narration of the experience of transcendence, and by extension for the narration of the Rosenzweig-Levinas relationship. For the first conception of the event, the body is unnecessary, profane, only useful instrumentally as it sets the stage for the transformation of voice into idea in a contemplation without distraction. For the other conception of the event, the profane nature of the concrete mechanism of the body still possesses elements of intrinsic goodness.

The Rosenzweig-Levinas relationship thus enables us to pick apart the strands of thought that led us to an uneasy discomfort with the rhetorical oscillation about the instrumentality of ethics on Maimonides and Cohen, which we saw in the previous chapter. In this chapter, we will associate Rosenzweig with a thinking of transcendence as purely sacred, a mode of thinking which ends up instrumentalizing ethical action. Levinas is able to get out of this bind, I argue, via a phenomenological method which complicates the sacred/profane distinction. Undoubtedly, both Rosenzweig and Levinas are concerned with how humankind can engender the preconditions for eternal truth (in Rosenzweig) or messianic triumph (in Levinas) through love of neighbor. However, I argue below that Rosenzweig's non-embodied thinking of the neighbor causes a severe ethical problem, and that the fourth section of Totality and Infinity (specifically the phenomenology of eros) and the analysis of sensibility in Otherwise than Being can be understood to serve as a corrective to the ethical danger that undergirds Rosenzweig's eschatology. For Rosenzweig sees the neighbor only as an alter ego. This is the very notion of otherness which Levinas
critiques as insufficient in works as early as *Time and the Other*: "The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this ... because of the Other's very alterity," a property which, for Levinas, the Other has completely independently of any reference to me. By virtue of this eradication of the alterity of the other person, one can claim that in the system of the *Star*, the neighbor only serves as a means to the end of the praying chorus of the Jewish community. My love of neighbor has nothing to do with the neighbor him- or herself; I am simply interested in making the voice of my congregation louder.

I realize that to talk about a Levinasian critique of Rosenzweig in terms of a phenomenology of the body will strike some as specious or historically inept. Although phenomenological appropriations of Rosenzweig have already occurred, and even though Rosenzweig lived contemporaneously with the rise of Husserlian and Heideggerean phenomenology, Rosenzweig makes reference to the movement only very late in his life, in a tantalizing description of the similarity between Heideggerean phenomenology and his own "new thinking" in a posthumously published and brief article entitled "Switched Fron-

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16 Rosenzweig's interest in the maximization of the religious community is, in my view, to be starkly opposed to the rhetoric of disinterestedness in Levinas; see "God and Philosophy," in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 67. Additionally, Rosenzweig's interest is always an interest in my religious community. The relations between Jews and Christians in the *Star* are only formal, not content-filled relationships between persons. Thus, I disagree with David Novak's view in *The Election of Israel*, 105, that Rosenzweig contradicts classical Judaism's view of the neighbor as one's fellow Jew. The voice of the community in the synagogue or church sings "We" (S 236-7), leaving all outside one's own house of worship to be dreadfully judged as Ye, no matter how integral they may be to the appearance of divine truth in the world. It seems to me that Levinas himself likewise mistakes a formal symmetry between communities for a lived relationship when he writes in his introduction to Stéphane Mosès's *System and Revelation* (trans. Catherine Thiny [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992], 17) that "there would be the greatest of intimacy between Christians and Jews, an intimacy centered around truth." For another critique of Novak's position, cf. Leora Batnitzky, "Dialogue as Judgment, Not Mutual Affirmation: A New Look at Franz Rosenzweig's Dialogical Philosophy," *Journal of Religion* 79:4 (1999), 523–44, esp. 537n. 40.

tiers." Furthermore, Rosenzweig died well in advance of the incursion of the analysis of corporeality into phenomenology with the publication of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* in 1945. Nevertheless, the philosophy of the body is far older than the phenomenological movement. The body as a philosophical category, and even discussions of the ways in which others' bodies affect my sense of self, have been philosophical and religious themes beginning with Plato's *Phaedrus* and the narrative of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11-12.

To repeat, this argument does not deny the extent of Levinas' adaptation of Rosenzweig, especially in the area of meontology. For in both the *Star* and *Totality and Infinity*, the structure of messianic or eschatological anticipation is described as existence in that which is "not yet." For Rosenzweig, the not-yet is discovered through existence in the world (S 223); for Levinas, it is discovered through sensibility and the erotic caress (TI 258). Rosenzweig's genius is to appropriate the methodology of Schellingian idealism in order to argue that although the world has positive meaning as God's expressive act, it nonetheless bears a negative meaning to humankind until persons live in the world and transform it from the status of creature or substance to something subject, something "animated with a soul" (S 241). For Rosenzweig and Levinas, humans cannot but perceive the world to be unfinished; one can thereby say that the world, as it appears to me, has a meontological nature. Insofar as in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* the separated self enjoys the objective world yet is called into question by the subjectivity of the Other's face and body, Levinas retains the meontological nature of the world, as well as the idealist form (if not the content) of the transition of the exterior from substance to subject.19

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19 Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pars. 18 and 803, amidst many others. I certainly do not wish to deny the many differences between Hegel and Levinas, especially Levinas' theme of my subjectivity as accusative and the Other's subjectivity as nominative. For Levinas, "subject" is hardly synonymous with "I," but is rather always understood in the accusative. See OB 11.
But the concrete situation in Levinas is one of understanding of tempered by critique by the other person, whereas Rosenzweig projects the understanding of the world gained in the revelatory encounter onto the world.

The arguments of this chapter depend upon the temporalization of nonbeing which I highlighted in the previous chapter in the discussions of Maimonides and Cohen. In other words, this chapter assumes the validity of the transformation of the "not" into the "not yet" found previously. The path of the argument of this chapter will proceed as follows. I will begin with an explanation of the meontological perspective of Rosenzweig's Star by reference to the first book, the ideas of which are largely rooted in Schelling's 1815 fragment on The Ages of the World. From that point, I will move to a presentation of the way in which the construction of meontology in the first book of the Star determines the construction of the neighbor within the arc of messianic anticipation in the second book, setting the stage of the instrumentalization of love that occurs within. The argument will then shift to a discussion of Levinas's work. First, I claim that in Totality and Infinity, eros qua the experience of the embodied Other par excellence, justifies philosophical claims about the meontological, understood as that which has no essence and is hence other than being as it is traditionally described. Then, I will turn to the Husserlian heritage of Otherwise than Being —Husserl's understanding of body in Ideas II and the lectures on time consciousness—to show that Levinas here expands the analysis of eros from Totality and Infinity into an analysis of all sensibility in general. Sensibility, like eros in the earlier work, is linked with "the immediacy of enjoyment and its frustration" (OB 74). In the later work, the body is completely engaged in messianic ethics, over and above the predominantly biological sense of paternity in Totality and Infinity. However, in both works (and in other essays), Levinas continues to equate the ethically responsible self with the Messiah, and this ethics always respects the intrinsic goodness of the Other. Here lies the complete articulation of the belonging-together of the dialectical and critical concepts of
meontology: my ability to ethically relate to another person in the social realm channels an agency that originates in that which lies beyond being.

The Soul, Faithful in Pathos

The Star of Redemption announces its meontological journey near the beginning of its first book (S 21), when Rosenzweig explicitly links his methodology with Cohen's appropriation of the infinitesimal calculus: mathematics reveals the origin of the objective in non-being, or in the cumbersome language of Hallo's translation, the origin of the Aught in the Nought. Cohen does not attempt to use the language of the infinitesimal calculus to make theosophic postulations about the nature and the history of God. But for Rosenzweig, this is part of the project of the opening book of the Star. Rosenzweig's source for this element of his thinking is Schelling, specifically the third fragmentary draft (1815) for The Ages of the World.\textsuperscript{20} Rosenzweig had the Weltalter (the German title) with him when he wrote the opening sections of the Star on postcards to his mother as he fought at the front during the First World War.\textsuperscript{21}

The Weltalter is a history of God, an account of God's becoming self-conscious as the precondition of creation and revelation. Schelling construes this path of becoming-conscious as a dialectical sequence of three potencies, each of which marks a successively

\textsuperscript{20} Two editions of this work currently exist in English. A translation of the 1815 draft, with a helpful and lengthy translator's introduction, can be found in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, The Ages of the World, trans. Frederick deWolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942). The second draft from 1813 (discovered in 1946), has recently been translated by Judith Norman and paired with a wide-ranging commentary by Slavoj Žižek: The Abyss of Freedom (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) which, among other things, uses Schelling to claim that Levinasian phenomenology rests on a still more fundamental psychoanalytic stratum that reveals the Other as a virtual externalization of my own psychic drives and the simultaneous repression of this fact (84f). Thus, the "and" of Schellingian reconciliation expresses the state that I both possess and am possessed by God.

further determination of the Godhead. The style of Schelling’s thought bears at least a
linguistic similarity, if not more, to the Cohenian motif of Erzeugung. However,
Schelling does not always fully justify the twists and turns which its dialectical path takes,
and one often feels that Schelling is putting just a tad too much necessity into a theosophic
image which he ends up rooting in the ultimate value of divine freedom (AW 186). In
other words, the history of the potencies seems to be highly arbitrary, and while arbitrar-
iness certainly does not conflict with divine freedom, it does conflict with the rational
structure of the dialectical path of potencies that is used to deduce this very freedom in the
first place. Notwithstanding this caution, though, the sometimes fanciful themes of the
Weltalter (notably mesmeric sleep; AW 165) are important for their context in the
overarching hypothesis that experience cannot be reduced to logical relations. Indeed, the
logical relationships by which we understand reality in the present are actually rooted in
experiential structures, God’s experience of becoming in the past, and our experience of
becoming in the present.

The Weltalter begins with the hypothesis that God is a dipolar entity, and that the
fullness of God lies in the historical process of dialectical movement between these two
poles, necessary essence and free power. This hypothesis is not made completely out of
thin air. Rather, Schelling believes that it is part of a rigorous science (AW 94): “What is
essential in science is movement; deprived of this vital principle, its assertions die like fruit
taken from the living tree.” Movement must be dependent upon contradiction between

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22 For an account of the place of Erzeugung in Schelling, see Edward Allen Beach, The Potencies of
The question of whether Cohen’s dialectic bears any explicit or implicit debts to Schelling is not one which
I can answer at this time. If it could be answered in the affirmative, however, it would call for a serious re-
visioning of the alleged anti-theosophic nature of Cohen’s wissenschaftlich way of thinking. Indeed, the
rise of Kabbalist historiography with Gershom Scholem is currently seen as a revolt against Cohen’s way
of thinking. See David Biale, Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah, and Counter-History (Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 1979), esp. 109–12.

23 All citations from the Weltalter will be from this translation of the 1815 draft, which corresponds to the
dition which Rosenzweig read.
poles, for “without contradiction, there would be no motion, no life, no progress, but eternal mobility, a deathly slumber of all powers” (AW 105). Contradiction here appears to have the connotation of the perdurance of difference, as opposed to the logical category of contrariness. There can be no history without this movement between poles, what one might too hastily explain away as a bi-polar disorder. The relationship between the poles must be described in terms of potency or potential; if they were actualities content in the fullness of their stasis, then there would be no impulse to the dynamism that propels history. The first potency is the subjective pole of pure power, pure potentiality; the second potency is the objective pole of being, the “that which is” generated by this power (AW 112–13).24 Thus, Schelling, like Plotinus and Maimonides in Guide I:17, co-optsthe ontological rhetoric of substance and attribute such as that found in Aristotle, and leaves this rhetoric in its philosophical privilege while folding it into a rhetoric of nonbeing understood as potentiality and privation. God is not (yet) before he is. Basing his reasoning on the principle that “the beginning is precisely that which is subordinated in the sequel,” Schelling concludes (AW 106–07) that only “what distinctively includes most to the nature of what-is-not can be posited for a beginning.” Since nonbeing includes within itself a conative impulse toward being, it is that which is subordinated. Schelling’s citations from the history of philosophy on this score curiously include both the Aristotelian account of privation as steresis and the Platonic account of me on in the Sophist (AW 108).25

At the same time, it is improper to speak of the potencies as equivalent the poles. Both poles are always present in God at each moment in His history. Yet the configuration of the two poles, the arrangement of domination or giving, of negation or affirmation,

24 For a detailed account of the potencies with primary reference to Schelling’s many works in the philosophy of mythology, see Beach, 111–46.

25 It is the Platonic strand which has been interpreted as dominant in the secondary literature, mostly due to the influence of Paul Tillich on Schelling studies. See The Construction of the History of Religion in Schelling’s Positive Philosophy, trans. Victor Nuovo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1974 [1910]), 52. Several scholars (but not all) see this Platonic strand to be filtered through Jakob Böhme (1575–1624). See Brown, The Later Philosophy of Schelling, and Beach 69–75.
changes in this history. This is made somewhat clear by Schelling's practice of using algebraic notation in his expression of the first potency as A=B. The equal-sign in this formula should not simply be understood as an identity formula, but rather as an expression of the state of the simultaneous co-existence of two predicates in a larger whole, in which the element on the right side of the equation marks the characteristic in which the whole hypothetically appears to human consciousness. In the formula, A represents the essence of God which has the capability to affirm, God as "eternal Yes"; B represents the power of God which has the capability of negation, God as "eternal No" (AW 104). The first potency is the configuration in which the negating power "forces back the affirming essence and secretes it inwardly as passive" while the eternal Yes also acts upon the power-pole and prohibits it from forcing itself upon any other sphere of action (AW 101). For this reason, while A=B announces the basic dipolarity that lies at the essence of God, it also announces that the essence of God appears only as pure potentiality. At the beginning of God's history, God is not. This is not to say that God is nothing; rather, God is not being Being, or alternately God is not being that-which-is, God is not being God, etc.26 This is Schelling's expression for the doctrine of the self-contraction of God before the moment of creation, first described in the texts of Lurianic Kabbalah as tzimtzum. This concept seems to have reached him through the Christian Kabbalist Friedrich Christian Oetinger, who in turn knew Jewish Lurianists in Frankfurt such as Koppel Hecht.27

The first potency, pure power, has within it a desire for its own externalization, for

26 The last phrase is explicitly, and the first two implicitly, indebted to Robert P. Scharlemann, "The Being of God When God is Not Being God," in Deconstruction and Theology, no editor listed (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 79–108.

27 Werner J. Cahman, "Schelling and the New Thinking of Judaism," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research 48 (1981):1–56, esp. 34–39. All Kabbalistic overtones in Rosenzweig's writing, it seems to me, can be traced back to this history. Rosenzweig announces a bare familiarity with Lurianic themes in the 1917 letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg which he later described as the "germ-cell" of the Star. But even here, this is noted only in the context of a comparison with Schelling, and Rosenzweig is quick to qualify his judgment by the clause "as far as I know." See Rosenzweig, "The Germ-Cell of The Star of Redemption," in Franz Rosenzweig's "The New Thinking", trans. and ed. Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 50.
self-manifestation, which it cannot possibly supply for itself. Desire is thus the postulated criterion for the passing of God from the first potency to the second potency (AW 134): “everything longs for constant being; nothing wants to remain in contradiction.” Divine power thus cedes its negatory hold upon the divine essence, and allows the eternal Yes to liberate it from its state of frustrated inability for self-manifestation and self-expression. At this point, both the essence-pole and the power-pole become self-conscious, i.e. realize their mutual dependence upon each other. The power-pole “becomes perceptible to itself as the power of beginning,” of coupling itself with a manifest essence to become the origin of something new. The essence-pole realizes that the power-pole grounds it, and its nature as eternal Yes is now described as love: the essence-pole loves the power-pole “as condition, and as the vessel, as it were, in which it unfolds” (AW 135). Yet the voices of Yes and No have now notably shifted in the passage from the first potency to the second potency: the negative and contracting power-pole has ended up affirming the essence-pole in the first potency's making room for the second potency, and in the second potency, the affirmative and expansive essence-pole has ended up confining and negating the power-pole. Because of this confining of the negative power of the first potency, Schelling refers to the second potency as $A^2$, marking the absence of the negative power of B. In this dialectical switch of Yes and No between the two poles which occurs in the shift from the first potency to the second potency, Schelling notes that the second potency is, like the first potency was, trapped in an antithetical situation, and it too must make room for a higher potency to liberate it, by freeing the power-pole from the confined state into which the essence-pole has thrust it. This third potency marks the union of the two poles, but according to Schelling, it also has a confining power that negates the antithesis between the two poles. In allowing for a continual alternative movement between the poles, it freezes the movement of progress. Therefore, it itself must be liberated. Luckily for the reader, Schelling chooses not to go through an indefinite sequence of potencies, but roots this final act of liberation in
divine freedom. The sequence of potencies, which Schelling describes as necessary, can only end up in antitheses. If this hypothetical history of God is to continue, to go beyond the formal structure of the potencies and relate to life through creation and revelation, then "this progress is only by virtue of a free divine resolution" (AW 189).

With this purported ability to ground creation and revelation in divine freedom, Schelling repeats the sequence of potencies on three levels. On one level, the sequence repeats itself within historical time. God first chooses to reveal himself as negating power; this is the act of creation that lies "at the beginning of his own revelation" (AW 193). Then this potency passes over into God's self-revelation to the individual as the Yes of love (AW 192), which in turn passes over to the redemptive vision of God as the union of the two poles in "spirit in the highest sense" (AW 197). On another level, this sequence repeats itself as the personae of the Christian Trinity. The first potency is described in terms of a wrathful God the Father, the second in terms of the love of the Son, and the third in terms of the Holy Spirit which is emblematic of the unity shared between the Son and the Father (AW 203). Finally, the triadic structures of the potencies reveals itself to be the template by which the entire created realm is structured, including both worldly objects and human individuals:

The inner part of every organic being depends on and consists in three main powers. The first (briefly by way of mere example) is that whereby the being is in itself, continually brings itself forth; the second, that by which it strives toward the outside; the third, that which, as it were, unifies the nature of both. Each of these is necessary for the inner being of the whole. (AW 199)

Schelling's reasoning here is murky, yet rests again on the "deduction" of the ultimate status of divine freedom. If history is to have any meaning, the potencies of God's pre-revelatory history must reiterate themselves within the arc of history. The potencies of God's being appear as the potencies of life itself, and hence as the potencies of living beings.

The system of potencies is the theosophical coding of a journey in which God comes to manifest himself fully and wholly as "the one and all in intimate connection" (AW
201), the full and complete determination which we saw in the last chapter as the endpoint of Cohen's theory of thinking as Erzeugung. Earlier in the Weltalter, Schelling describes this as "a progress from darkness into light, from death into life" (AW 192). This latter phrase is well-known to students of the Star as the primary arc of its narrative, which, in the German, begins with the words "from death" and concludes with the words "into life."28 It is then not at all an exaggeration to say that Rosenzweig's appropriation or adaptation (in Gibbs's midrashic sense of this term) of Schelling seeps through every page of the Star. To this reading I now turn, wishing to glean from this quick reading of Schelling the fact that the fullness of God is only meaningful for human consciousness through the construction of the system of potencies. Always and everywhere Schelling's goal is to imagine the dialectical turns which are necessary to bring the fullness of God's spiritual being into reality. Already from the point of view of the Levinasian point of view, this appears odd. In Levinas, it is the experience of being which is to be avoided in the name of that which lies beyond being29; in Schelling, the experience of the fullness of being is our greatest desire.

If Rosenzweig's reading of Schelling is truly to be a midrashic "adaptation," then it too must have a moment of critique. One of these critiques is explicit in the first book of the Star, when Rosenzweig in no uncertain terms differentiates his conception of the non-being of the first potency of God from Schelling's conception of the "dark ground" (S 28). Yet a more forceful critique lies in the empiricist (if not proto-phenomenological) examination of one structure of facticity which for Rosenzweig grounds his turn away from idealism. This fact is that of my impending death, and my fear of it. Death is not the mere

28 This is a fully sedimented and now ordinary reading of the Star, having at first appeared in the opening sentence of Rahel-Freund's book on Rosenzweig. It has been recently challenged by Zachary Braiterman, in "Into Life"?!? Franz Rosenzweig and the Figure of Death," AJR Review 23:2 (1998), 203–221.

29 This can be found many places in Levinas, as seen in Chapter 1 and below. But for yet another example, cf. "The Meaning of Meaning," in Outside the Subject, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 93.
fact of nothingness, of non-existence. This fact also includes my intentional comportment of fear towards it (S 3): “all that is mortal lives in this fear of death, and every new birth augments this fear by one new reason.” Rosenzweig claims that the history of philosophy from the pre-Socratics through Hegel has never wanted to think through this fear, but rather (S 10) “plugs up its ears before the cry of terrorized humanity.” The empirical mistake which this “old” thinking makes is a blindness to the category of the singular, where thinking is always already situated. The fact of fear in the face of death means that the fearful subject cannot be reduced to the category of the human. Neither can this fear be bracketed away, since it is the environment in which all my epistemological endeavors are situated. In addition, the philosophical abstraction away from death ignores the time-bound nature of existence. Temporality, as exemplified in the ever-recurrent moment of my fearful cry, banishes knowledge of the single idea. This analysis marks the beginning of Rosenzweig’s pushing the Kantian ideas back so that they sink away into the murky depths of the beyond, of the “meta.”

But does Rosenzweig’s argument force us into a Protagorean relativism? Is knowledge hopeless, and is my thinking always bound by my fearful interests? Here meontology comes to Rosenzweig’s rescue (although he seems to be ignorant of the fact that this concept is just as much part of the history of philosophy from Ionia to Jena as Hegel’s totalizing dialectic and Socrates’s assertion in the Apology that death is a blessing in comparison with life). The dynamic nature of nonbeing, its containing its own telos hidden within itself, justifies the epistemological quest. Temporality is the transcendental context for knowledge of being. Rosenzweig describes this in terms of Cohen’s infinitesimal calculus which, as described in the last chapter, details the role that to me on plays in the determination of that which is. The “nonbeing of the differential” is not equivalent to the number zero, but rather “points to a something [Hallo: “Aught”], its being; at the same time it is a being that still slumbers in the lab of nonbeing” (S 20). Thus, as with Maimonides
and Cohen, but in opposition to Levinas’s putative understanding of Rosenzweig, the Star is not an opposition to totality tout court but rather a deferral of totality. The meontological determination of the Kantian ideas as exterior to thought which Rosenzweig sees as a dismembering of totality grounds the hope for a recovery of this totality (S 22). This seeps through the entirety of the Star. The telos of the soul’s spiritual journey—the vision of the face of God in the Star of David at the moment of death, akin to the rabbinic understanding of Moses’ “death by God’s kiss” (G 627–28)\(^{30}\)—is the “something” which we have every right to expect once we view nonbeing as not-yet-being (S 390). For Rosenzweig, nonbeing is always comported, for Rosenzweig, towards God as its full development and expression. (At the same time, Rosenzweig also, like Cohen, states [S 390] that “God is the Nought.”) These arguments are not limited to the close of the Star. Near the end of its first book, Rosenzweig also appropriates the temporalization of nonbeing observed in the previous chapter: the All—the sum of the Kantian ideas—is “a secret ... not yet manifest to us.”

The Star is thus oriented along both Schellingian and Cohenian rhetorics. This is not always an easy friendship. For while Cohen’s process of divine Erzeugung is a determination of an object in comparison with its surrounding objects, Schelling’s is a settling of accounts between two contrary impulses within the closed-off object of analysis. Although Rosenzweig’s announced methodology is Cohenian, the content of the first book of the Star is clearly Schellingian in vocabulary. Rosenzweig in fact universalizes Schelling’s theosophy by asserting that each of the Kantian ideas—God, world, and the subject-I (“man”)—is structured as a dynamic interrelationship between two polarities. Insofar as the these ideas, examined apart from the others, are claimed to be “irrational” (S 19), one might say that God, world, and the subject-I are all afflicted by a bipolar disorder.

In the case of God, Rosenzweig appropriates fully the concepts of the eternal Yes

\(^{30}\) The rabbinic citation is B. Baba Bathra 17a.
and the eternal No from Schelling’s *Weltalter*, there is also a brief mention of an “And” which formally unites the two poles according to the spirit (but not the letter) of Schelling’s third potency (S 33), and which is the hidden precondition for the various inter-polar relationships which configure the various understandings of God at different points in the *Star.* As stated above, the Schellingian Yes refers to the infinite essence of the divine, whereas the No refers to the power which forces this essence to contract and hide itself. Likewise, for Rosenzweig, the Yes refers to the infinite essence of God (S 29), while the No refers to the divine freedom which is completely other than the infinite (S 30). These two poles contain the dynamic of the divine nonbeing. The Yes refers to the singularity of God, the fact that God transcends any essential attributes that humans might ascribe to Him, the positing of God as a singular and transcendent idea. The No, on the other hand, refers to the potential of God for relation. Freedom itself is finite; it can only aim at one action out of many at any given moment. Yet it does aim; it “reaches beyond itself with unlimited power” (S 30). Nevertheless, there is nothing for it to aim out to except for the Yes-pole of divine essence. The account of the bare potentiality of the Godhead which Rosenzweig develops here is again identical to that of Schelling. The essence-pole swallows up the power-pole.

But in approaching essence, caprice [freedom understood in its relation with the infinite essence] nevertheless ends up in the magic circle of its inert being. This being does not emit any force toward caprice, and yet the latter feels its own force ebbing. With every step that takes it closer to essence, the infinite power (of caprice) senses a growing resistance, a resistance which would become infinite at the goal, at essence itself.

Divine freedom, having no essence of its own, is always oriented externally. It desires something to act on. Yet the only “thing” which freedom has to act on is the divine essence.

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31 In other words, even though Rosenzweig refers to the “And” in the first book of the *Star*, he defines it as “the secret companion not of the individual world but of the verbal context.” Because the verbal context of the God is not established until the moment of God’s manifestation (i.e., the miracle that of God’s extroversion in creation and revelation, according to the first two chapters of Book II of the *Star*), one should conclude that the “and” of S 32–33 exists only on a hypothetical level. The “and” may help the eternal Yes and the eternal No of the Godhead “to a vital reality” (S 33), but this vital reality is not manifest until the middle book of the *Star*. 
which has already been defined as infinite and self-absorbed. It thus acts manically upon the divine essence, which is (as Cohen asserted, following Maimonides) inert, and attempts to draw it into itself, to control it in some way. Conversely, the essence-pole can also enfeeble the power-pole, moving it from euphoria to depression. Because the divine essence is completely inert, it cannot express any of the force that divine freedom wants to pass on to it. One could here draw an analogy from the classic example in introductory mechanics of billiard-ball collisions: the divine essence would be akin to the fixed sides of the table that gradually sap the billiard balls of their kinetic energy. Yet at the same time, the divine essence gradually, through its relations with divine freedom, is able to amass and inhere energy within itself, which can eventually become self-expression in creation (S 113).^{32}

Despite the transparency of the similarities between Rosenzweig and Schelling on the bipolar and potential nature of God, it is intriguing that their algebraic expressions for the first potency of the Godhead are radically different. As stated above, for Schelling this is A=B; for Rosenzweig, it is the simple identity statement A=A. Why is this the case? The answer must be at least partially rooted in the fact that Schelling’s equation is part of a Christian-supersessionist view of the Plotinian argument in which nonbeing is not only associated with potentiality, but also with sickness, error, and evil (AW 155). For Schelling to say that in the first potency, God (A) appears outwardly as nonbeing, as nonmanifest (B) is to say that God’s nonmanifest nature as eternal No is a “hindering, resisting, obtrude[ing]” force which “should not be” (AW 97) and is hence morally evil. Schelling further associates this moral evil of with a stereotypical portrayal of the God of the Hebrew Bible as a God of wrath (AW 188). The way in which the eternal No serves as the foundation for the self-expression of the eternal Yes in the second potency is thus parallel with God’s passing from evil to goodness, from chaotic wrath to the self-giving of divine

^{32} I therefore disagree with Else Rahel-Freund’s contention that the infinite essence-pole of the Godhead is merely passive while the finite freedom-pole is merely active. This is only half of the story, as both Rosenzweig and Schelling make clear. Cf. Rahel-Freund, 92–93.
love, and from the “Old” Testament to the “New” Testament (AW 159). For obvious reasons, Rosenzweig is not interested in repeating such a narrative. Although he agrees with Schelling that the first potency represents a state of chaos by virtue of the shattering of the idealist All in which the three Kantian ideas of reason were seen to be completely knowable (S 83), this chaos is associated with what he interprets as the various paganism of Eastern and ancient Greek religions.

Rosenzweig, unlike Schelling, continues by applying the theme of dipolarity in his analysis of the other two Kantian Ideas: world and subject-I or “man.” Rosenzweig describes the unknowability of the world, his “negative cosmology” (S 41) in terms of the reining in of its affirmative form- or essence-pole by its negating and determining finite content-pole. The Yes of the world is its form as logos, as the ordering of soul/form which exists within each object (S 43). Its No is the finite content to which this logos is always applied in the continuous renewal of creation. As with the idea of God, Rosenzweig’s understanding of the idea of the world in the first book of the Star follows the structure of the first Schellingian potency: negation holds the affirmative essence of the idea in check, renders it passive, and prohibits from expressing itself fully and independently; there is an “ever-renewed constriction of procreation and birth” (S 45). The logos of the world (S 44) “is utterly universal and yet everywhere attached to the world, tied up in it.” In the first gaze at an object, there is no linkage between that object and other objects in the world. Every object appears as “particular” (S 45), as radically different from every other object in the world. The world appears simply as a panoply of things, not as the ordered emanation of an overarching concept that serves to bond objects to one another.

Rosenzweig then moves to argue for the rational right to posit an ensouling origin of these objects. The move here is similar to the positing of God’s infinite and unknowable essence which Rosenzweig makes in the first book of the first part of the Star with

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33 Also cf. Beach 133–34.
reference to the Godhead and which Maimonides makes in the negative-theology sections of the *Guide*. But a simple positing of the infinite is philosophically insufficient; for Rosenzweig, there must be sufficient empirical evidence to justify such positing. This can only be done through a process by which the particular individual is carried off “into the open arms of the species” (S 49). The act of classification—which may be rooted in the taxonomic attempts of Aristotle's biological works, especially the *Parts of Animals*\(^{34}\)—is teleologically oriented towards letting the logos appear across different objects through the construction of genus-species relationships. This telos is the “and” of the third potency, the belonging-together “of the thing and its concept, the individual and his genus, of man and his community” (S 49). Rosenzweig, in giving his account of the dipolar structure of the world, does not posit a stage of its development which would be equivalent to the sense of the second potency, i.e. one in which the logos would beat back and repress the force of the particular. Yet the first potency of the world does seek its own annihilation; the passivity of the universal logos, for Rosenzweig, “craves application,” and thus attracts the particular to itself. The particular, as it “plunges” into the universal as an object falls toward the earth due to the force of gravity (S 48), thus becomes self-conscious of itself and, by extension, its relation with the universal. The development of the “and” out of the structure of the first potency is thus due to the very dynamic of universal and particular within the object itself. It needs no external compulsion whatsoever. At the level of the first potency itself, before the particularity of the object gravitates towards the logos, the objects of the world are completely self-contained, ignorant of anything outside of them that might be called “universe.” Rosenzweig therefore uses the algebraic expression $B=A$ for the metalogical world: the finite content ($B$) renders the logos ($A$) passive and refuses to let the infinite come to presence. As for Schelling, Rosenzweig’s algebraic equations are

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\(^{34}\) More immediately, it may be rooted in popular ideas of the surrounding world (*Umwelt*) culminating in the work of Jacob von Uexküll, who amplified concrete historical structures into the expression of a quasi-divine destiny through a similar, but not identical, mechanism.
not identity statements, but rather predicate statements which state the direction of a repression-dynamic within the idea. Thus, B=A is not the same as A=B. This latter equation, Rosenzweig sees as the logic of emanation, in which the logos would repress the uniqueness of each particular object; there would be no apparent difference between two members of the same genus.

With respect to the third Kantian idea, the subject-I "man", Rosenzweig's delineation of the potency-structure again closely hews to that found in the Godhead. Here, the Yes-pole is the particular "peculiarity" of the particular person (S 64). Unlike the affirmative poles of the Godhead and the world, the human Yes-pole is not infinite in terms of space. Nevertheless, one can still describe it as infinite insofar as it is apeironic, "finite yet boundless" (S 64). Rosenzweig describes the apeiron of the peculiar individual as an ignorance of anything that exists outside of selfhood. This seems to me to be an inadequate formulation of the argument, and leads the reader down very counter-intuitive paths of thinking about perception. The key to this argument lies in the reference to Kant at the very opening of this book (S 62), which lets the reader know that Rosenzweig is sampling Kantian arguments throughout this section. As long as there is an "I think" that justifies and supports all of the operations of my understanding, I am unable to extricate myself from myself, and hence cannot gain the benefit of an exterior view that would lead to any justifiable knowledge-claims about myself. Instead, the very subjectivity that I am attempting to examine is itself colored and distorted by its also being the examining agent. Hence,

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35 Rahel-Freund has not fully explored the subtlety of the difference in "infinite" and "finite" that exists between "man" and the other Kantian ideas; cf. Rahel-Freund, 101.

36 Indeed, perhaps Rosenzweig is sampling arguments from the first Kantian critique through-out the opening part of the Star, on the assumption that Schelling's Hegel-critique marks a return to Kant. While such an argument would need to explore Schelling's relationship to Kant in further detail (there are no explicit references to Kant in the Weltalter), and while it would fall prey to the critique that there is no logical reason why a position contra Hegel should amount to a position pro Kant (why "if not B, then A"? why not C, or R?), it is important to note that Rosenzweig's critique of Kant in the Star's opening pages are aimed only at the deduction of the moral law, and not at the refutation of idealism. For an argument that being against Hegel is indeed equivalent to being for Kant, see Ronald Green, Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt.
as Kant writes, "I have no knowledge of myself as I am but merely as I appear to myself; the consciousness of self is very far from being a knowledge of the self." The negative pole is expressed as free will, the determinate orientation of my freedom. Again, Rosenzweig authorizes the reader to search the Kantian literature for a fuller version of this claim, and it is easiest to point to the argument of the *Critique of Practical Reason* that freedom is the "fact of reason." For Rosenzweig, this freedom has a negative force, insofar as (S 66) "all negation posits something determined [and] finite." In the act of willing, my particular and peculiar form is packaged into the content of a determinate and ephemeral object of my will. In each free act of volition, I am choosing between two or more alternatives, accepting one while rejecting and negating all the others. Yet for Rosenzweig, that which is determined and negated is not simply an object of my will in the world, but rather my very peculiarity itself. In other words, just as divine freedom repressed and held back the divine essence, so does human freedom repress human distinctiveness (S 68): "the 'self' is what originates in this encroachment by free will upon peculiarity." This is the construction of the defiant will. The defiant will does not make peculiar decisions which will allow the subject's distinctiveness to develop, but wills the perseverance of the peculiarity that it already sees itself as being. Rosenzweig associates this sentiment with Mephistopheles' a-teleological view of human nature in Goethe's *Faust*: "Du bist am Ende—was du bist."

The essence of the individual, distinctiveness, is thereby made passive, confined within its solitary way of life, turned "into the content of predications about something else" (S 69).

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37 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 158.

38 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 103. Rosenzweig's attraction to Kant here is a bit odd, especially since the deduction of the reality of freedom is based upon the unity of theoretical and practical reason, which itself is in turn based upon the deduction of the moral law as a universal maxim of the will. It is precisely this universality which Rosenzweig sees (S 10) as placing Kant in the tradition of All-encompassing thinking.

39 For an amplification of this Kantian account of volition, see John Silber, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion," in Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, lxxix–cxxxiv, esp. lxxxvi–ciii.

Rosenzweig's algebraic expression for the first potency of human subjectivity is \( B=B \), the finite version of \( A=A \), the first potency of the infinite divine. Unlike the world, in which the particular object seeks the categorical genus (S 50), the yearning of the first potency of human subjectivity exists within the human subject itself. As Rosenzweig writes in the 1917 letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg later described as the "germ-cell [Urzele]" of the Star, the "dull" and "nondivine" \( B=B \) "has its = already in itself and at itself and does not ask after any A."\(^{41}\)

The descriptions of the Kantian ideas of God, world, and human subjectivity given in the first book of the Star are all versions of the repressive relationship delimed in Schelling's description of the first potency in the Weltalter. This repressive relationship is, also in accordance with Schelling, seen as meontological. This is not only due to the fact that Rosenzweig describes the Ideas as "Nothingnesses of knowledge," but can also be further refined by a claim that, in the cosmos of the opening part of the Star, the essence of each of the three ideas has not yet come to be. Rather, appearance shrouds the universal essence, so that one can truly speak of the idea as being something which-is-not. Most importantly, the structure of the Ideas at this point is one of a relationship between two poles. Meaning is constructed by the interrelations of the poles within each ideas, not by the interrelations of the ideas themselves.

As noted above, there are brief hints in the first part of the Star, more clearly with reference to the world and God than to human subjectivity, in which Rosenzweig shows how the future configuration of the ideas will consist in a switching of the valences of the poles. No longer will the No-pole repress the Yes-pole, but the affirmative essence will be affirmed by the power-pole, which renders itself passive as it allows the essence of the idea to come to appearance. In the dynamic nature of the cosmos (S 88), the ideas are always in a process of conversion: "what converged as Yes will radiate forth as No; what entered as

No will issue as Yes.” In this conversion, which Rosenzweig associates with revelation and faith (contra philosophy and thinking), and which seems to be patterned on the transition from the first to the second potency in Schelling's Weltalter, the three ideas come into relationship with each other (S 115): “In the authentic idea of revelation, the three 'actual' elements of the All—God world man—emerge from themselves, belong to one another, and meet one another.”

The key question that the reader must pose to Rosenzweig's account of conversion is one of temporal order. What comes first: the switching of the valences of the poles of the Ideas, or the meetings between them? Does the meeting determine the reversal of the valences, or does the spontaneous reversal of the valences lead to the meeting? What is at stake in posing this question is nothing less than the question of instrumentality and fungibility which I raised in the last chapter, briefly, in suggesting a conversation between Hermann Cohen and Martha Nussbaum. If the meeting determines the reversal of the valences, then there is room for alterity to be a constitutive factor in the development of the Idea in question. The giving of the essence which characterizes the second potency will be prompted by the expression of the essence of another Idea, Other in the richest of senses, within its concrete instantiations. But if the reverse is the case, then the interaction between the ideas will only be an application of the second-potency formula. That which gives its essence will give it to a blank slate, a completely empty otherness, since the giving and affirmation associated with the Yes is magnetically attracted to the inessential and determinate No. As I shall now show, the gift of essence in Rosenzweig always occurs in accordance with the latter model. At the end of the first part of the Star, God, world, and human subjectivity are empty of all essence, still within the meontological structure of the not or the not-yet. The move from emptiness to fullness must begin somewhere, within one of the Ideas, and then spread to the others. This beginning is within God.

The transition from the proto-cosmic mystery of the first part of the Star to the
manifestation of each of the Ideas of its second part is a pure miracle (S 90), rooted in an
act of freedom on the part of God (S 116). Rosenzweig here hearkens back both to the
divine freedom which enables the Godhead to conquer the antithetic structure of each of the
three potency-systems, and to the second potency itself. The divine freedom which allows
for creation is not the same as a compulsion (S 115), such as I laid out in the analysis of
creation in Cohen and Maimonides. In the previous chapter, creation was a necessary
consequence of the doctrine of negative attributes. But Rosenzweig's doctrine is grounded
in God's continual self-manifestation in the world. If God is always manifest, than He
must create, and placing this compulsion upon God would seem to compromise the radical
transcendence which is central to that very Jewish God-idea which Cohen and Maimonides
are defending. Rosenzweig is able to get out of this trap by positing a pre-history to God
in which He is not Himself, merely a maelstrom of force. The repressive relationship
which this force exercises upon the divine essence in the pre-history institutes a vitality
which is the transcendental matrix for God's miraculously free choice to create the world.

Rosenzweig writes (S 113) that in creation, power becomes an attribute of the
subject, but not simply an attribute like other substantial attributes; rather, it is "no longer
isolated deed, no longer caprice, but essence. God the creator is essentially powerful."

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42 All accounts of this miracle focus on the importance of Rosenzweig's "speech-thinking." For all its
centrality, I must confess that I neither understand nor am particularly interested in this theme as anything
more than a metaphor for a certain kind of thinking. Especially from note 49 below, the reader will gather
that I find the linguistic examples which Rosenzweig offers to be philosophically unhelpful, since the
warmth of the intimate conversation on display becomes rather frigid in Rosenzweig's forcing it into the
role of a philosophe given up for public knowledge. When the private emotions of a romantic drama are
thrust into a public sphere, they ironize themselves and become appreciable on the comic level of camp (for
example, Anthony Minghella's adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's The English Patient, in which Ralph
Fiennes appears unintentionally to be pain by the allegedly erotic hands of Kristin Scott Thomas).
Rosenzweig has not learned what Levinas demonstrates in Totality and Infinity, that eros cannot be
publicized and still remain eros (and not, perhaps, pornography). I plan on expanding this argument in a
future essay on what Jewish thought might learn from Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" and the literature
surrounding it. In the meantime, for sources which are fairer to Rosenzweig on this point, see Rahel-
Freund 138–59 and Gibbs 57–104.

43 Thus, David Novak claims that the Cohenian God cannot be free, at Election 62. However, it is not
necessarily the case that this claim reflects sound argumentation. For example, Novak fails to explore the
counter-claim that God's freedom might not, and on Maimonidean grounds cannot, be anything like human
freedom.
Now Rosenzweig may be thinking of the determination of God in terms of the attributes of action and creation in Maimonides and Cohen, but the belonging-together of essence and power seems to me to be more rooted in Schelling. Power realizes that it can further extend itself when it couples with essence; essence realizes that it can finally express itself when it couples with power. Here too, there is a reversal of the Yes and the No on the part of the poles within the Godhead. Power now affirms essence, by creating new essences within the world; and essence now confines and determines power by renewing the presence of essences in the world at every moment in an apparently infinitely punctiform series.44 Nothing has forced God to make this decision, although Rosenzweig does note that once the decision for self-manifestation has been made, there is no turning back (S 117): “as ‘manifest’ God he cannot do otherwise than to create.” Once God has freely switched the valences of the poles that lie within Him, creation and its daily renewal (S 122) proceed, as it were, on automatic pilot. In other words, God’s creation provides the world, but establishes no relationship between God and the world.

Moreover, God’s act of creation does not even provide the world as we come to understand it, as an environment which houses objects composed of both form and content, essence and concrete instantiation. It only authorizes the transition from the protocosmic world as “essenceless semblance” to a new conception of the world as “unessential essence.” This argument is one of the most difficult in the Star; since it is almost theologically intuitive to dwell upon the fullness of God’s creation, a fullness which includes both formal essence and concrete material. Yet Rosenzweig claims that “the world ... is not necessarily through being created with the act of creation performed once and for all by God” (S 119) and that “the world did not have to ‘become’ something created ‘complete’ in the divine creation at the world’s morning” (S 120). These claims are of
paramount strategic importance. For only if the created world is still incomplete can the
philosopheme or theologoumenon of redemption be justified. If the world could be
thought as having a uniform essence, always present and transparent, then thought would
return to an idealist mode in which the world would be seen as only an emanation of the
divine. Most importantly for Rosenzweig, this scenario would entail a knowledge of the
world which (by virtue of the emanationist framework) could be amplified into a
knowledge of God. With this knowledge, there would be no terror in the face of death.
Therefore, without an incomplete creation, the empirical motor of Rosenzweig’s thinking
loses all of its power. Therefore, the argument thus deserves further unpacking.45

The shift of polar valencies in the Godhead causes a parallel shift in the valencies of
the world. In accordance with the conversion of Yes into No and vice versa (S 88), the
created world will mark the appearance of the infinite in the particular, as distinct from it.
The logos of the world was, in the proto-cosmos completely absorbed into the particular
object; the object was saturated (gefüllt; S 50) with its own concept.46 Creation, as a
mechanism in which the universal Being does not attract its own repression, but rather
freely gives its essence to the particular, shows the universal. In the pagan pantheistic
worldview (what Rosenzweig terms the “proto-cosmos”), the object plunged into the
universal; in the created world the universal plunged into the “outside”, externalized itself in
objects. This means that the universal ends up temporalizing itself, and this temporalization
itself ends up preventing the full externalization of the universal.

In the act of God’s self-temporalization which is creation, worldly objects are
preserved from moment to moment through the workings of divine causality. This
occasionalist argument goes back at least to Descartes. In the third of his Meditations, he

45 There are further remarks on the incompleteness of creation in Mosès, 83–85.

46 The productive Auseinandersetzung between Rosenzweig’s pagan quasi-dismissal of the saturated
phenomenon and Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenological theology centered around the unconditionality of the
saturated phenomenon as the empirical site of revelation still remains to be done. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion,
Rosenzweig is at the same time more and less sophisticated than Descartes on this matter. For Rosenzweig does not argue for occasionalism on the basis of the structure of time, and thus does not demonstrate creation out of the structure of human existence. Rather, Rosenzweig has already demonstrated that God must manifest himself in the world through creation because of the dynamic of the system of potencies—more of a wager for creation than a proof of it. As noted above, Schelling’s Weltalter is a description of the history of God if and only if God is the Creator of the world who reveals himself to humankind. Rosenzweig’s own claim that “creature-consciousness [is] the consciousness not of having once been created but of being everlasting creature” (S 120) seems to be merely imaginative, less justified than anything in even Schelling, much less Descartes. Rosenzweig hardly ever structures his claims as straightforward arguments. Yet we can reconstruct his train of thought from the previous sentence: “Seen from its [the world’s] own point of view, its being-created would mean for it manifesting itself [ihr Sich-Offenbaren, lit. its self-revelation] as creature.” This, I think, can be expressed with the following argument. For creation to mean anything for human consciousness, creatureliness must be apparent to human consciousness at any moment at which an object is perceived. If this is not the case, then there is no revelation to human consciousness that occurs through the medium of

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47 Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, in Selected Philosophical Writings, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 96. Descartes uses the same reasoning—“from the fact that we now exist, it does not follow that we shall exist a moment from now”—in his Principles of Philosophy, Part I, article 21, in ibid., 167. For an account of Cartesian causality which claims that Descartes is not a pure occasionalist, but argues only that God is the first premise in the causal chain while humans are secondary causes, see Kenneth Clatterbaugh, “Cartesian Causality, Explanation, and Divine Concurrence,” History of Philosophy Quarterly 12:2 (1995), 195–207.
creation or in any other medium; there is no "idea of creation in the light of revelation" (S 139). In addition, if this is not the case, then there is no self-temporalization of the divine as necessitated by the infra-potency dynamic. To keep with the language of Descartes, occasionalism is a clear and distinct idea because to contradict it means to contradict both the compulsion which drives the act of God's creation of the world and the ability of the individual to receive this revelation or a more direct revelation at any point in time (S 115–16). I cannot experience creation as a mode of revelation unless I experience the creature-liiness of the objective world. And this must happen in the present moment; a postulation of the Creator of the world merely as a first cause who acted long long ago is not even close to approaching an experience of the Creator.

Thus, creation as revelation necessitates occasionalism. This means, for Rosenzweig, that the essence of the created object is both inside and outside the object. The created object does not possess its essence as an "enduring essence" but rather only possesses "a momentary essence, ever renewed and yet universal" (S 120). For the created object to possess an essence that stretches across the punctiform instants of the temporal continuum is to deny what Rosenzweig sees as the necessary truth of occasionalism, which precludes the very notion of an enduring essence. Thus, the essence of the object must be given to it again from moment to moment in the divine preservation of the object. This marks the fundamental difference between the proto-cosmic world and the created world. In the proto-cosmic world the distinctive particularity of the object saturated it to the extent that it seems to concretize and envelop the logos at every moment, and this was the case for every object. This is the meaning of Rosenzweig's description of this world as an "essenceless semblance" (S 121), in which the essence comes to appearance along with the object. This is opposed to the modern configuration of the object, such as that of Kant in which the thing-in-itself is hidden behind semblant appearance. Rosenzweig's description of the created world hews closer to the Kantian line: the essence gives itself to the object,
and this is what comes to appearance, but only partially and incompletely, as noumenon or trace (depending on the reader's linguistic biases). The essential being of the phenomenal object is perceived to lie in a different temporal order, in an irrecoverable past: the world (S 121) "has such a Being of its own in back of it, or had it before it became creature, but that Being stayed behind in the 'essenceless semblance' of the proto-cosmos." In the created world, the phenomenon betrays its essence, but only partially; it also betrays (S 121) "its constant need for renewal" and its desire for "being in order to gain a stability and veracity which its own being cannot provide." The essence of the created object is thus both universal and ephemeral, and thus created existence is a fully antithetical structure. It is needy and calls out for resolution, just as the structure of the second potency in Schelling calls out for the "and" of the third potency as a unifying force.

To sum up, the necessity of experiencing creation necessitates an occasionalism of the hidden God which renews the essence of the object from moment to moment. The loving gift of revelation is concomitant with a separation from the revealer and creator. The object cannot provide for itself, cannot cause itself to exist in the next moment in time. As such, there is yet another antithesis between the essence-pole and the power-pole of the object. The essence-pole of the object is active, and comes to presence albeit ephemerally; the power-pole is unable to engender the stability of an object that can cause itself to persevere from one moment to the next, and is therefore completely passive. This reversal of the polar valences of the world leads to what Rosenzweig describes as an "unessential essence [unwesenhaft Wesen]," an essence that is intelligibly near yet sensibly far, never sinking down to reside at the level of the concrete (S 120).

The world has embarked on the current of reality, and thus its essence is not "always and everywhere." It is an essence which at every moment originates anew with the whole content of the Distinctive which it includes . . . It is: existence. Existence in contrast to Being means the universal which is full of the distinctive ... herein infected by the distinctive, [it] must continually become new in order to maintain itself.

It is still necessary to demonstrate that the created world is still meontological, still
written under the sign of the "not." For some readers, this argument might be counterintuitive; after all, Schelling's *Weltalter* describes the "not" solely as what exists at the beginning (AW 107). Having moved from the proto-cosmos to the created world, supposedly we are no longer at the beginning. A response to this intuition which would emphasize Rosenzweig's theological view of creation as precisely "in the beginning," according to the opening word of the Hebrew Bible, is on the right track. Yet this claim is insufficient, and does not do justice to Rosenzweig's hermeneutic of understanding existence through both philosophical and theological lenses, since both "are dependent on each other" (S 106). The philosophical flipside of the theological response emphasizes the fact that the incompleteness of the created world, as evidenced by the antithetical nature of existence, simultaneously universal and distinctive, does not exhaust, but rather perpetuates, the conative impulse that we have seen to be at the heart of that which is not. The objects of the created world are still determined by the privation of being and its stability. Rosenzweig, perhaps unintentionally, describes this privation along the same lines as the meontological structure of objects delineated in Plato's *Sophist*. In the created world, things are always essentially "for others," and only gain meaning in their relationships with other objects.

The thing has no stability as long as it stands lone. It is certain of its individuality only in the multiplicity of the things. It can only be displayed in connection with other things. Its definiteness is a space-time relationship (*Beziehung*) to other things in such a connection. Even as something defined, the thing has no essence of its own; it is not something in itself but only in its relationships. (S 133)

The unessentially essential nature of the object means that what makes it appear as a certain thing to consciousness is not any property of the object abstracted from the world in a kind of *epoche* through which consciousness might become a "connoisseur" (S 248) of its individual details and see the essence of the object. The phenomenology of the created world is impossible for Rosenzweig, for the essence of the created object is, as shown earlier, hidden behind the object. Admittedly, Rosenzweig's epistemology of relationship
is not nearly as extensive as Plato's; what Rosenzweig mentions in the course of a paragraph is a theme which Plato spends several dialogues elucidating. Yet the same basic sense is present in both. Meaning occurs through the dialectic development of relational structures between objects, either in terms of the spatiotemporal matrix, or in terms of the act of conceptualization (S 133): "such essence as it has is not within it but is the relationship which it has to its category."

The neediness of the created world is paralleled by the neediness of the individual after the experience of immediate revelation from God. For Rosenzweig, immediate divine revelation, defined in the narrow sense (S 162) as the ephemeral "experience" (Erlebnis; S 157) of divine love48, is necessary. For to view God only as the origin of the created world (as Hermann Cohen does) is to think God only as empty idea, and not to believe in a God who relates to life. Rosenzweig writes (S 160) that "from out of the darkness of his concealment there must emerge something other than bare creative power ... lest God should once more be able to retreat behind these acts into the Concealed." If God's freedom to create expresses the transcendent temporalization of the divine in the past, then God's being in revelation expresses his immanent temporalization in the present. Yet if God's love is communicated in the present, then it must be meontological—not yet fully present, fleeting in every moment. To view the love of God as something which constantly exists throughout the world is to remove it from the presentness of the present, and to banish it to the realm of death. The idea of God's love, like any idea for Rosenzweig, is particularly deadly in stasis. Rosenzweig's metaphors cleverly display this (S 164), as

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48 Further details are necessary regarding two phrases in this definition of revelation.  
A. "Narrow sense": as Stéphane Mosès correctly points out, "revelation" in Rosenzweig also has a broader meaning which refers to the development of the relationships between God, man, and world. Cf. Mosès, 97.  
B. "Experience": Rosenzweig is usually seen as being entirely opposed to the subjective Erlebnistheologie of someone such as Schleiermacher. Cf. S 100, Mosès 98 (but also cf. Mosès 100 and 102, where he contradicts this). On the one hand, it is important to note that it is the ephemerality of the experience which separates Rosenzweig from Schleiermacher, and not experience itself. On the other hand, this may demonstrate that Rosenzweig is more on the side of theology, and opposed to philosophy, than he might have wanted to admit.
they compare the static attribute of divine love to "the rigid mask which the sculptor lifts from off the face of the dead." The hypostasis of love "would reduce the living countenance to rigor mortis." As present and divorced from any categorizability, divine love is determined in space and time. It is an act, not an attribute, and so must be always and everywhere particularized and limited. Like the created object, the act of love has no ontological stability.

God always loves only whom and what he loves, but his love is distinguished from an 'all-love' only by a Not-yet: apart from what he already loves, God loves everything, only not yet. His love roams the world with an ever-fresh drive. It is always and wholly of today, but all the dead past and future will one day be devoured in this victorious today. (S 164)

As in the dynamic of creation, the repositioning of the valences of the dipolar structure of God that occurs in divine love given to the human individual institutes a correlate repositioning of the polar valences in the object of that love. But revelation is unlike creation, and its dynamic is completely unique within the second part of the Star's system. In my view, the moment of revelation, in its transformation of the inward human self into a relational identity which Rosenzweig names "soul" (S 82, 169), institutes not simply the exchange of valences, but also the unifying of the poles insofar as the soul is not apeiromantic, as the self is. The human individual is completed and brought to presence before either God or the world is; this marks the difference between Rosenzweig on the one hand and Cohen and Levinas on the other.

Like the act of creation, God's act of revelation is a determination, and hence negation, of the divine essence. The act of love "bursts forth into the manifest [ins Offenbare] as a No, as an ever new self-denial" (S 160). Thus revelation is also an event in which divine essence takes on a negative valence, and ends the repressive regime of divine power which typified the proto-cosmic God. As for the human side of the experience of revelation, we also see a ceasing of the repression of the distinctive content of the individual by the defiant will that sees itself as the measure of all things. The content of the individual, the "T" which is the "No that has become audible" (S 174), is discovered
through the encounter between the human and the divine. This happens in a sequence which one can reduce to three steps.

First, God issues the command "Love me!" As stated above, if love is not to be an eternal and deadened attribute but a singular relationship with an individual existing within the present moment, then it cannot take place in the indicative mood. "I love you," for Rosenzweig, is a rather pathetic little sentence (S 176–77): "[L]ike every declaration it always comes afterwards [hinterher] and thus, since the love of the lover is presence, the declaration of love is truly continually belated." There is always a gap between the moment at which love is felt and the moment at which love is communicated. As soon as it is heard, the declaration loses any truth-value it had at the moment it was uttered. The response which "I love you" prompts is always "Do you still love me, now?" It gives no security. One can paraphrase Rosenzweig's concern with the propositional declaration of love by stating that "I love you" does not seek to establish a relationship, but rather only simply to communicate a state of affairs. At best, it serves as an inadequate reminder of the eternality of the feeling of love. When spoken at the outset of a relationship, the declaration usually is also a hidden request that love be returned. "I love you" can always be demythologized and decoded as "Won't you love me?" or "Do you love me?" (On occasion, its decoding is even worse: "Can we have sex now?") The masking of the question underneath the affirmation is emotionally stunted, not to mention socially improper. The benefit of transferring this scene to the God-human relationship, for Rosenzweig, is that the transcendence of the divine lover means that he does not need to ask for love in return. The impropriety is shattered. Instead, God can command love—"Love me!" in accordance

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49 One might dryly note that, without intoxicants, "Love me!" is hardly the most efficacious of inaugural romantic maneuvers, either in a discothèque or during the intermission at the opera. Robert Gibbs has a properly tortured footnote on this issue, dwelling on the question of whether men approach love differently than women, at Correlations 264n. 21. But Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, who has offered a prolonged meditation on the Rosenzweigian religious life as a proto-feminist eroticism (Better than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996]) does not question Rosenzweig at all on this point. Cf. Greenberg, 96–97. The difficulty of the matter is perhaps allayed by a consideration of God's love within a covenantal framework; the commandment to love God is already situated within the "historical prologue" of the covenant, the listing of loving acts which God has already
with the Biblical command to love God (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37), and inaugurate the loving relationship in that manner.

Second, I respond to this love immediately, based on the trust I have of the commanding lover (S 177): “in the eternal trust of her love, the beloved opens her arms wide to receive it.” In the moment in which I hear the command, I am cognizant of myself as being loved by God, and have a stable identity as such. But this identity lasts only for the moment that the command is given. Afterwards, the desire to make the moment endure takes over (S 179): “the beloved is conscious of wanting nothing in the future but to remain what she is: beloved.” The insertion of the experience of revelation into the temporal continuum involves not only a hope that the joy of being-loved in the present will persevere in the future, but also a comparison with past moments in which I did not open myself up to this love and acknowledge it. The identity of the beloved again risks falling into repression; how can I vocalize this identity when I suddenly become aware that I have failed to live up to the love-commandment in the past? For Rosenzweig, at this moment shame washes over the beloved and mutes the ability to acknowledge divine love. Identity is strangulated at the same moment that it tantalizingly comes to presence.

At this point, the will serves to break the impasse of the inexpressible identity, in the third step of the individual’s arrival at full presence. At this point, he decides to admit, before God, his failure to live up to the commandment prior to his experience of it. This acknowledgment of sin is for Rosenzweig “already the full admission of love” (S 180). Thus the soul—the self who has now entered into relationship with the divine, having left behind its inward life—does not assert its love in propositional form either. God commands; the individual confesses. No one asserts. It should be noted, although Rosenzweig does not make this very explicit, that the confession of sin is an act of the defiant will, which rejects the imposition of shame upon it. But this act of defiance allows

done for Israel. Cf. Jon D. Levenson, Sinai and Zion, 36–42.
itself to will the experience of its own identity, and the individual attains complete self-consciousness, specular reflection mediated through God. It is only once shame is cast away in the confession of past sin (Sünde, but not the present potential for future sin, Sündhaftigkeit), that the believer can attain knowledge of his of her true essence as a beloved creature (S 182): “the soul ... attains being, a being visible to itself, only when it is loved,” and when it acknowledges that love by acknowledging its own past sins. In the union of defiant will and singular character that compose religious self-consciousness, there is also a union of whole and part, between apeiron and peras. I am still the measure of my own judgments; the will’s defiant rejection of shame confirms that it is still completely autonomous and the measure of its destiny. Yet in the passage from this defiance to the confession of sin—the synthesis of humility (S 168)—I have now placed bounds upon myself, and now see myself as part of a larger God-governed world. Indeed, I see myself as possessed by God—for Rosenzweig, the beloved soul says to God, “I am yours” (S 183)—at the same time that I possess certainty of God’s love for me. And in this certainty I become aware of the gap between my inner sense and my outer sense, the fact that the interior experience (Erlebnis) of the soul is not paralleled by the soul’s empirical experience in the world(Erfahrung). But this gap between the private and the public spheres is part and parcel of Rosenzweigian self-consciousness. I am, whereas the world is not-yet. This gap threatens the bliss of the certainty of divine love. At the same time that this threat marks the pinnacle of the love-experience as a painful, anti-orgasmic scream which “sobs beyond the proximity of the lover ... into the gloom of infinity” (S 185), it also calls me to enact my newly discovered essence for-myself. But this action must be for-others, in terms of the divine command to love the neighbor which Rosenzweig sees as the fulcrum of redemption in terms of my demand of the “complement” of revelation, the founding of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God (S 184–85). Self-consciousness requires moral obligation. Rosenzweig speaks to this in the 1922 Lehrhaus lectures: “The majority
of havings-to [Müssens] is a having-to through others. The command becomes for me the prerequisite: I am [myself] only for you."

The way in which revelation demands redemption, on account of the failure of the outside world to correspond to my inner truth, introduces a Hegelian idiom which should rightly be foreign to Rosenzweig. After all, it is Hegel who marks the nadir of the philosophy of the All that ignored the reality of death (S 6–7). Yet the redemptive act, as I shall now demonstrate, is a mimicry of the Hegelian path of thinking in which the subject recognizes itself in the substance of culture. Indeed, insofar as the world is still written under the "not yet" sign of to me on, the act of redemption is precisely parallel to the Hegelian "magical power" by which the act of tarrying with the negative converts it (in this case, the world) into being. And because others are used as the medium through which I actualize my self-consciousness, the Hegelian method is at one with an instrumentalist ethics.

To reiterate the antithesis of revelation: in order to convert the presentness of the commandment into something eternal and enduring, the individual soul can do nothing but display its faithfulness to the commandment, and continually acknowledge itself as loved. Yet this acknowledgment of the commandment cannot remain within the God-soul relationship. It must orient itself outside the fleeting instant. Now that the self is a soul, more than a created object but recipient of the love of God, it must return to the world to ground the experience of revelation in order to remain faithful to the command of God. How can I enact my faithfulness to this command when I have been taken out of my spatio-temporal location in the world by the act of revelation? The task facing me is to ground my own faithfulness, to once again become part of the world. Rosenzweig sees this task as analogous to Adam's naming of the creatures in Genesis 2 (S 187). As Adam, in naming the objects of the world, gives it the content and individuality that it lacked in creation, so I


51 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, par. 32.
must endow the world with the content of character, with the essence which lies behind the appearances of objects in the world. In faithfulness, I demand and engender a correspondence between created objects and my interior experience of revelation (S 187).

One's own experience depends on one's own name; it therefore needs to be grounded in creation, that creation which we previously designated as the creation of revelation, as historical revelation. Thus grounded in the world, it must therefore be grounded in space and time precisely in order to provide a ground for experience's absolute certainty of possessing its own space and its own time.

How do I respond to the love given in revelation? I redeem. I convert the not-yet into the now. Yet this grounding cannot be automatic. Even though the world has begun on its own part the process of creating organic life which already moves objects from the level of appearance to that of being (S 222), the being of phenomena are still hidden in the noumenal realm. The inauguration of life does not mark the transition from the existence of the world in space and time to its being in eternity, but only to beings of the world in space and time. The world is still meontological (S 223):

We sought an Infinite, standing by itself; we found all kinds of finites, indefinitely numerous. We found something finite which was finite in its very essence, for it attained its durability in resistance against something other . . . The finite life that we find is thus simply the not-yet-infinite.

The universal and particular elements of the object are still in an unsynthesized dialectic with each other. The creation of the world has supplied the particular living organism; it is up to the redeeming individual to bring the universal categorial form, to presence. Simple biological growth is not sufficient to perform this synthesis, for Rosenzweig. In a critique of Cohenian asymptotic thinking, Rosenzweig argues (S 225) that "in order to become manifest form, the world requires an effect from without in addition to its own inner growth, the growth of life which is precarious because never certain of enduring." This effect is the human activity of redemption.

Whereas the world moves from universal to particular, the redeeming soul moves from particular to universal. It gives form to the objects that come before it. In so doing, it engenders their similarity to itself. I see the worldly object, or the other person, as
neighbor and hence as part of the divinely governed world. Yet it is important to remember 
that if the soul encounters the world as not-yet-infinite in its search for the infinite, then any 
object which the soul comes across in its quest for naming is able to serve only as a 
representative of the universal infinite. Since the end of human action is the infinite, all 
finitude must necessarily be only a metaphor for that end (S 234): “if then a not-yet is 
inscribed over all redemptive unison, there can only ensue that the end is for the time being 
represented by the just present moment, the universal and highest by the approximately 
proximate.” Although the commandment of God to love the neighbor is (S 214) “clear and 
unambiguous in content,” the reader of the Star sees that the beloved neighbor is not. The 
object of love is seen as such only because of his or her spatial position. Rosenzweig 
states that the neighbor (S 218) “is not loved for his own sake, nor for his beautiful eyes, 
but only because he just happens to be standing there, because he happens to be nearest to 
me.” And as such, the neighbor could be anyone; I do not pay attention to anything that 
makes her particularly concrete (such as her facial features, her gestures, her sense of 
humor, the list is potentially endless). I do not sense her. I only heed my desire to fulfill 
the commandment, to (S 227) “bring about the Messiah before his time.” Thus the human 
lover in redemption “barely even sees the neighbor” (S 235) and “feels only the impulse to 
the act of love.” This is necessarily so for Rosenzweig; how can I love the concrete, 
particular neighbor when it is precisely this subjectivity which I am supposed to engender 
in the object of my love, when the neighbor is not the starting point of my love but the 
(unintended)\(^5\) result of my love, since (S 235) “the act of love creates a neighbor out of its 
object”? Rosenzweig’s model of religious action sets itself up for a Feuerbachian re-
response, in which the neighbor is critiqued for being no more than a stepping stone to God.

For at the moment of revelation, only the I is definite. God has said “You are 
mine.” I am no longer a self taking up space; I am God’s. In my love of neighbor, I see

\(^5\) Rosenzweig is clear that the only motive for love of world is the desire to be faithful to God; thus, any 
result that may spring from the act of love is purely accidental. See S 214-5.
that the neighbor is God's as well, that he is like me. As such, the philosophical move is this: my identity is not expropriated from me to the neighbor, but the neighbor's identity is appropriated by me (and my identity is appropriated by God). Thus, the words "I", "neighbor", and "world" are seen in the light of redemption to be synonymous in their nature of being possessed by God. This is a fundamentally Hegelian move, for the otherness of the other is interpreted by the act of love only in terms of the soul's identity. Rosenzweig's description of the loving relation between the soul and the neighbor is as follows:

Out of the endless chaos of the world, one nighest thing, his neighbor, is placed before his soul, and concerning this one and well-nigh only concerning this one he is told: he is like you. "Like you," and thus not "you." You remain You and you are to remain just that. But he is not to remain a He for you, and thus a mere It for your You. Rather he is like You, like your You, a You like You, an I—a soul. (§ 240).

Compare this with the end of the "Morality" section in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which describes the "forgiveness of evil" as the affirmation of the similarity between self and other:

The reconciling *Yea*, in which the two 'Ts let go their antithetical *existence*, is the *existence* of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality (*Zweieheit*), and therein remains identical with itself, and, in its complete externalization and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself: it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge.53

In both passages, the I is already constituted *before* its encounter with the neighbor, and its love (for Rosenzweig) or forgiveness (for Hegel) of the other person is simply a recognition of itself in the other. This conflation of universality and particularity —my particularity is also the other's particularity which in turn is the universality of selfhood—is for both Rosenzweig and Hegel the manifestation of a trilateral relationship between God, self, and community. It can only take place through the encounter between two persons, the temporary stage of the dual which Hegelian dialectic resolves into the immanence of God in intersubjectivity, and which Rosenzweigian dialectic resolves into the immanence of the

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53 G. W. F. Hegel, op. cit., par. 671. Robert Gibbs reminds me, in personal conversation, that Hegel's appropriation of the dual is indeed rooted in Hebrew grammar, via Hamann's philological activities.
relationship with God in the world (S 235): “Where the dual has once applied, where someone or something has become neighbor to a soul, there a piece of world has become something which it was not previously: soul.” This difference between the role of God in Hegelian dialectic and the role of the soul in Rosenzweigian dialectic, I would argue, is not a qualitative one, for in both cases we see the effect of love/forgiveness as the conversion of substance into subjective ipseity. I do not only call my neighbor “You” (as Levinas is so fond of quoting in his hagiographies of Rosenzweig54), I call him soul, I call him I. The neighbor is part of the song of myself. Ironically enough, this Hegelianism in Rosenzweig is the direct consequence of Rosenzweig’s appropriation of the Schellingian structure of potencies. Because the individual has already attained the third potency, the “and”, at the moment of revelation, there is nothing for the individual to learn from his neighbor, from the world. After revelation, the soul is never called into question. Rather, by foisting its love upon the world, it ensures that it will never be critiqued.55

The neighbor’s quality of alter ego is the only aspect of the neighbor’s neighborliness which matters. One can already hear the objection: but what is soul?56 Is it not already the model for the expropriation of all egoistic notions of what “I” can be? Are not the words “I” and “soul” always in tension for Rosenzweig? If the neighbor and I are both soul, are we not already taken out of ourselves in a perpetual self-sacrifice for the greater good of the community? Are we not already both existing in the accusative case? This is a strong argument, yet I am not sure whether this is a purely Rosenzweigian argument, or


55 Additionally, one should note that it is not necessary to read Hegel in such a heterophagous and totalizing matter as I have done here. One can easily point to the careful distinction between Hegelian dialectic and Fichtean dialectic made by Robert R. Williams, in his Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), in the interest of defending Hegel against the charge of the totalizing rejection of alterity. Yet Rosenzweig’s Hegel is a totalizing Hegel, as the opening pages of the Star make clear. Thus, any similarity in phrasing or language between Rosenzweig and Hegel is doubly interesting, and demonstrates that Rosenzweig cannot shake the specter of totality from his own thinking ... if indeed this is even his desire.

56 I thank Leora Batnitzky for raising this objection to me.
one which is made in the hindsight of Levinasian and Derridean lenses. For what does the soul do in the Star? It (S 170) tries to "live permanently in the love of God." It sings "he is good" wherever it goes, before whomever is nearest to it, and in whatever it does. It gathers more voices for its song of praise to God. It prays for the coming of the kingdom (S 185). It does this in every situation. It does not know the irresolvable ethical questions with which Kant himself offered a self-critique in the Metaphysics of Morals through the casuistische Frage. It does not know the tensions of deep friendship which threaten the universality of the categorical imperative. It certainly does not know the problem of theodicy. It does not know the concrete of the body, for it prays outside of the body as "animated" (S 240), as soul. This is not to say that the soul is necessarily pietistic; Rosenzweig's critique of mystic experience (S 208) insures this. But the soul's act in the world is one of perception and one of perception alone; the soul simply strives toward redemption, which (S 250, emphasis mine) "merely brings into the view of all the living that which had previously taken place in the actual revelation as invisible occurrence in the individual soul." In its prayerful perception, the soul only verifies its own experience. Redemption is not concerned with the concrete content of the world—that was already the revelation of creation—which might take it out of itself (as the objector argues); it exists (S 240) "in the absence of any real doing." Again, redemption as verifying perception is an act of appropriation, not expropriation. Of course, it occurs in a communal context, in the cohortative song of the We (S 232). Yet it can never threaten the solitary experience of revelation which is always for Rosenzweig the bedrock of subjectivity, through which all subsequent experience must be mediated. Outside of the relationship between God and the individual, all is formal.

If this is the only way in which I, for Rosenzweig, can genuinely relate to my neighbor, what kind of relation is this? Considering the fact that Rosenzweig defines the "we" (S 236) as "the totality which develops out of the dual," and as consisting of a
“united” voice, never plural (S 236-7), one can infer that the relations between members of either religious community are simply formal relations (Verhältnisse), relations between perceived ideas predefined as part of the totality of revelation. For the relation between Jews and/or between Christians to have content, to be a relationship, the I must be able to speak for itself outside of the voice of the We and the You must be described as something over and above another soul, equivalent to my own. Otherwise the interaction cannot produce anything new. But newness exists only in the relationship between the individual and God; the singular merely expands from I to We in the revelation of redemption, a plug-and-chug reapplication of the revelation motif. Is it then possible that there can be a relationship between members of two different religious communities? Rosenzweig excludes this possibility as well, since the very existence of the We presupposes a Ye outside of the community to whom We do not speak; We only judge Ye and (S 237) “[w]e cannot avoid this sitting in judgment, for only with this judgment does it give a definite content to the totality of its We.” Thus, for Rosenzweig’s religious individual, life cannot include any relationships (Beziehungen) with other persons, and falls back into the very Kantian formalism that Rosenzweig argues against in the Star.

The way in which the formalism of the ethical relation in Rosenzweig lies opposed to what we will see in Levinas (for whom the other is always concrete) is paralleled by an opposition on the issues of messianism and eschatology. As we shall see below, despite the self-descriptions of both thinkers, as messianic, Rosenzweig and Levinas mean very different things by the term. For Rosenzweig, the “messianic” has nothing to do with the thisworldly messianism which the Bible transmits to us in Psalms 2, or which Maimonides transmits to us in Hilkhot Melakhim. Rosenzweig’s messianism is not linked to any messianic figure, but rather to the cognition and experience of the eternal God in his being. Levinas, on the other hand, has little patience for the concept of eternity.\footnote{Levinas, "Ethics of the infinite," in Kearney, 66.}
But why eschatology? Why should we wish to reduce time to eternity? Time is the most profound relationship that man can have with God precisely as a going towards God. There is an excellence in time which would be lost in eternity. To desire eternity is to desire to perpetuate oneself, to go on living as oneself, to be always.

But it is this shift of attention from time to eternity, from the historical to the ahistorical which characterizes Rosenzweig’s thought. The incorporation of the other person into the choral We of either the synagogue of the church is the conquering of time and the achievement of perdurance, buffeted from the risk of death, or the possible bad fortune of life (S 253): “The We is eternal: death plunges into the Nought in the face of this triumphal shout of eternity. Life becomes immortal in redemption’s eternal hymn of praise.” This is not an account of the expectation for a future redemption, or an argument for its real possibility, or an argument for existing “as if” the world were already redeemed. In the synagogue, or in the church, the believer stands safe from harm, enveloped in the warm womb of an eternal love which never alters. The world has achieved the “and” characteristic of Schelling’s third potency. But this is at the cost of the very concreteness of the world itself. The world attains the third potency only when the individual has run away from it into the arms of eternity.

At this moment, meontology appears to become relieved by ontology. No longer are they working together, as they were in the created yet unredeemed world. Although the world is not yet fully redeemed in the here and now with the creation of religious communities—the third potency for Rosenzweig falls into the antithesis between Judaism and Christianity which is then overcome only by God, for “only with God himself does the verification reside ... [e]arthly truth thus remains split into two”58—the being of God is cognized by the individual consciousness within the matrix of the religious community. At the moment when the choir of the synagogue or church proclaims God as truth and verifies this truth through the construction of its communal ways of life, God is no longer not-yet.

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Once God has made himself fully manifest in creation and revelation, and when this manifestation has been verified in human redemption,

the First and the Last and the intimately present [der Herzmittegegenwärtige] burn into one in the God of Truth. And of this God in whom real past having-been and real present being and real future becoming crystallize together, we may—now for the first time—say: He is.

It is important to note what this passage does not say. It is not a proleptic imagination of what the religious community will say at the moment of complete redemption of the world. It states that God becomes present—not simply in the sense that God is in the present moment, but that God's eternity becomes cognized by consciousness—in the religious life. The believer is not straddled between history and eternity. Rather, his or her very belief enables a leap out of history and into eternity. At the same time, under no conditions does Rosenzweig mean for this to be otherworldly. But the temporal continuum which underlies the world is denied, since Rosenzweig sees the goal of reading the Star as a continuing of the philosophical theology within the newly sacralized realm of the mundane, in which one lives "the day as the-All-within-the-everyday [All-tag]." This is not a will toward eternity, as in Nietzsche's Zarathustra; it is a will that eternity has come, and that sense-certainty has nothing to be worried about when made within the ambit of faith. The Schellingian context of the Star teaches that the content of this intention is a real possibility, since the potencies are always on-the-way to their actualization—"the godhead's vital, real being is ... an eternal birth into being" (AW 157)—the experience of the religious life testifies to the actuality of this birth, in which the finite is completely overwhelmed by the infinite.

These sentences from Rosenzweig's "The New Thinking" essay are perhaps not completely confirmed by the Star, some might say. After all, the message of the Star is that "God is the nothing" (S 390), and that God's self-manifestation still reveals nothing about his essence except for the fact that he is the transcendental condition of truth (S 388). If I

59 Ibid., 99–100. Translation revised.
60 Ibid., 100. Translation revised.
can know and experience the eternal being of God, as Rosenzweig seems to claim in "The New Thinking," then might not one then make the argument that the very strength of this claim is vitiated by the realization that the eternal being of God is fundamentally meonto-
logical, insofar as God cannot be defined in essentialist or ontological terms? This is the fundamental mystery of the *Star*. How much cognition does the believer have by the end of Rosenzweig's recontextualization of idealism in the *Star*? Which word takes primacy in the proposition "God is the nothing": "is" or "nothing"? What is the extent of cognition here? One *must* side with the "is." This is not simply because Rosenzweig says so in the "New Thinking" essay, or even because revelation might be moot if the answer sided with the "nothing." After all, Rosenzweig does assert that Judaism and Christianity each only have "a part of the whole truth," and that revelation culminates not simply with the manifesta-
tion of God but with the *re-concealment* of God behind his acts in the world (S 416–17).

It is because Rosenzweig's "nothing" now means exactly the opposite of what it did at the opening of the *Star*. There it referred to that which was absolutely impenetrable and dark for human consciousness. But now, once the believer has had a quasi-mystical experience of the face of God, the nothing is characterized by absolute light, "the mysterious [and] miraculous light of the divine sanctuary" (S 424). By the end of the *Star*, the believer who truly leaves time behind for eternity has a prophetic vision of the face of God which visually confirms the "Love me!" heard at the moment of revelation. As in Hegel's *Logic*, nothing and being are identical. Rosenzweig explicitly links this model of human perfection with Biblical phrases depicting Moses. The rabbinic example of Moses' "death by a kiss" from the mouth of God (S 422–23) is often depicted in the secondary literature on Rosenzweig.61 The believer is compared to Moses before the closing "Gate" section of

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61 Here Rosenzweig is borrowing not only from Deuteronomy Rabbah (as Nahum Glatzer writes in his "Index of Jewish Sources" appended to the English translation of the *Star*), but also from at least two other sources: B. Baba Bathra 17a and its use in Maimonides' account of Moses' death (as well as that of Aaron and Miriam) as an example of the perfection of passionate love (*chesheq*) of the prophet at section III:51 of the *Guide*. 
the *Star*, which marks the transition from the textual philosophy into lived practice.\(^{62}\) At the moment of the discovery of God's truth (S 390) as the nothing, the believing community of the We finds God "by our side, in immediate proximity, as a man finds his friend."

Although there is no note to this sentence in Nahum Glatzer's index of sources, Rosenzweig's language is (in my opinion rather obviously) an evocation of Exodus 33:11: "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend." In addition, the language of light may very well reflect Rosenzweig's preoccupation with the writings of Judah Halevi who writes of the prophetic vision that "weak-eyed people can only see in the shadow, but people with strong eyes can see in sunlight."\(^{63}\) While Halevi does go on to make the Platonic point that no eye can directly see the sun (for then one would go blind), the fact remains that Rosenzweig's language in the final sections of the *Star* refer explicitly to states of prophecy, traditionally seen as the level of supra-intellectual human perfection. God is apprehended. If God is apprehended as "the nothing," this only means that the believing We apprehends God only in terms of his attributes of action, and not in terms of any essential attributes. Once God has become manifest for Rosenzweig, "God's essence has vanished in his action, in his love" (S 390). Thus, although Rosenzweig seems to limit the possibility of cognizing God when he writes (S 417) that "He is beyond all that can be imparted ... even above the Whole, he is the One," this very rhetoric is what Maimonides associates with the highest apprehension of God as ultimately simplex (G 139): "in every case in which the demonstration that a certain thing [i.e. attribute referring to God's essence] should be negated with reference to Him becomes clear to you, you become more perfect."

What Rosenzweig has thus done in the *Star* is democratize the elitist accounts of

\(^{62}\) Rosenzweig, "New Thinking," 100.

prophecy given in Halevi and Maimonides. The We of the synagogue, simply by taking on
the everyday structures of Jewish life and moving from time to eternity, attains the
prophetic level of Moses! While this egalitarian approach to Judaism has certain benefits,
especially for women in the synagogue, it also heightens the very problem of ethical
formalism which I have highlighted above. For the prophet never sees the Other as
concrete, or takes the time to take note of the particular situation of the Other. While the
prophet is certainly the leader of his community, passing on to the community the divine
overflow which he has received from God (G 374), he has achieved universal knowledge:
he (G 372) "will see only God and His angels, and will only be aware and achieve
knowledge of matters that constitute true opinions and general directives for the well-being
of men in their relations with one another." Indeed, the patriarchs are so attuned toward
God, that their bodies seem to act by rote (G 624), performing actions "with their limbs
only, while their intellects were constantly in His presence." Even if Rosenzweig's
community is not as perfect as the prophets or the patriarchs, the emphasis on the source of
true knowledge is the same. In the formalist approach to religious life, truth cannot be
found in the historical world or the temporal continuum, no matter to what extent it is
perceived as the creation of God. For Rosenzweig, as well as for Maimonides, truth can
only be found in turning away from the world and turning toward eternity.

But is it necessary for the meontological approach to philosophy to collapse in such
a formalist ethics? Is it possible to have both a rich delineation of the relationship with God
and a rich delineation of the intersubjective relationship? Perhaps one can extend the
perpetual oscillation between the particular and the universal which takes place on every
page of the Star to another area: the distinction between the holy and the profane. This
revisioning of Hegelian dialectic would not simply refer to the soul's redemptive quest to
recognize itself in substance. It would also refer to the quest to recognize the ultimate
subject, God, in the substance of the world; it would enrich the Rosenzweigian argument
for seeing creation in terms of revelation.

II. The Body, Faithful in Eros

As shown in the previous section, the Schellingian framework which underlies the dialectical turns of the *Star*, qua one in which concrete matter becomes no more than a vessel-pod for the transcendent, prohibits Rosenzweig from seeing any intrinsic good in the concrete others who exist in our daily lives. In order to prevent an ethics which is only an instrumentalist use of the Other for our own good\(^{64}\), it is necessary to tarry with the phenomenal nature of personhood, to turn to the themes of embodiment and spatiotemporal comportment.\(^{65}\) The theme of the body is completely missing in the *Star*, unless one wants to emphasize the brief reference to the community's understanding of redemption in terms of (S 241) "the great simile of marriage." This blind spot in Rosenzweig calls out for bodily supplementation, and in this section, I shall argue that this is exactly Levinas' function in the Jewish meontological tradition. Not only do Levinas' analyses of embodiment and the finitude of knowledge within the spatiotemporal matrix lead to a view of the person as both intrinsically *and* instrumentally good, but this serves to solve both the ethical and metaphysical problems of the meontological theories of Maimonides, Cohen, and Rosenzweig. Although Levinas' endpoint is decidedly in line with at least one strand of the Jewish tradition (as I shall show in the next chapter), the tools that Levinas uses to reach this point are Husserlian. Thus, the structure of the argument of this half of the chapter will proceed as follows. First, I will introduce the thematic of the body as the locus in twentieth-century Continental philosophy for examining the philosophical ambiguity of

\(^{64}\) I want to stress here that I am not arguing against the utilitarian use of the Other per se; rather, I am arguing against it being the *only* component of a meontological ethic. One might place the instrumental good of persons in the context of their intrinsic goodness, as John Stuart Mill does. I have made some preliminary remarks to this effect in "On A Utilitarian Element in Modern Jewish Philosophical Ethics" (unpub. ms.).

matter as that which excludes the ideal yet is the material cause for any human knowledge of it. Second, I will lay out a brief overview of the Levinas-Husserl relationship and the development of Levinas' Husserlianism, paying special attention to Levinas' appropriation, especially in the 1965 essay "Intentionality and Sensation" of Husserl's nascent body philosophy and philosophy of internal time-consciousness with its double intentionality. Next, in the light of this Husserlianism, I will summarize the discussion of embodied eros in Levinas' Totality and Infinity and then show how this analysis is expanded in Otherwise than Being so that the body becomes the site at which the "dephasing" of time (with its concomitant ethical commands) is cognized by consciousness. Finally, I will show how these later analyses determine the Levinasian notions of prophecy and messianism, and in the context of one of Levinas's Talmudic readings, aid in the elucidation of a double selfhood: there is the ethically responsible self who is the Messiah, and the ethically responsible self who awaits the Messiah.

The history of the concept of the body in Continental philosophy customarily begins with Sartre's analysis of the issue in the second chapter of Part Three of Being and Nothingness, published in 1943. Here, the uniqueness of the body as a phenomenon already comes into view; Sartre describes it as "the point of view on which I cantake no point of view, the instrument which I cannot utilize in the way I utilize any other instrument." Two years later, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his Phenomenology of Perception, gives the first clear elucidation of the body at the level of fundamental ontology, as the transcendental condition for any and all perception. However, for Merleau-Ponty it seems as if any ontological or existentialist propositions become extremely difficult to formulate when one starts to speak about the body. In Phenomenology of Perception, the body becomes the locus for the very equivocation of human existence, situated on the fence between subject and object, uncertain where it wants to rest. In his analysis, the body is

constantly othering itself in a supreme ambiguity, and this very insight means that any philosophical reflection that ignores embodiment (such as Hegel, but not Descartes) has become obsolete.

The experience of our own body ... reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existing. If I try to think of it as a cluster of third person processes—'sight', 'motility', 'sexuality'—I observe that these 'functions' ... are all mutually implied in a unique drama. Therefore the body is not an object. For the same reason, my awareness of it is not a thought, that is to say, I cannot take it to pieces and reform it to make a clear idea. Its unity is always implicit and vague. It is always something other than what it is, always sexuality and at the same time freedom ... never hermetically sealed. ... I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a 'natural' subject, a provisional sketch of my total being.  

If one cannot say what the body is, one must turn to life in order to know the body, whether that body is mine or my neighbor's. Merleau-Ponty describes this turn away from reflection as a loss of self. If phenomenology states that the only way to know the body is through a life in which lets go of the subject's control over the objects it contacts, then a philosophy such as Rosenzweig's will be inadequate from its standpoint. For in the Star, it is the objects of the world that are deprived of the subjectivity of selfhood; it is precisely the task of the religious individual to give duration and subjectivity to the world, and thereby deprive it of the possibility of death.

Merleau-Ponty is usually perceived as a critic of Husserl, specifically insofar as he turns away from the apparent absolute idealism of the transcendental ego which suffuses the fifth of the Cartesian Meditations. Yet although Merleau-Ponty turns away from certain Husserlian concepts, he does not turn away from Husserlianism tout court. Rather,

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68 Ibid.

Merleau-Ponty’s idea that consciousness is bodily ensconced in the world, and that thinking is always caught up in the structures and strictures of bodily existence\textsuperscript{70}, is derived from Husserlian works which were unpublished at the time that Merleau-Ponty was working on his manuscript (in part at the Husserl Archives in Louvain) during the Second World War. Specifically, there could be no Merleau-Ponty without the second volume of \textit{Ideas} (written during the First World War, but not officially published until 1952). To be sure, Merleau-Ponty only explicitly cites this Husserlian text once in the \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}.\textsuperscript{71} There is some anecdotal evidence of Merleau-Ponty’s enthusiasm for the ideas contained therein (ID2 xvi), but any philosophical use of this is limited, to say the least. More importantly, Merleau-Ponty’s move away from the immanence of thinking in the Cartesian transcendental ego toward a voluntarism which centers around an analysis of the expressivity of bodily comportment depends upon a move in \textit{Ideas II} which is critical of this very epistemological bent. Merleau-Ponty writes that “consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can.’”\textsuperscript{72} The thetic aspect of consciousness is contingent upon an embodied will. Likewise, for Husserl the theoretical attitude which alters the natural attitude of viewing objects in the world as “simply ‘on hand’” into viewing them as constituted by human consciousness and its intentional modes of comportment (desiring, detesting, doubting)—the advance of the \textit{Ideas II}\textsuperscript{73}—is revealed in the second volume to depend upon bodily capabilities. The freedom of consciousness is unthinkable without kinesthetic freedom (ID2 61), since “the Body [\textit{Leib}; lived-body as opposed to \textit{Körper}, the thingly body of nature] is, in the first place, the medium of all perception ... all that is thingly-real in the surrounding world of the Ego has its relation to the Body.” The “I

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\textsuperscript{70} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}, 203 and 383. Cf. Schmidt, 43.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 92.

\textsuperscript{72} Merleau-Ponty, 137.

can”, which in Ideas I referred to the ability to suspend the natural attitude by means of the phenomenological reduction and highlight the nature of human thinking, is now further delineated as depending upon a more primary ego-faculty (ID2 160): the ability “to freely move this Body and to perceive an external world by means of it.”

On the one hand, this new concept of the body as a tool renders twee the mind-body problem of the sixth of Descartes’ Meditations (and especially its seventeenth-century occasionalist solution). For at a level far more basic than that of how sensations of pleasure and pain are comprehended by the mind, Husserl is able to explain how the spontaneous comportments of the body lead to consciousness’ ability to adequately describe objects. Sensation is not a challenge to the mind, as in Descartes; rather, tactility (to take one example) is a necessary part of the constitution of the object via the discovery of yet still other of its aspects or adumbrations (Abschattungen). Using a language which hearkens back to Democritean descriptions of sensation in which atoms jump into the hand, ear, or eye, Husserl describes the property of the object moving into the bodily organ that is sensing the object at the time.

My hand is lying on the table. I experience the table as something solid, cold, and smooth. Moving my hand over the table, I get an experience of it and its thingly determinations. At the same time, I can at any moment pay attention to my hand and find on it touch-sensations, sensations of smoothness and coldness, etc. In the interior of the hand, running parallel to the experienced movement, I find motion-sensations, etc. Lifting a thing, I experience its weight, but at the same time I have weight-sensations localized in my Body. (ID2 153)

The shift from objective weight to subjective weight-sensations means that even if I were only to be dreaming of a table lying under me, I would still have touch-sensations on my back, perhaps going as far as to sense a splinter from a badly sanded table, even though no such splinter and no such table exist in objective reality. Without such kinesthetic sensa-
tions, I would be unable to describe the proper predicates of an object (ID2 157): “the touch-sensing is not a state of the material thing, hand, but is precisely the hand itself, which for us is more than a material thing, and the way in which it is mine entails that I, the 'subject of the Body,' can say that what belong to the material thing is its, not mine.”
But already in this sentence the ambiguity of bodily sensing (vision as well as touch) emerges. For while the physical body is merely a thing in the world—there is no separating between a live body and a corpse at the natural level—the lived body is something more, both of the world and above it, both a material thing and a tool of the transcendental ego's spiritualizing act. Thus the kinesthetic basis of the constitution of objects in the world only heightens the old Cartesian problems, since Husserl's emphasis on the kinesthetically free body cannot fully eliminate (and indeed depends upon) the classical conception of the body as a sensorium. The body becomes best expressed through the figure of the Janus-face. It both receives sensations and constitutes their meaning, and therefore lies on the borderline between the material and the ideal. On the one hand, the lived body is "aesthesiological", the material organ for perception (aisthesis) of the surrounding material objects. This is how I constitute the meaning of the lived body in my own consciousness. On the other hand, the lived body is "for the will, the freely moving Body" which has its own reality insofar as it is the agency by which I can constitute anything in the first place and, more mundanely, act upon objects over and above a relation of sensibility. Husserl describes the Body as a "two-sided" or "double" reality (ID2 297), and the relation between the two sides is difficult to delineate. They seem to be eternally correlated, but the sequence by which the two sides of constituted differs according to the mode of reasoning. From the point of view of the ordo essendi, the aesthesiological stratum "is always a presupposition" for the possibility of any free movement. Yet from the point of view of the ordo cognoscendi, it is free movement that makes this very knowledge possible.

It is this ambiguity in priority which Merleau-Ponty begins to manipulate in his rebellion against the perceived hegemony of the mind in Husserl, and which Levinas will then further manipulate in a rebellion against the hegemony of voluntarism in both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. In 1960, Merleau-Ponty published Signes, a collection of essays
which included a long summation of his view on Husserl, "The Philosopher and His Shadow." The essay is exemplary insofar as it hermeneutically performs, in a simultaneous slavishness and criticism, the ambiguity that marks so many other aspects of Merleau-Ponty's thought. On the one hand, Husserl is for Merleau-Ponty always and everywhere correct—in Ideas II, that is. For it is in this text (and Merleau-Ponty also cites Ideas III and a text on the Copernican revolution in the history of science) in which Husserl moves away from the theoretical descriptions of the pure, i.e. transcendental, ego which has knowledge of being as thought, and from the position that the phenomenological attitude is always and everywhere superior to the natural one.

From Ideas II on it seems clear that reflection does not install us in a closed, transparent milieu, and that it does not take us (at least not immediately) from "objective" to "subjective," but that its function is rather to unveil a third dimension in which this distinction becomes problematic. . . . From Ideas II on Husserl's reflection escapes the tête-à-tête between pure subject and pure things.75

As the earlier summary of key arguments in Ideas II would lead one to believe, this third dimension is one situated as a bridge across the material and the mental. The embodiment of constituting consciousness means that constituting consciousness is simply not the sum of mental processes by which consciousness is defined in Ideas I.76 Rather, as shown above, Merleau-Ponty is drawn toward the structures of Ideas II which show phenomenology interrupting itself, insofar as they contest "the unidirectional relationship of the one who perceives to what he perceives."77 When I rub my hand across a table, it is the roughness of the table that transfers itself into my hand in the act of sensation. (Merleau-Ponty uses Husserl's example from Ideas II §36 of one hand touching another; here "the


75 Ibid., 162–63.

76 Husserl, Ideas I, 68 (§36).

77 Merleau-Ponty, 166.
touched hand becomes the touching hand."\textsuperscript{78} It becomes difficult to tell what is properly
called subject and what is properly called object; the intentionality-structure of embodied
consciousness blurs the difference between the two. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty goes on to
hint that embodiment threatens the very noesis-noema distinction—the distinction between
intensive form and hyletic data—upon which the model of intentionality in \textit{Ideas I} is
predicated.\textsuperscript{79} The body is now more than something that must eat and sleep in order to
avoid the fatigue that saps the mind; rather, the mind cannot be thought without the body, it
thinks bodily. This has consequences that go far beyond the quibbling over the question of
what kinds of analyses constitute "good" phenomenology.

For Merleau-Ponty (and for Husserl in \textit{Ideas II}), embodiment is what solves the
problem of other minds and grounds a sociality that is not grounded in the mediating
structure of analogical projection of myself onto the other person (a stance from which
Husserl retreats slightly in the fifth \textit{Cartesian Meditation}). Concrete experience of
another's body gives an immediate knowledge of that person, and the realization of an
analogy between my embodied consciousness and that of the other comes \textit{after} this
knowledge. In a gloss on \textit{Ideas II} §45, Merleau-Ponty claims that the "transferred co-
presence" of the other by which I come to the conclusion that my sensation of another is
self-validating occurs with "neither comparison nor analogy nor projection."\textsuperscript{80} This is
because all sensibilia are qualitatively identical. When one hand touches another, there is
no doubting the validity of my sensation of that hand \textit{whether or not} it belongs to me or to
someone else, and just as there is an immediate transfer of texture from one hand (or a
table) to another hand, there is a similar transfer from one person to another. The analysis
of sensibility leads Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to the conclusion that intersubjectivity

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{80} Merleau-Ponty, ibid., 168.
underlies the constituting ego. This analysis applies to other modes of sensibility besides touch; it does not matter whether I hug the other person or simply see him sauntering down the aisle.

However, this does not mean that I know the other person completely. Husserl, and especially Merleau-Ponty, are clear that the immediacy of sociality only establishes the identity of the sensible field that the two share, and any positing of a mental identity over and above this is fraught with risk. Husserl writes that "to the seen Body there belongs a psychic life, just as there does to my Body," but says nothing about what kind of psychic life this is (ID2 174). Merleau-Ponty draws out the limits of the Husserlian claim more efficiently: in a response to the objection that the constitution of an intersubjective embodiment will lead to the projection of an intersubjective mind, he emphasizes that the very phenomenology of the body in Ideas II which upsets the relationship between noesis and noema, constituting and constituted, prohibits this very kind of move. "The one who is constituting is as yet only animate flesh himself; nothing prevents us from reserving for the stage when he will speak and listen the advent of another person who also speaks and listens."81 The analysis of sensibility only tells us that sociality is really possible, and that this sociality is both indebted to and contrary to the transcendentalism of Ideas I, because it deals with the "hither side"82 of phenomena that lies beneath consciousness' activities and constitutes them as the precondition for any constitution. Already in Merleau-Ponty, not to mention the Husserl of Ideas II, we have the development of a thematics of something which challenges the mental processes of consciousness—bodily intersubjectivity, the realization that the touch of another is immediate and unimpeachable.

Insofar as this model is one in which matter gives consciousness its ego and its intersubjective telos is a challenge to the more egoistic language of earlier Husserl, one can

81 Ibid., 169.
82 Ibid., 180; the term appears frequently in Levinas' later writings.
say that the lived body reveals. But the extent of this revelation is murky. In the 1980s, Levinas published two brief articles on Merleau-Ponty's treatment of Husserl, both later reprinted in Outside the Subject. While they endorse Merleau-Ponty's strategy of using Ideas II to critique the positions found in Ideas I, Levinas still finds that Merleau-Ponty's body-philosophy does not go far enough, and is simultaneously too true and not true enough to the Husserlian project. (When writing about the body, who could expect any less ambiguity?) Although Levinas appreciates the emphasis on the role that bodily life plays in the constitution of the mental, Merleau-Ponty's deft handling of the deconstruction of the subject-object polarity in Ideas II still adheres to a cognitive prejudice: "we know far more about [things] in the natural attitude than the theoretical attitude can tell us—and above all we know it in a different way." The position is the inverse of Kant: Husserl has no problem with the noumenal knowledge of the thing-in-itself in Ideas I, but when faced with the irreducible belonging-together of the noumenon with the phenomenon, a barrier complicates gnosis, as the natural attitude is shrouded in "mystery." But it does not make gnosis impossible. This different kind of knowing still involves a knowledge that there is a mystery and that this mystery allows for a sociality in which I and the Other are no more than different modes of a primordial bodily intersubjectivity. Therefore, Levinas concludes in going against the grain of "The Philosopher and His Shadow" that Merleau-Ponty does not see Ideas II as a challenge to the Husserlian model of consciousness, but rather as the argument that bolsters and completes its authorization: "sociality does not break the order of consciousness any more than does knowledge, which, cleaving to the known, immediately coincides with whatever might have been foreign to it." Thus the order of the revelation of the body is co-opted into the stream of mental processes, and becomes a secularized

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84 Merleau-Ponty, 163.

consolation for the fear of being unable to break through the solipsistic cage.\footnote{Also cf. Levinas' remarks on Husserlian phenomenology in "Transcendence and Intelligibility": "Nothing ever comes to unseat this intentional will of thought or fails to measure up to it." Levinas, "Transcendence and Intelligibility," trans. Simon Critchley and Tamra Wright, in Basic Philosophical Writings, 153.}

Levinas' ethical critique of the egoism that perdures in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is paired with an admiration for certain strands in Merleau-Ponty and especially for Husserlian thought, which "requires an attentive ear throughout, despite the apparent immobility or restating of the main theses."\footnote{Levinas, "On Intersubjectivity," 98.} In the latter of the two essays on Merleau-Ponty ("In Memory of Alphonse de Waelhens"), there is a strange paragraph which simultaneously valorizes and dismisses the practical upshot of Ideas II's ambiguous structure of knowledge. It is worth quoting in full.

Husserl's texts on empathy, which were published in Ideen II, present the meaning of this knowledge in a manner that is indeed particularly impressive in its phenomenological preciseness. These analyses, many years earlier than those of the fifth meditation in Husserl's Cartesian Meditations seem to me, paradoxically, richer than the latter. Specifically, I have in mind the whole of paragraph 56 of this dense but so very rich volume—and even more specifically the inimitable pages (248–59) on the understanding of "spiritualized" objects (contrasted with our knowledge of all other meaningful objects): cultural and written ones. I have in mind the admirable effort to bring out, through the phenomenological analysis of apperception, sociality and society in their height and preeminence in relation to the perception of objects simply endowed with "signification." Yet at no point in the course of that very beautiful analysis is the (ultimately or originally) cognitive structure of the lived put into question, in order to conceive of the cognitive access to the objectivity of the other person on the basis of his or her proximity as neighbor, rather than founding the latter on the former.\footnote{Levinas, "In Memory of Alphonse de Waelhens," 112–13. Translation slightly altered to reflect the English edition of Ideas II.}

On the one hand, the Husserlian text, like Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, finally falls prey to the analogical view of persons which Levinas everywhere associates with totality and the violation of the otherness of the other person. Yet on the other hand, Levinas does not find mistakes in Husserl's phenomenological investigations themselves, they are impressively precise. This gives the reader two options for interpretation: either Levinas is breaking with phenomenology tout court, since not even the most precise of phenomenological
models can ground ethics, or Husserl is ignoring an element in his observations which would ground a more Levinasian ethics.

An interpretation of §56 and especially §56h (the section Levinas emphasizes in the above) decides for the latter option. Indeed, the survey of Levinas' own statements regarding phenomenology found at the beginning of this chapter should already predispose one toward this. The section gives the reader the social upshot of the discovery of consciousness as intentional. Recalling the analysis of the necessarily embodied nature of constitution in §18, sensibility prohibits the separation of subject/object and material/mental. When Husserl turns to the constitution of other people in this later section, it is the body/spirit dualism that becomes irresolvable into its parts. The other person is given to me as "one with [his or her] Body" (ID2 245); analogizing from the co-presence of the material and mental in the stream of my conscious processes, I "introjectively posit" a similar unity in the other person (ID2 240). 89 This means that the "psychic grounds" (ID2 234) of constitution cannot be found in the natural physicalist order; because the physical appears to be always already animated by the operation of intentionality, a different order of causality appears which Husserl terms "motivation" (ID2 241). Now although I have constituted this body-spirit dyad in the Other, the Other still confronts me bodily in intuition and determines my response. This moment of empathy turns back upon itself in the intersubjective experience:

I hear the other speaking, see his facial expressions, attribute to him such and such conscious lived experiences and acts, and let myself be determined by them in this or that way. The facial expressions are ... immediately bearers of sense indicating the other's consciousness, e.g. his will which, in empathy, is characterized as the actual will of this person and as a will which addresses me in communication. The will characterized in this way ... then motivates my counter-willing or my submission, etc. . . . The mien of the other determines me (this is already a kind of motivation) to join to it a sense within the other's consciousness . . . We are altogether outside the attitude required for grasping natural causality. (ID2 247)

This is where the phenomenology of the Other stands at the beginning of §56h. Ethics—which one might define here as the attunement to the Other’s face as a recognizable phenomenon—becomes possible for two reasons. On the one hand, there is the reason that is later popularized in the fifth Cartesian Meditation: the belief in the existence of the other person is confirmed via analogy, because the Other expresses him- or herself in the same manner that I do. But more importantly than this, ethics is possible because the perception of the other person immediately transcends the naturalistic attitude. The embodiment of consciousness with its unique unity, once analogized, means (ID2 248) that other people signify themselves to me as a “unity of the expression and the expressed that belongs to the essence of all comprehensive unities.” Unlike the sensation of physical objects, which teach me about my own embodiment, the sensation of the Other communicates meaning to me, and this teaches me something about the Other’s persona—an aspect of being-in-the-world which I have not yet constituted (with the exception of my own). In this manner, Husserl writes, other persons are like texts, in which the physical book is always animated by the sense of the words that are “fused” with the signifying words. In the presentation of the other person’s body, there is also an presentation of the other person’s soul (ID2 252): “each movement of the body is full of soul, the coming and going, the standing and sitting, the walking and dancing, etc.” Moreover, because this presentation of the other person’s soul is an presentation to me, it displays a stratum above and beyond the belonging-together of material and mental which Husserl defines as soul. The belonging-together of two souls apparent in the presentation of the other person displays spirit, and allows me to constitute a spiritual world of free persons over and above the natural world of mechanically determined objects.90 Returning to the analogical framework, the apperception of the other person as a “spiritualized” thing in turn leads to a new self-apperception as spiritualized, an apperception which is not available to the ego in any self-

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inspection but necessitates this detour through the other. This leads to the constitution of the socio-ethical realm (ID2 254): “by means of this apprehension, with its complicated structure, I fit myself into the family of man, or rather, I create the constitutive possibility for the unity of this ‘family.’”

This model obeys the logic of Platonic meontology as laid out in the discussion of the Sophist in Chapter 2. The constitution of the self through the other, based on the blurring of the boundaries between subject and object and between material and mental in any kind of givenness, means that the given (and this includes the Ego given in self-perception) is never fully given to me, but is only fully given as an Object within the intersubjective sphere. Thus it is not only the constitution of the other person that should normatively motivate my taking an ethical position in the world, but this ethical position also has an epistemological force that aids in the path towards the Wesensscauh (intuition of the essence) of the object. In the present, nothing is, all is not, although a teleological hope is still held out for being.

But does anything at all have an essence of its own in the first place? Or is the thing, as it were, always underway, not at all graspable in pure Objectivity, but rather, in virtue of its relation to subjectivity, in principle only a relatively identical something, which does not have its essence in advance of graspable once and for all, but instead has an open essence, one that can always take on new properties according to the constitutive circumstances of givenness? . . . No thing has its individuality in itself. (ID2 312–13)

Indeed, Husserl's notion of essence, while as intersubjective as that of Plato, involves, as shown above, a more complex oscillation in the directions of constitution, and stages in which an “analogical” onto the Other is coupled with modes of pure givenness that make that analogy possible in the first place. While Husserl did not use the word “meontic” or “meontological” specifically, this sense of unity in and through difference is what Husserl's student Eugen Fink meant by the term “meontic” in the personal notes during the period when he wrote the Sixth Cartesian Meditation.91

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Of course, the ego comes first in Husserl; I constitute my own Body before I constitute anyone else's. Yet the oscillatory structure of constitution—from myself to the Other at the animal level, back to me at the spiritual level, and then back to the Other at the ethical level—provides a space for Levinas to make space in Husserl for a new narrative of how constitution works. Levinas shows that Husserl's intended narrative, by virtue of its phenomenological preciseness, makes room for another narrative which emphasizes the radical alterity that serves as the transcendental condition for any constitution at all.

The tension which Levinas manipulates is that between transcendental and empirical priority. For although the ego is empirically prior in the Husserlian narrative of the constitution of the other, there is no guarantee that it is transcendentally prior. And indeed Husserl says this explicitly in §76h, Levinas' favorite section of Ideas II.

It must be noticed, however, that the unity of expression is a presupposition for the constitution of the founded reality as one which encloses levels, but that it is not already in itself this reality. We could formulate it in this way: it is only by means of expression that the person of the other is there at all for the experiencing subject, and the person must necessarily be there first in order for him to be able to enter ... into a real unity of a higher level and indeed to do so together with that which serves as expression. (ID2 257)

In other words, Husserl here is retreating from the correlation between the givenness of the object to consciousness and consciousness' intentional constitution of the object that Ideas I establishes, i.e. the theory that objects are given to me as I constitute them and are thus fully dependent upon consciousness. As Maurice Natanson lucidly put it, "phenomena, unlike gods, are not self-generating; they point back to where they have come from and to how they have traversed their constitutive path," and this absolute origin is nothing less than the status of phenomena "as intentional objects for consciousness."92 Levinas himself makes a similar point in his 1930 dissertation on Husserl—written only with access to the writings of Husserl published at that time (e.g. Ideas I but not Ideas II), when he writes

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that things need consciousness in order to exist. Yet the quote from Ideas II above contradicts this. Here, it is not phenomena that depend upon consciousness, but consciousness that depends upon the phenomenon. The expressivity of the body is given from an I-know-not-where, conditioned by something unnamable. Moreover, this unnamable is necessary for my constitution of the other person as a spiritualized object. To be sure, this is always and everywhere my constitution of the other person as spiritualized; the spirit of the other person does not visit upon me from above and catch me by surprise. Yet even if my own ego is empirically prior to that of the other, Husserl here seems to set out a possibility for the Other as transcendentally prior to the constituting self. The surprise of the priority of the other comes in the phenomenological reflection upon how consciousness came to make sense of the other as a spiritualized being.

I claim that it is this passage in Ideas II which serves as the locus of the Levinasian enigma within Husserl, and as the thematic discussion of the place where it becomes possible, within the bounds of a precise and rigorous phenomenology, to speak of “the other in the same” as Levinas does throughout Otherwise than Being. Thus, I am here siding with Jacques Derrida’s recent interpretation of Levinasian phenomenology when he writes that “the interruption marked by ethical discourse [occurs] on the inside of phenomenology ... phenomenology imposes this interruption upon itself, it interrupts itself,” and against the more simplistic interpretation of the Levinasian Other as “not a phenomenon.”

Levinas defines enigma not as “a simple ambiguity in which two significations have equal

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93 Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology, 48. However, Levinas does refer to the unpublished writings and the wraslings with empathy there in the last two paragraphs of the final chapter of his text, 150–51.


95 See the editors’ introduction to “Enigma and Phenomenon” in Basic Philosophical Writings, 65. To be sure, Levinas at times authorizes this interpretation with clearly stated programmatic dichotomies (74: “phenomena ... ensure immanence as a totality and philosophy as atheism. The enigma ... is transcendence itself.”), but the predominant language of “insinuation” and “torsion” and “knot” should lead the reader to view these moments of clarity as an ironic performance of the problems which underlie clear phenomenological description.
chances and the same light” but as a structure in which “the exorbitant meaning is already effaced in [the very appearance of] its apparition.”96 Certainly, this effacing of the exorbitant Other takes place in the Ideas II passage. For if the other is transcendentally prior in this paragraph, then it is exactly here where Husserl’s argument should but does not lead him to conclude that the cognitive access to the intersubjective nature of the other’s Objectivity is precisely grounded upon the proximity of the Other. For if it is true that the other’s unity of expression and expressed (in the bodily gestures that I perceive) are the transcendental condition of cognition, then it is also true that this unity depends upon a perceptual appearance which necessitates a sufficient nearness which engenders perception.

The spatial relations between two bodies are a prime empirical example of the Levinasian se déphasé (OB 34)—being put (or putting oneself) out of phase, lacking contemporaneity with one’s own consciousness, that describes the Levinasian self’s difference-in-identity (as opposed to the identity-in-difference that typifies the Husserlian transcendental ego of Ideas I and, to a lesser extent, Cartesian Meditations), its turn into obsession and schizophrenia, and then its religious awakening as a mad prophet. In Levinas’ sustained discussion of Husserlian phenomenology in 1965 (“Intentionality and Sensation”), Levinas turns to the role of the body in Ideas II in the penultimate section97 and describes the act of bodily sensation as “a type of fundamental iteration.” Without going into a detailed analysis of these Husserlian passages, Levinas draws out the strange schizophrenia of the constitutive operation. While the phenomenology of spatial sensation does render consciousness always already incarnate, one must simultaneously say that incarnation gives nothing outside the facticity of the intentional life of the subject. The assertion of Husserl that the qualities of a thing are dependent upon the localized sensations

96 Ibid., 71. Added explanatory material mine. Thus the Other both appears as a phenomenon, and also has a transcendent meaning only gives itself as an unknowable exorbitant meaning.

of the corporeal subject still does not "convey an introspective given, presupposing an attitude in which interiority stands opposed to exteriority." There is a gap between the localized sensing and the intentional act of consciousness which, for Husserl (ID2 160), gives a "spiritual forming" to the sensed matter. Only content can be touched, not form. This gap between the two poles of thing-ness is unbridgeable; and intentionality cannot achieve the immediate intuition of an object (although sensation can achieve an immediate intuition of an object's content). For Levinas, Husserl's assertion here that sensations but not intentionality is corporeal—and hence "only metaphorically are they [intentional acts] said to be related to the Body or to be in the Body" (ID2 161)—would seem to be a reversal of the classical Husserlian position that, at some point, a Wesenschau of the object is possible. The inability of the object to be given, on Levinas' interpretation of Ideas II, means that the only thing that the body gives is the fact that the body gets in the way. In this gap, knowledge of the world will be characterized by privation.

This does not leave the self completely powerless, however. The necessity of the gap between consciousness and the object is what grounds the freedom of the self. This freedom to take up different bodily comportments with respect to the object is what, for Levinas, constitutes transcendence in the phenomenological sense—the ability for thought to leave behind the borders of its interior space and literally move over into the world which it perceives through bodily kinaesthesis. The structure of the objects of the world are dependent upon me, and thus the power of the self to move necessitates for Levinas that a structure is never fixed, never simultaneous with itself.

The philosophy that contributed the idea of eidetic structures, ends up also radically denouncing the idea of structural fixity—its undephasable simultaneity—by introducing movement into the subjectivity of the subject and conditional motivation into its very presence.99

This is not the end of the narrative. At the same time, alongside this transcendence of the

98 Ibid., 146.
99 Ibid., 148.
subject in movement is also the collapse of the power of the self, its inability to convert its intentional acts into pure representations of the essence of the object. The alterity of the world is never extirpated by intentionality. For the body which directly senses the content of worldly object can only do this because it is an object like the objects it senses. The body can take on the spatial contours of something it touches, for example when leaving a hand on a rough object for a period of time leaves little red grooves on one's palm. Because this is the case, then the spiritual apprehension which Husserl associates with intentionality becomes possible only as a metaphor, and thus not really possible. All objects possess an originary spatiality—one can also say that all other persons possess an originary self-expression, as in the above quotation from Ideas II §56h—which cannot be recuperated either by consciousness or by the positing of a psychophysiological parallelism. Meaning thus oscillates between two kinds of loss: the loss of meaning-for-consciousness within the physiological realm, and loss of the material content of that meaning in the psyche. In other words, although it is true to say, along with Husserl, that intention animates sensation and gives it meaning, this act is never performed without the death of the sensed content itself. And as Husserl admits in Ideas II, the metaphorical displacement of materiality is not a resuscitation of materiality within consciousness. Thus, at the same time that consciousness transcends itself through its embodied being in the world, this very worldliness of the world still transcends consciousness. Intentionality cannot transcend space itself, since its transcendence is in fact "a walking in the space of the subject constituting space."100 Just as the unity of another person's self-expression presupposes the subject's constitution of that very unity, the constitution of the spatial arrangement of a material object depends upon my already being in that very space that I am trying to constitute. This gap between the intentional aim and the hylomorphic intended object grounds the dephasing and iteration of the subject, and its constitution of an alterity.

100 Ibid.
which challenges its own undeniable power.

One might object, however, that the dephasing which is deduced from the relation between intentional consciousness and bodily comportment might be recuperated through an analysis of time. Perhaps, the argument might proceed, through an infinite variation of bodily “seeings” of an object, one might be able to get essential knowledge. The metaphoricity of bodily intentionality could thus be conquered through prolonged examination of the object, since the object is always the selfsame object at all moments in time. (In film, we see this through the technique—prominent in 1998 advertising campaigns by The Gap and other companies—by which a director is able to give the viewer a 360-degree view around a still object by placing 20 cameras around it and using a computer to triangulate the gaps in perspective.) Thus, the phenomenological grounding of alterity in the dephasing between subject and object must make use of two arguments: one for the relation between the body and the space it occupies, and another for the relation between intentional consciousness and the temporal flow of impressions upon it. The first half of “Intentionality and Sensation” is an argument for this other kind of dephasing, and thus assures that objects both in their spatial and temporal aspects, are constituted by consciousness as always already simulacra of their true essence. Levinas' argument in

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101 It is not clear to me whether this technique remains with the bounds of traditional phenomenology. One must ask whether film and video, in its use of montage or (as in these Gap ads) the montage which conceals montage, reveals an essential Kantian synthesizing self or imposes this self upon the essentially single-camera viewpoint of the individual that we find in Merleau-Ponty, for example. Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 407: “When I walk around an object, I am not presented with a succession of views which I subsequently co-ordinate thanks to the idea of one single flat projection ... I am not a succession of psychic acts, nor for that matter a nuclear I who brings them together into a synthetic unity, but one single experience inseparable from itself.”

102 For an argument which seeks to recuperate the meaning lost in today's specular culture of simulacra through an array of strategies including irony, appeals to counterfactuality, and the formation of communities of generosity, see Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering*. In the next several pages, I am sensitive to the somewhat anti-Levinasian elements of her argument that the thinking of the gap between the specular simulacrum and the real object may simply lead to a nostalgic “dream of the recovery of the aura [which] carries the danger of a reinscription of the Fascist sublime” (111). Nevertheless, at the risk of falling into a naïve optimism, I think that Levinas’ Husserl-derived argument that nostalgia is useless in the face of the simulacrum would cut this worry off at the pass. On the other hand, I also would offer the view that irony may very well be essential elements of this Levinasian rigorous science, which would make it far easier to mobilize outside of phenomenological theory and in the realm of culture.
this 1965 essay is that not only space, but also time is constituted as an iteration, in which
the primordial impression (*Ur*impression) of an object is never apperceived by
consciousness as such, but is rather copied at each moment. (Because I will use this
argument to ground an argument of the intrinsic goodness of the material Other in *Totality
and Infinity*, written in 1961, I should mention that the 1965 argument takes up and
expands upon other essays by Levinas about Husserl from the 1940s and 1950s.\(^{103}\))

The argument is rooted in Husserl’s analysis of the constitution of time in the lec-
tures *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*. The position which
Husserl works out in these pages\(^{104}\) begins as a response to the difficulties with the
psycho-logic theories of Franz Brentano (and also, as the critical edition points out,
Alexius Meinong) as to how consciousness can intuit temporally extended objects, for
example the melody of an aria or a tractor pull. Meinong believes that consciousness
synthesizes each of the moments of the object at the end of the series, yet fails to explain
how consciousness can reach back to the beginning of the series in its act of synthesizing
the temporal continu-um of the object (PCIT 234–35). Brentano, on the other hand, agrees
that a temporal moment (for example, a note in a melody) perdures in this kind of
perception, yet cannot explain how consciousness perceives a succession of temporal
moments, i.e. how consciousness perceives a note that does not perdure throughout an
aria, but rather passes into the next note in the phrase (PCIT 11–12). Husserl’s challenge,
then, is to come up with a model of time-consciousness which allows for something to be
intuited in the present as something past, without being mere imaginative representation.

Husserl solves this problem by differentiating between two kinds of having-passed:

\(^{103}\) Specifically, “The Work of Edmund Husserl” and “Reflections on Phenomenological ‘Technique’,”
These essays are published before *Totality and Infinity*, in 1940 and 1959, respectively.

\(^{104}\) In 1928, this lecture transcript was published, with heavy editing by Edith Stein and light editing by
Martin Heidegger. In 1966, Rudolf Boehm published a critical edition of the text, which allowed scholars
to resolve often contradictory matters in the earlier edition through assigning dates to each section of the
lectures.
the simple past which I recollect (e.g. "yesterday I put some water chestnuts in my shopping basket on my way to the checkout aisle") and the "just-passed" which characterizes the intuition of a temporally extended object, in which an aria or an essay endures while I listen or read, even though single notes and words elapse. In this latter case, Husserl develops a notion of time-consciousness in which each now-moment of a temporal flow is intuited as always running off into the past. Each now-point\(^{105}\) along a temporal continuum constitutes a "primary impression" (Urimpression) upon consciousness which then recedes into the past, yet is still present for consciousness as something past. Husserl calls the consciousness of this just-past moment "retentional consciousness" or "primary memory" (PCIT 31, 43). For example, in the melody, my intuition of the fifth note of the primary motif includes within it an intuition of the onset of the theme which began four notes (and perhaps two beats) previously, as well as the entire continuum of the melody up until the fifth note. In retention, the past is now, as the past that it is. The now-moment is always in flux as it travels in two directions: progressively along the temporal continuum and receding into the past of consciousness. All of this is rather unstably maintained in the present moment of intuition (PCIT 31).

The "source-point" with which the "production" of the enduring object begins is a primal impression. This consciousness is in a state of constant change: the tone-now present "in person" continuously changes into something that has been; an always new tone-now continuously relieves the one that has passed over into modification. But when the consciousness of the tone-now, the primal impression, passes over into retention, this retention itself is a now in turn, something actually existing. It is actually present itself (but not an actually present tone).

The retentive maintenance of the just-passed moment in consciousness is different from that in ordinary recollection, what Husserl on occasion terms "secondary memory." In the water-chestnut example given above, I am not attaching the chain of retentions to an "actually present perception" (PCIT 37), but rather to a perception that I had yesterday, and is now taking place only and wholly within the fantastic powers of my imagination. In

\(^{105}\) Since Husserl uses both the language of now-points and flow, he does not dichotomize punctiform and stretched notions of time. Cf. Wyschogrod, An Ethics of Remembering, 152–59.
recollection, I am reproducing and re-presenting a temporal sequence (along with the retentive modifications that were originally there) that has already been given. The modification of the UrJmpression into the chain of retentions is linked with direct sensation, unlike the intuition of recollection.

Although Husserl speaks more often about retention of past moments in the intuition of temporally extended objects, there are also brief references to the protention of future moments, the way in which consciousness can expect future occurrences. This cannot occur without the series of retentions which Husserl has delineated earlier (PCIT 54): "every process that constitutes its object originally [a process which cannot occur without the modification of the UrJmpression into retentive consciousness] is animated by protentions that emptily constitute what is coming as coming, that catch it and bring it toward fulfillment." Consciousness of time does not merely consist of now-moments shading off into the past, but of expected future-moments becoming present (PCIT 59). This can happen as a sure thing, e.g. a melody in which the sequence of notes gives the listener a confidence that the composer is heading back to the tonic key. Or, as James Hart has pointed out, this expectation also is the transcendental condition of surprise and/or disbelief\textsuperscript{106}, e.g. "He can't possibly shoot Old Yeller, can he?"

In the Confessions, Augustine writes that neither the future nor the past exist, that there is only the presence of the past in memory, the present moment, and the presence of the future in expectation.\textsuperscript{107} Husserl cites Augustine's affirmation of the difficulty of time as a philosopheme—"I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me, but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled"—in the first paragraph of his 1905 lecture notes.\textsuperscript{108} Indeed, the reference to the eleventh book of the Confessions here makes


\textsuperscript{108} PCIT 3; Augustine, ibid., 264.
it a likely prospect that Husserl's recourse to the notion of impressional consciousness over and against the psychologistic accounts of Meinong and Brentano is rooted in the following Augustinian passage:

It is in my own mind, then, that I measure time. I must not allow my mind to insist that time is objective. I must note let it thwart me because of all the different notions and impressions that are lodged in it. I say that I measure time in my mind. For everything which happens leaves an impression on it, and this impression remains after the thing itself has ceased to be. It is the impression that I measure, since it is still present, not the thing itself, which makes the impression as it passes and then moves into the past.  

The key to solving the paradoxes of the psychologistic accounts of time lies in Augustine's realization that an impression remains in consciousness after the occurrence itself. Husserl shifts the terminology, to be sure: the distinction between perduring impression and "the thing itself" for Augustine is for Husserl transposed into that between retentive consciousness and the *Urimpression*.

Although this Augustinian heritage of Husserl might be taken as a species of a "metaphysics of presence" which gathers the running off of time into the no-longer and the not-yet into a retentive chain that exists now, it would be hasty to remain with this conclusion. For Augustine also states that the present in and of itself has no duration whatsoever, and in this sense, as Edith Wyschogrod states, it "defies conceptualization."  

I would add that, in itself, the present seems to have no presence at all. A similar retreat from the gathering function of retentive modification takes place in §31 of the published version of Husserl's 1905 lectures on time and also in other materials written between 1907 and 1909; it is this retreat which Levinas will manipulate to the fullest extent possible.

Husserl (PCIT 70) defines the *Urimpression* as the "absolutely unmodified primal source of all further consciousness and being ... [which] has as its content that which the word 'now' signifies." The primal impression is absolutely punctiform; its temporal

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109 Augustine, ibid., 276. To my knowledge, no Husserl scholar has dealt with the possibility of Husserl's Augustinian heritage. Given the additional citation of Augustine at the close of the *Cartesian Meditations*, this is a serious lapse in the study of phenomenological theology.

110 Ibid., 266; Wyschogrod, ibid., 153.
position individualizes it from the other primal impressions in the sequence. Nevertheless, Husserl also writes that "the moment of the original temporal position is naturally nothing by itself; the individuation is nothing in addition to what has individuation." This means that this primal impression which is the ground of all temporal consciousness must itself be retrospectively posited as part of this very consciousness. Just as in the discussion of the Body in *Ideas II*, in which the prior spatial expression of the Other was the precondition for consciousness' constitution of spatiality, here the theory of the sequence of retentive modifications of the originary *Urimpression* must serve as their own precondition. Thus phenomenology in both space and time retrospectively posits its own conclusions as exterior to itself, in the sense of Levinas' *se déphaser*. There is no immediate contact with the primal impression; this is the synthetic work of intentional consciousness.

The whole now-point, the whole original impression, undergoes the modification of the past; and only by means of this modification have we exhausted the complete concept of the now, since it is a relative concept and refers to a "past," just as "past" refers to the "now." (PCIT 70)

The *Urimpression* has no meaning outside of its running off into the series of retentions. To use the language of the philosophy of time appropriated by Edith Wyschogrod, the punctiform series of nows that are "before" and "after" one another has meaning only through the act of consciousness which stretches this very punctiformity.

Husserl, on this reading, is thus both hyper-Augustinian and utterly non-Augustinian. On the hyper-Augustinian side, Husserl's rhetoric leads to a firm divorce between the impression of the temporally extended object and the object itself. Husserl is extremely blunt about this in one of the sketches which served as the material for Edith Stein's assembling of the transcript of the "1905" lectures. Here, temporal consciousness of the retentional chain is completely opposed to objective time (PCIT 345): "the consciousness of the now is not itself now. The retention that exists 'together' with the consciousness of the now is not 'now,' is *not simultaneous* with the now, and it would make no sense to say that it is." This now, which Husserl elsewhere terms an "ideal limit"
(PCIT 42), is completely exterior to consciousness, because it never coincides with itself in the intentional aim, meaning that it never has meaning until it has passed, and time has flowed on to a new now. This retrospective positing of the now, this process in which it has meaning only through becoming past and not-now, is for Levinas, another example of dephasing:

The Urимpression already deviates from that needlepoint where it matures absolutely present, and through this deviation presents itself, retained, to a new punctual present. . . . [This] divergence of the Urимpression is the event, in itself primary, of the divergence of dephasing.111

The impressional nature of consciousness, hypothesized by Augustine and more stably proven by Husserl, displays the exteriority of objective time, in which the present moment runs off into a past dimension that is completely other and completely irrecoverable. Since all objects are temporally extended, one is forced to conclude that all sensation, as opposed to giving knowledge, is actually contingent upon a prior alterity. The temporal aspect of the material Urимpression demonstrates that the realm of the ego-consciousness has no meaning without an always already prior otherness which cannot be contained within the meaning-structure of consciousness (indeed, it "runs off" from it), and is hence, according to Cartesian principles, infinite.112 As with the analysis of Ideas II, we find that phenomenology presents a picture of the epistemological powerlessness of consciousness.

Yet also as in Ideas II, this is not the entirety of the narrative. The theme of powerlessness which Levinas finds in the Husserlian text challenges other aspects of the lectures on time. In sections §15 through §23 of the 1928 published version of the lectures, the gap between intuiting consciousness and the object is minimized. For, as mentioned above, retention is not the same as recollection, and the temporally extended object is not merely a phantasm in my mind. My mind certainly can create phantasms—this is not at stake—but

111 Levinas, "Intentionality and Sensation," 142–43.

112 For the definition of the infinite as that which cannot be contained within an idea, see Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," in Collected Philosophical Papers, 54.
for Husserl in this section of the lectures on time-consciousness, the faculty of phantasy only serves to re-present past now-moments to consciousness. Retention, on the other hand, "gives a now itself" (PCIT 42). Because retention constitutes the now-moment, Husserl has every right to say that "primary memory [retention] is perception." But elsewhere (PCIT 240), Husserl writes that in retention "the apprehension-content [of the Urimpression] assumes the character of a phantasm, or in any event, of something that is no longer to be characterized as sensation." Husserl seems fundamentally unable to distinguish between the nature of the retained and the recalled now-moment without recourse to the very objective time sequence which is exterior to internal time-consciousness. Here there are two interpretive strategies available. On the one hand, it is possible to make a Derridean move, of the sort found in Speech and Phenomena, and argue that meaning does not depend upon the intuition of any object, even though this is exactly the point that Husserl makes in §13 of the published version of the 1905 lectures. 113 On the other hand, it is possible to return to the Husserlian text and do further research as to what exactly is intuited in the perception of a temporally extended object. This latter strategy makes it possible to find the same tension between the powerlessness and power of consciousness that I outlined earlier in the analysis of Ideas II.

Husserl's primary thesis in the writings on internal time-consciousness is that objective punctiform time is constituted through the mental act of stretching the now-moment out through the network of retentions and protentions. As such, internal time-consciousness is best seen as a flow; the possibility of retention of the past (necessitated if the intuition of a melody is to make any sense at all) shows that each now-moment flows backwards into a just past no-longer and cedes its position to a now-moment that was previously not-yet (PCIT 81). Each now-moment that I select in my orientation (the

opening note of a musical motif, for example) becomes the basis for a series of intentional retentive and protentive modifications. However, this is not the only possibility of time-consciousness, to be conscious of the manner in which objects are temporally extended. Consciousness can also be aware of its own flow that allows it to constitute objects as temporally extended. As stated above, this flow is immanent to time-consciousness (because it refers to the impression of the object-for-consciousness, and not the object-in-itself, which Husserl describes as "transcendent"). I cannot constitute a "before" and "after" in the punctiform series of objective time-moments without the flowing of now-moments into retentions and of protentions into now-moments. This means that retention and protention are not simply something observed in reflection upon the passing of a melody; they are the techniques and means by which this very reflection occurs, and thus constitute the very consciousness which constitutes them. The flow of objective time is, more primordially, the flow of consciousness. Thus, it is not only the case for Husserl that there is a gap between the phantasmatic melody-for-consciousness and the transcendent Urimpression of the objective melody. There is also a successful self-reflexivity in consciousness in which it recognizes its own constituting power. Husserl defines this to be "absolute subjectivity."114 In its own way, it is transcendent; as the condition for objective standards of time, it is prior, and there is no more absolute or more primordial structure that grounds the flow of consciousness. In this same passage, Husserl stresses (as he does in Ideas II) that consciousness is only metaphorically like any objective or constituted order. But here this metaphoricity stresses not only the way in which consciousness is less than the materiality of the Urimpression, but is also more than the retrospective constitution of it.

To stress this point is not only to show that the analysis of time in Husserl leads to the same tensions as to the authority of the self found in the analysis of embodiment. The

analysis of time shows something else, quite new and quite important for the Levinasian project, over and above the exteriority of matter with respect to consciousness and the ability of consciousness to transcend itself and make contact with matter. In addition, the analysis of time shows the future as the horizon of consciousness, and a modification of the pansophist teleological arc observed in the previous chapter. Levinas will term this arc "messianic" and "prophetic."

Once it becomes apparent that consciousness can focus on either the temporally extended object or its own temporal extension as flow, one can then describe the intentionality of absolute subjectivity in two different ways. Either one can focus on the momentary Urimpression that has been constituted by consciousness and is sinking further and further back into time, or one can focus on the processive flow of consciousness itself and its continuous acts of constituting.¹¹⁵ Husserl's analysis of the latter is what interests us here. Husserl describes retentional consciousness as a Zugleich, as "being-all-at-once" as "the continuum of phases that attach themselves to an Urimpression, each of which is retentional consciousness of the earlier now" (PCIT 83, 385ff.) Thus, consciousness is continuously modifying the retentional series, adding new moments to the retentional series.

Now if we allow the flow to flow on, we then have the flow-continuum running off, which causes the continuity we have just described to be modified retentiously; and in this process, each new continuity of phrases existing together in one moment is retention in relation to the total continuity belonging to the being-all-at-once in the preceding phrase. (PCIT 85)

In other words, in what might at first seem to be a moot point, the flow is unending.¹¹⁶ Even when a melody ends, or when a piece of music ends, or when I am waiting in the long line to return to the parking garage, or when I am at the discothèque later trying to

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¹¹⁵ PCIT 85–86. Husserl's term for the former intentionality is Querintentionalität; translated as "transverse intentionality"; the term for the latter is Langsintentionalität, translated as "horizontal intentionality."

¹¹⁶ Hart draws out this theme further in his discussion of the immortality of absolute subjectivity in "Phenomenological Time," 23–31.
awaken myself from that evening's sluggish performance of Donizetti, the shift from the
not-yet into the now does not end. The constitution of the retentional unit is "always
adding something new" (PCIT 87). I can highlight or add on to this retentional chain by
picking a now-point and constituting that as the Urimpression, adding either others'
sensations of the same event, or deepening the historical background to the experience (for
example, by asking about the role of the musician or the music hall in this flux). The
flow—the flow which I am—is potentially infinite. And there is no reason not to think that
there is something religious at stake here. The constitution of the infinity of the absolute
flow which constitutes time is an apotheosis for Husserl, since he ascribes to the Augusti-
nian view that "God's infinite consciousness embraces all time 'at-once."\textsuperscript{117} This is the
ideal limit of the flow toward which consciousness must be on the way, since the flow
itself is unending, and the ideal expression of the transcendence of absolute subjectivity.

But I am not simply riding the flow into the infinite. Here the double intentionality of
retention tells us otherwise, since it reveals my freedom to turn my phenomenological look
onto any now-moment, and perform eidetic variations on it (how is the impression different
for this other consciousness in the/my flow? What now-moments do other perspectives
allow me or others to experience in the running-off of this impression?).

As is always the case for phenomenology, the uncovering of the most basic stratum
of life engenders a moral imperative that the derived strata correspond as closely as possible
to the basic stratum. Here, transcendental phenomenology opens up the possibility of
ethics. For an ethical act to take place, two things must have to occur: I must be able to be
affected by the other and be placed in a position of powerlessness, and I must be able to
affect the other from a position of power. The command to be ethical is useless if I do not
hear the command and its challenge to my power, and if I cannot re-gather my power and
perform the required act. I must have reserves which I can give. In ethics, power and

powerlessness belong together; the ability to be ethical is the power to be powerless. The tensions, almost unwitting, in Husserlian phenomenology are fertile ground for the elucidation of an ethical subjectivity.

Although Levinas is traditionally, and for good reason, perceived as a philosophy of a radical passivity, these Husserlian tensions exist in Levinas' phenomenology of the body and sensibility and in the elucidation of the phenomenological attitude to sensibility as a prophetic or messianic moment.

The Husserlian equivocation about the body which both immediately senses data in its own expression and depends on others' prior expressions is extended in Levinas' work. The body is first mentioned in Totality and Infinity in the section on the dwelling as the form of self-sufficiency (TI 164): "To be a body is on the one hand to stand, to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand on the earth, to be in the other [the elemental], and thus to be encumbered by one's body." This tension between the subjectivity of the body and its dependence upon the elemental, between the "pure passivity" of labor as bodily dependence and the "distance" from the world which allows one to master the elemental by building a dwelling which is (TI 165) "a perpetual postponement of the expiration in which life risks foundering," is Levinas' own description of the ambiguity of bodily existence. Yet my ability to form a dwelling involves as a precondition my ability to represent the objects as distant from myself. The interiority of being at home with oneself, giving myself the time which I need to combat the alienation of the elemental environment which both possesses me and gives me enjoyment, implies (TI 170) "a new event; I must have been in relation with something I do not live from." The representation of the object by which the body attempts to negotiate its ambiguity is also an endowing of the object it with subjectivity, with an essence that has nothing to do with me. I separate it from myself, and in so doing prove that I have the ability to set into motion of chain of events in which my very subjectivity can be put into question. Separation—the hypostasis of the
I—is at the same time (from the point of view of the separating subject) an act of donation (TI 171) of essence to the object. And once I see the object as having an aspect which is in-itself, it immediately becomes transcendent. I can no longer completely possess it, for I have fundamentally defined it as not me in my act of hypostasizing myself in the dwelling. Thus, this act dialectically undoes itself and becomes a calling into question of myself by the object. This shift is one act in four stages: I take a position, I name the object, I see the object as having an essence, I realize that it transcends me.\textsuperscript{118} And in this realization, I also realize that I \textit{can} be called into question, and that I \textit{can} be ethically for-Others. For how can I sacrifice myself if I have not already constructed myself as apart from the world? How can I give bread to another if I do not already have it and realize that bread is something enjoyable? As in Husserl, the analysis of the body reveals the possibility of my practical acts, and this possibility—including the possibility of the priority of the world and its expressions—is in both Levinas and Husserl something which I constitute (TI 40):

"Alterity is only possible starting from me."

The distancing of the self from the object, although necessary as an act of self-positioning as a free subject, means that the self exists only in its selfhood completely detached from the objective world of nature, and is thereby constituted in part by lack, and thus as \textit{me on}. Levinas describes the self's hovering over itself in the ethical potency of interiority as the intersection of subjectivity and meontology (TI 209):

In order that objective distance be hollowed out, it is necessary that while in being the subject be not yet in being, that in a certain sense it be not yet born—that it not be in nature. If the subject capable of objectivity \textit{is} not yet completely, this "not yet," this state of potency relative to act, does not denote a less than being, but denotes time.

The constructing of relationships\textsuperscript{119}, in fulfilling my desire to transcend the finitude of

\textsuperscript{118} "In order that I be able to see things in themselves, that is, represent them to myself, refuse both enjoyment and possession, I must know \textit{how to give} what I possess. Only thus could I situate my self absolutely above my engagement in the non-I. But for this I must encounter the indiscreet face of the Other that calls me into question." (TI 171)

\textsuperscript{119} For Levinas, my relations with every object are always already relationships, because they, in having an essence, call me into question, and thus form an \textit{interaction}. For Rosenzweig, objects in the world do not have essence for-me (that is my task), and there can be no point in calling-into-question the self who is
meontological subjectivity, has only reversed my status as object to a new existential subject-status. In order for the desire to fulfill itself, I must ethically relate to the Other: I must have the power to give to someone, but the constitution of the Other as another person with an essence is already necessary before I give this. My power presupposes that the world is simultaneously something that belongs to me—the field of possible acts in which I can leave my own traces (for philanthropy is a leaving behind of one's name, e.g. the Guggenheim Museum, the Mellon Foundation)—and something that is completely alien to me on the intersubjective level, since I have constituted the world as the arena of my power on the basis of my body's own sensings without having constituted the other persons in that world, without having prepared for the possibility that others can express themselves to me and come into my apperceptive field without my hand running across them.

The constitution of the world as the sphere of my acts cannot be divorced from the subject's consciousness of time. For Husserl, acts "constitute a temporal being and in this regard are originally giving" of impressions to consciousness at the same time as consciousness restores their objectivity through intentionality (ID2 126). For Levinas, the significance of the ability to stretch my practical acts over a temporal frame (TI 166) inverts itself when re-conceived at a higher phenomenological stratum. Levinas claims that the relation to the world found in work and praxis is itself grounded in the possibility of the future as conquering death in the future's very nature as pure and transcendent possibility:

Time is precisely the fact that the whole existence of the mortal being—exposed to violence—is not being for death, but the 'not yet' which is a way of being against death, a retreat before death in the midst of its inexorable approach. (TI 224)

The support for this claim, I think, cannot be fully explained in Totality and Infinity without the fourth section. The analysis of labor in the second section of the text shows already secure in the experience of revelation.

Levinas defines the desire for infinity as the fundamental human desire at the beginning of the first section (TI 33).
that time cannot simply be an objective order of periodicity. Levinas writes that I can
“make use of time” (TI 166): I can slow down my work and make the passage of time on
the factory lines tolerable. I can tell my professor that I need a year to hand in a paper for
her course because I really want to hand in something publishable and slow down the
natural passage of time, or time can hasten as an inviolable deadline nears. The stretching
of time away from its punctiform order is thus the creation of consciousness, as shown
above. The originary creation of time, according to Levinas, takes place in the parenthesis
resulting from eros (TI 247).

It is key to read the “Phenomenology of Eros” (TI 256-266) not as a model of
gender relations (for the model of the caress can potentially ignore the gender of who is
carressing), but as a certain kind of redemptive ontology. (The fourth section of Totality
and Infinity is an account of how eros can engender [TI 285] “messianic triumph.”) For
Levinas, eros is redemptive precisely because it is constantly oriented towards the future;
one can never love the beloved-in-itself. The other whom I touch has always already
disappeared (TI 257-8): “The caress consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what
ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough, in soliciting what slips
away as though it were not yet.” This is very difficult; one does not intuitively say that
when I touch the person I love, that I am not touching anything at all. Yet this must be the
case. The key sentence in Levinas’ meontological description of the erotic scene (TI 258)
is that “in the caress ... in the carnal given to tenderness, the body quits the status of an
existent.” The existent in Levinas is defined (TI 119) as that which is exterior to being,
which exists not as a being, but in the mood of happiness at its possession of the world as
its sphere. For the erotic to leave this behind does not mean that the erotic Other is fun-
gible, in which one could exchange sexual partners like needles. The issue of fungibility
never enters the picture. For the touch of the erotic Other is not the same as the touch of a
rough surface in Husserl. The caress depends upon the Other’s prior expression of his
erotic self, literally his disrobing. This expression, however, should not be understood in
the sense that the face expresses itself. The face expresses itself linguistically and mani-
fests itself (TI 200), leaving a trace of its cry which I can capture at later points in time.
The expression of the body, however, iterates itself between the moment of disrobing (or
the moment at which he gives me the look which invites me to disrobe him) and the
moment of my touch.¹²¹ The erotic embrace is temporally situated in a way that the scene
of manifestation (although not the scene of ethics itself) is not. As an always prior
expression of the sort detailed by Husserl in Ideas II §56h, it is irrecoverable, just as any
other Urimpression would be. Thus, the move to fulfill the desire to truly know another
person “in the Biblical sense,’ is doomed to failure. My constitution of the Other’s self-
expression is merely a retention of the actual expression itself, and as a result no
determinate form of the Other himself is given to consciousness in the erotic scene. The
erotic Other is given only materially. One might object that even the roughness of the stone
as well as its other properties formally present themselves in the act of my touching it, and
this can lead to the construction of the stone in such a way that it is valid for all values of
the variable We, in accord with my intentional aim. Yet the erotic touch gives no properties
outside of dermality, and as such contests my intentional aim in the erotic caress.¹²² For
reasons similar to these, I think, Levinas describes (TI 256) the erotic Other as “an
exorbitant ultra-materiality.” The object of my desire must always remain desire. Neither

¹²¹ The reader will note here that I go against the grain of almost all of the secondary literature on Levinas
in writing as little as possible about the face of the Other, which for Levinas issues the command that
proscribes my violence and calls me to be responsible for and to the neighbor. Not only do I do this
because secondary literature has virtually exhausted the topic, but also because the face is a modification of
a more phenomenologically primordial erotic experience. The face shows itself, in its manifestation, to be
a “phenomenon” (in scarequotes) which cannot sati human needs as the world can (TI 179–80). The result
for the subject is that, as Edith Wyschogrod writes, “the hunger experienced in the presence of the Other
feeds upon itself” and becomes ever greater. This is already the erotic mania, the “sublime madness,” of

¹²² Undoubtedly it is possible to view the erotic Other as a thing to be constituted as a mere dermal entity,
but this is a denial of the fragility which the caress communicates. In the constitution of the merely dermal
erotic Other, there is no non-sensuous ground for differentiating between the human epidermis and synthetic
substitutes.
the essence nor the appearance of the other can never be signified in the erotic scene (TI 257)—“Being not yet is not a this or a that.” Eros does not allow for reification. In a sense, then, the erotic Other who has always expressed himself before I touch him cannot be violated, and Levinas accordingly describes the object of erotic desire as always virginal (TI 258).

Yet why does Levinas temporalize the erotic other? Why is the virgin “not yet” and not simply “not”? The answer to this question must, I think, lie in Levinas' trust of desire as a genuine emotion. Following Descartes, Levinas is unable to believe that life is governed by an evil genius; desire exists because the object of its desire is somewhere in the field of experience. Yet if the object exists in some mysterious way that is ungraspable either by my action or through recourse to historical experience, the only option for the modality of its existence is future, as not yet. The object of desire is always that which is about to come; once it comes desire is satiated and I move on. Yet the erotic other never comes, it situates itself always behind the veil of the Other's flesh as (TI 258-9) “the night of the hidden, the clandestine, the mysterious, land of the virgin, simultaneously uncovered by eros and refusing eros” and not even the parts of the Other's naked body can hint at the nature of the essence of alterity. Yet since alterity is the object of our desire, it always exists in meontological potential.

Since the erotic project necessarily fails, it dialectically collapses into what Levinas terms “voluptuosity,” in which the Other is turned into a sum of profane fleshy parts. And I enjoy this voluptuous, concupiscent relationship. Yet Levinas describes the erotic relation as taking place on two levels. On the level of voluptuosity, the erotic relation is one of need, and fundamentally egoistic. On the other hand, the failure of my attempt to relate to the essential alterity of the Other means that I can only discover the absence of that for which I search (TI 260): this obscure object of desire “hides while uncovering, says and silences the inexpressible” and as such (TI 264) “marks precisely the force of this absence,
this *not yet*, this less than nothing.” Thus Levinas is able to argue that (TI 264) “eros goes beyond the face” and trace the path of sexual fecundity which engenders the perpetuity of subjectivity in time, the precondition for what Levinas describes as “truth”, “efficacious goodness”, and “messianic triumph” on the closing pages of the fourth section (TI 284-5).

Can one argue that this relation of redemption exhibits the concreteness which Levinas promises in his vision of phenomenology? Can one say that the Other of eros is more than the instrument of my fecundity, necessary for the anticipation of truth-telling? There are parts of the fourth section which lead one to believe that Levinas has made no advance upon the Rosenzweigian notion of love, in which the neighbor is only a stopping-point on the route to truth. Levinas writes that love is “pleasure and dual egoism” (TI 266), and his descriptions of love collapsing into a relation of need can only echo the description of need given earlier in *Totality and Infinity* as a violent exploitation (TI 115-6), and should make the reader worry whether the erotic Other is simply a dermal object, lending orgasmic joy to interrupt the seemingly interminable wait for the Messiah. Yet it must be remembered that love is always ambiguous. It is always both voluptuousness and transcendence. The two cannot be separated. Let us return to the description of voluptuousness. It is a scene of apolitical solitude. It does not know the State, it is “supremely non-public.” The erotic couple is alone in the world yet completely abstracted from it, and in the light of profanation the dialectic between the body that I exploit in the production of my children’s or my student’s time, and the essence which I desire has become supremely complicated.

The non-sociality of voluptuousness is, positively, the community of sentient and sensed: the other is not only a sensed, but in the sensed is affirmed as sentient, as though one same sentiment were substantially common to me and to the other. It [Voluptuousity] is inward and yet intersubjectively structured, *not simplifying itself into consciousness that is one*. In voluptuousness the other is me and separated from me. (TI 265)

Although the erotic Other *qua* separated from me is unknowable and ideal, this necessitates that she also be *intrinsically good*, that she have a value which is completely independent of all my thoughts and acts, and which is more than simply a spatiotemporal status. In this
sense, the erotic Other is always undefinable, and cannot be incorporated into any pre-existing totality. This satisfies any “secular” ethical requirement to treat the other person as an end in himself. Yet Rosenzweig is not denied here. To the extent that the erotic Other is me in the child or in the community in which we stake our couplehood, he is only instrumentally valuable as a means of my fecundity (and likewise, I am a means of his fecundity) and thereby completely devoid of content. In Levinas' description of the me-ontological not-yet, there is a strange yet valid simultaneity of interpersonal identification and its impossibility—the quasi-identity of powerlessness in the face of the holy and power over the profane, two vectors which point in the same direction.

The description of the Other as always transcending me is parallel to the description of the transcendent face of the Other in the third section of *Totality and Infinity*. Yet these are not equal strata in Levinasian phenomenology. Being-for-the-other is effected as moral action, but the commonality between myself and the object of my erotic desire is (TI 265) “due to the identity of the feeling.” Only in eros, in the equivocation of the body, can I work toward bridging the gap of separation between myself and the Other. For this gap can only provide me (upon reflection) with a notion of the Other as the precondition for the I of interiority; the move to the future, to the “effectuation of time” (TI 247), is not performed in the ethical scene in *Totality and Infinity*.

Levinas argues that precisely because eros fails in its attempt to fulfill its desire, it and only it can fulfill the precondition for messianic triumph. Levinas describes the difference between friendship qua ethics and love qua eros as a difference in object (TI 266): “friendship goes unto the Other; love seeks what does not have the structure of an existent, the infinitely future, what is to be engendered.” Love cannot possibly go unto the Other. A mode of existence in which the Other counts more than myself is not anything which could fulfill my desire to know the Other as he exists in himself. As such, I can only aim at that which is underneath the beloved’s exterior appearance, at that which is to
me completely invisible, at the abyss of identity itself. In loving the body of the Other, I can only relate to the idea of the Other. On the other hand, in the ethical relation, I am friendly to the Other as the idea of exteriority, but I take care of his or her bodily needs—shelter, food, etc. Thus eros as voluptuosiy can only be (TI 266) "voluptuosiy of voluptuosiy, love of the love of the other." At this profane level, there is a certain kind of parallelism, a "substantially common sentiment." But nevertheless, this common sentiment is not equally shared by both lovers, since my voluptuosiy must be as different from the Other's voluptuosiy as my body is from his. Identity and difference coexist in eros, and it is this coexistence (not the valorization of sheer powerlessness) which marks the path to transcendence (TI 266): "in this unparalleled conjuncture of identification, in this trans-substantiation, the same and the other are not united but precisely —beyond every possible project, beyond every meaningful and intelligent power—engender the child." The desire to unmask the hidden nature of the Other naturally leads to the procreative act, which of course cannot occur without voluptuosiy and the failure of eros. And my relationship with my child (or, if one wants to metaphorize the situation, with my student, or potentially with anyone whose friendship is perceived not as an exchange of good deeds, but as an exchange of ideas and identities) is my (TI 268) "relationship with the absolute future" in which I am able to outlive my own death and transcend myself.

Having seen the conjunction of the discourses of the instrumental and intrinsic goodness of the Other in Levinas as a piece with the general conjunction of the discourses of power and powerlessness in Totality and Infinity, it remains to show that for Levinas, just as for Maimonides and the other thinkers in the meontological tradition, the Messiah is

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123 In To the Other, Adriaan Peperzak offers the model of teaching as equivalent to Levinas' biological model, and Levinas himself states (TI 277) that the concept of fecundity "delineates a structure that goes beyond the biologically empirical." and that (TI 254) "the transcendence of discourse is bound to love." One might also argue that a less rigorous notion of the friend—which would include the person who comes under the category of "best friend" or "close friend"—involves the same kind of trans-substantiation of which Levinas speaks in the erotic context. Cf. Peperzak, To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993), 196.
demythologized into a trope for the responsible self. The obvious text here to cite is one of Levinas' first Talmudic readings, delivered in 1961 and published two years later in Difficile Liberté two years later as the second half of the essay "Messianic Texts." Here it becomes clear that the production of time in the act of teaching or procreating is not only a way to ensure that time will still exist at the time that the Messiah decides to come. Rather, the production of time in touch, in caress, is already a production of messianic triumph, in the here and now.

The Talmudic passage under discussion, and Levinas' commentary on it, read as follows:

R. Nachman said: If he[the Messiah] is among those living, it might be one like myself, as it is written: "And his chieftain shall be one of his own [lit. from him], and his ruler [moshol] will come out of his innermost [places]." (Jer. 30:21)

Jeremiah's text concerns an age in which sovereignty will return to Israel. The Messiah is ... the absolute interiority of government. Is there a more radical interiority than the one in which the Self commands itself? ... The Messiah is the King who no longer commands from outside—this idea of Jeremiah's is brought by R. Nachman to its logical conclusion. The Messiah is myself; to be myself is to be the Messiah.124

This passage is usually understood as signifying that the Messiah, like, R. Nachman, will come from Davidic stock. Levinas' interpretation, which links messianic sovereignty with personal autonomy is not immediately justified by the text—he himself admits it to be "audacious." But there are two other axes of Levinas' interpretation which make the audacity worthwhile. First, Nachman's thoughts on the identity of the Messiah follow a (rather shocking) citation of Isaiah 53:4 which affirm, in the rabbis' understanding, that the Messiah does indeed vicariously suffer for others. Thus, the wisdom of political rule is expressed through care for the subjects of the kingdom in their individual afflictions. The sphere of the world in which the king enacts his powers serve as a giving up of those powers for the relief of the subjects' unbearable suffering. Secondly, the Biblical verse which this Talmudic passage cites is easily associated with the thematics of touch and

caress which one finds earlier in *Totality and Infinity*. Jer. 30:21 could easily have used a more traditional example of the Hebrew Bible's royal ideology of messianism (either *melekh*, “king” or even *nasi*, “prince”—indeed, Rab responds to R. Nachman by hypothesizing that if the Messiah does live, it will be Judah ha-Nasi, the codifier of the Mishnah). But instead, it uses *moshel*, “ruler” or “governor.” This is a nominalization of the verb *mashal*, “to touch” or “to handle”; so the thinking goes, the ruler is one who can manage and handle everything well. (A *mashal* or “allusive tale”—another nominalization of the verb—is thus a technique by which Torah is made tangible or comprehensible to the reader.) Thus, this section of the Talmud literally proclaims the Messiah to be someone who touches—dare one say caresses?—from the depths of his or her interior spaces. The erotic scene, generalized from the boudoir to the polis, is the scene of mastery ... and of course the scene of mastery's failure. Mastery must turn into responsibility for the person whom I caress, since that person has, as Husserl tells us, already expressed herself before I can constitute her as someone whose suffering I can take on. My consciousness comes onto the scene only after the fact. The phenomenological analysis of the scene shows that I have the power to stand up to the transcendence of the Other which I realize upon suspending of the natural attitude and to give him or her an essence within the sociopolitical sphere—to guarantee justice and the radical fungibility of persons that it assumes—as a pale substitute for the greater degree of reality which the Other phenomenologically possesses. Once again here, the multiplication of this responsibility should be clear from the Husserlian analyses of body and time. If the original *Urmpression* of the Other's bodily self-expression is constantly running off from consciousness yet still retains the burden of its priority, then this temporal lag will only magnify as the originary expression of the Other becomes more and more distant.

Levinas continues in this essay by stating that “messianism is no more than this torsion of the self...and in concrete terms this means that everyone must act as if he were
the Messiah."125 The figure of the torsion—the iteration of the self in its practical power of freedom which is at the same time an epistemological powerlessness—should now be familiar from the complex dimensions of the phenomenological analysis of the sense of touch. But exactly how does this torsion accomplish messianism? The failure of consciousness to give anything objective to itself in the caress returns as success, for two reasons. It is the temporal distance of the expression from consciousness (the gap between the Urimpression and consciousness’ conception thereof), hidden underneath the immediacy of dermal contact, which makes possible the obsessive multiplication of erotic desire in the face of failure; desire multiplies because the desired person never comes to presence to fulfill my desire. Second, this ratcheting up of desire imparts a command to give resources and subjectivity to the Other, i.e. my performance of messianism in the here and now.

The language of torsion is almost omnipresent in Levinas’ second magnum opus, Otherwise than Being. Yet the language of messianism is nowhere to be found there. Likewise, it is in Otherwise than Being where Levinas describes his project as meontological; yet the language of not-yet does not appear. For all the thematic continuities between the two magnum opera126, this discontinuity seems to be unbridgeable. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall argue that the Husserlian background of Levinas, in Otherwise than Being, serves only to heighten messianic discourse. For the language of prophecy in the 1974 text is not only related to Biblical prophecy in the sense of being a spokesperson for God.127 Indeed, prophecy is Levinas is not about hearkening the audience to God with

125 Ibid., 90.


threats about the wages of sin, although certain texts from Ezekiel such as those used as the epigrams to Otherwise than Being do speak to this topos. Rather, prophecy here speaks to the performance of this hearkening within the political sphere. The Levinasian prophet ensures political sovereignty for the Other, and as such is no different from the description of the Messiah figure in Difficult Freedom. Prophecy has a redemptive function insofar as it announces or witnesses to God as origin, God as the unthematizable (and unnamable in the word "God") referent of my thinking. It announces me as God's agent, with the power to act ethically and create political institutions which reflect that power. Prophecy announces the possibility of all persons being the Messiah (the possibility of giving up my own possibilities for others).

But how do I realize that this is possible? How do I come by this insight? As I have hinted above in the references to Levinas' "Intentionality and Sensation" essay, it is certainly not through a command from above, much less one that states "Love me!" Rather, it is through a command from below, from the en deça that Alphonso Lingis cumbersomely translates as "on the hither side." I hear the command through doing phenomenology, through foraging for the concrete. The command impresses itself upon the self when it realizes that the object's self-giving to consciousness is always out of phrase with intentionality's giving the object to consciousness, and this dephasing is known through sensation, through the tarrying with matter that is never found in Rosenzweig's writings on revelation.

This beyond is said ... by a saying out of breath or retaining its breath, the extreme possibility of the spirit, its very époche, by which it says before resting in its own theme and therein allowing itself to be absorbed by essence. This breakup of identity ... is the subject's subjectivity, or its subjection to everything, its susceptibility, its vulnerability, that is, its sensibility. (OB 14)

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128 John Llewelyn briefly notes this point while making the claim that there is no systematic boundary between the hither side and the beyond in Otherwise than Being. Cf. Llewelyn, Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics, 155–56.

129 The perceptive reader will have noted that I have omitted the clauses dealing with language and signification from this quotation, as well as from most of the discussion of Levinas in this chapter and in Chapter 1. Not only are there other sources (notably Gibbs) which deal with the performativity of signifying speech in Levinas far better than I ever could, but I am also suspicious of the broad purview of the term "language" when a phenomenological analysis of writer's block or a stutterer to speak might lead
The vulnerability of sensibility which Levinas uses as the ground of the possibility of ethics is an extension of the model of eros, as is highlights the way in which not only the Other in the scene of eros is vulnerable to penetration on the literal level, but that I am vulnerable as well to the erotic Other in the inability to recuperate him in consciousness, due to the dephasing of time. What is in Totality and Infinity, the simultaneity of orgasm and its frustration, is broadened in the later work to include every sensible experience. To draw this out it is first necessary to show Levinas’ dependence upon Husserl’s lectures on internal time consciousness in Otherwise than Being and then show how they connect with the writings on sensibility in the second and third chapters of the text.

Levinas begins the pages on the Husserlian notion of time in Otherwise than Being (OB 31–34) by claiming that the lectures on internal time-consciousness are about the project of recuperating time (OB 32). In other words, the dephasing of the present in retention and protention, this “differing within identity, modifying itself without changing” is still a glow of consciousness, in which one is able to shed light on the faraway world which, as matter, is totally other than my own essence as mind. Yet Levinas then repeats the argument from the “Intentionality and Sensation” that the Urimpression is the transcendental condition of its own constitution. Consciousness is thus, before it is perceived as consciousness of anything, fundamentally passive. If the Levinasian phrase “a passivity more passive than all passivity” (OB 50) refers to anything more than hyperbolic rhetoric, it refers to this insight into the mind—that the impressional consciousness cannot make a decision to become passive, but simply is (on every page of its narrative) passive, and then represses this fundamental passivity in the face of the material world in its active attempt to remember this impression. The meontological schema which is hinted at on other pages of Otherwise than Being (OB 102), can thus be to different conclusions about the relationship between communication and language without compromising the larger contours of Levinas’ thought.
reconstructed in terms of this narrative. In the attempt to remember how memory works, the phenomenologist seems to step outside of being.

Though it be a rehabilitation of the "sensible given" of empiricist sensualism, the Urimagestion recovers its power to surprise, in the context of intentionality (which remains imperious in Husserl) or after Hegelian negativity. Consciousness producing itself and being produced [se produisant] outside of all negativity in Being which still operates in the temporality of retention and pretention. (OB 33)

In this passage it is difficult to tell whether the prepositional phrase "in Being" is part of the larger clause "outside of all negativity" or not. I here want to claim that Levinas wants to have it both ways. In light of the ambiguity characteristic of Levinas' use of the reflexive voice in Otherwise than Being, especially with reference to the verb se produire in both his earlier and later writings\(^\text{130}\), one should say that consciousness produces itself in the ontological framework of internal time-consciousness but is also passively produced meontologically, outside of Being, by the weight of the sheer materiality of matter. Levinas supports this reading by viewing the realization of the exteriority of the Urimagestion as a combination of two supposedly incommensurable orders (OB 33): "Nothing introduces itself [Rien ne s'introduit] incognito into the same, to interrupt the flow of time." The nothing which lies outside of being would appear to be nonbeing, in the dual sense which was laid out in Chapter 2. This nothing (rien) is not sheer nothingness (néant); Levinas seems to recognize the validity of the Hegelian argument that pure being and nothingness are identical (OB 175). The Levinasian rien inserts itself between these identical poles, appearing within the order of that which is essentially cognizable (the same) as that which is exterior to it. As such, it is to me on in the Platonic sense, since it is cognizable as different from the retained impression, But this rien is also to me on in the sense that Levinas means to use the Greek phrase in the Kearney interview discussed in Chapter 1; it is not cognizable in itself, but rather exhibits the dephasing of time, the inability to capture the presence of the present, which Levinas terms "diachrony", "senescence" and "aging".

\(^{130}\text{Cf. Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics, 111n. 11.}\)
In Otherwise than Being, this theatics of time-consciousness is linked to the topos of corporeality. Levinas denies in the later work that the new link between corporeality and consciousness of time has anything to do with eros (OB 53), although eros was the means of creating time and resisting death in Totality and Infinity. On the other hand, Levinas also makes a link here between “the disorder of caresses” and the larger topics of vulnerability, sensibility, and the contestation of intentionality (OB 90). One should reconcile this contradiction, I think, through an argument that the model of the caress in the earlier work, in which the lover both penetrates and is penetrated by the beloved, now becomes a trope for phenomenology as such. Levinas moves away from the language of eros and back to the model of work in Existence and Existents as discussed in Chapter 1 in the interest of showing the way in which the body does not only find the fulfillment of its erotic desires unfulfillable, but expresses this lack of completion in its pain. While pain existed in Totality and Infinity only as a thematized extraction from the analysis of eros, in Otherwise than Being the correlation between sense and material which was the upshot of the earlier analysis is now inscribed throughout. Yet this does not mean that jouissance has disappeared from Levinas’ analysis. Indeed, joy is a disclosive phenomenon for Levinas in a way that one cannot say of Heidegger’s Being and Time, for example. Indeed (OB 72–73), “enjoyment is an ineluctable moment of sensibility,” and joy has a dialectical meaning insofar as without the ego-reinforcing moments found in the satisfaction that underlies joy, “suffering would not have any sense.”

The ambiguity of the mood of sensibility is written on the body, and this ambiguity is the expression of the primordial ambiguity of time-consciousness, as seen in the example of the Urimpression. Levinas sums up his phenomenology of the body, defined by its capacity to sense, as follows:

Under the species of corporeality are united the traits we have enumerated: for the other, despite oneself, starting with oneself, the pain of labor in the patience of aging, in the duty to give to the other even the bread out of one’s own mouth and the coat from one’s shoulders. [As] passivity in
the paining of the felt pain, sensibility is vulnerability, pain coming to interrupt an enjoyment in its very isolation, and thus coming to tear me from myself. (OB 55)

Each of these clauses refers to the dephasing of time, and only through this reference do they speak to any sociopolitical situation. For example, the "despite oneself," the title of the subsection of Levinas' argument directly preceding the section on corporeality, does not refer to any contestation that one could point to in the natural attitude (OB 51): "the passivity [of the 'despite'] expresses a sense in which no reference, positive or negative, to a prior will enters." This is not an argument about the face of a real live person who might occupy my bed or my cathode ray tube. Rather, the 'despite' which refers to the inability to contest the "passivity more passive than any passivity" (OB 51) only "signifies in the 'passive' synthesis of its temporality." After this sentence, Levinas continues by again summarizing his interpretation of the way in which Husserl's lectures on time-consciousness speak to a transcendental exteriority. In this way, one can see how Levinas might link the "despite oneself" with the "for the other" and the "starting from oneself," in order to express how consciousness comes to realize its own repression of time's dephasing. But what does this have to do with the body? There are two answers to this question. One has to do with Levinas' return to the analysis of lassitude from Existence and Existent; without openly referring to the Husserlian lectures on time-consciousness, Levinas uncovers this same structure of dephasing in terms of bodily expression. The fatigued body is a time-lag (EE 35, OB 54) in which the I's positing of its own present follows upon the irre recuperable present which weighs it down and which it immediately intuits. If the body expresses time, if time is spatialized in the way that skin hangs on bones, then language about the body can be used to express and bolster the language of diachrony. Dephasing announces itself in matter (OB 49).

This being torn up from oneself in the core [sein] of one's unity, this absolute noncoinciding, this diachrony of the instant, signifies in the form of the one penetrated-by-the-other. The pain, this underside of skin, is a nudity more naked than all destitution... a denuding beyond the skin.
The inability to gather consciousness into the plenitude of presence announces consciousness as radically impressional in its origin. If Husserl argued in Ideas II that the body is an extension of consciousness insofar as sensings are localized in the skin of the hand or in bodily comportment, then Levinas here takes Husserl's point further by noting that this argument has the effect of making all consciousness, not only the skin, into a *tabula rasa*. Another body expresses itself and bursts into my consciousness, pricks the border of my skin which guards my interior space and keeps it safe from attack, and then I sew myself up again in the constitution of that object. And this happens over and over again; the body is a tissue of scars. Insofar as the borders of my self burst, spilling out "like a hemophiliac's hemorrhage" (OB 92).\(^{131}\) This is not simply the pleasurable union of two naked bodies. This is the realization that for all my violation of the Other in our erotic entanglements, his immunity to this erotic desire that defines me at this moment is an attack on the way that I predicate myself as I lie in bed (or wherever). His skin, once silky, suddenly grows thorns. This is pain on the phenomenological level—meaning collapses when I realize that my constitution of the world relies upon the world's nonsensical unconstitutability, its constant running-off into the past—and the ground of the possibility of pain as seen in the natural attitude. For if consciousness were completely enclosed, a windowless monad, then there could be no pain. Where would I have left myself open to attack? Why would my touch suddenly turn back on itself?

As in Maimonides and Cohen, the analysis of meontological subjectivity carries ethical consequences for Levinas. Since subjectivity is constituted by its vulnerability to the material world which it needs for its acts of making meaning, and since this meaning can never be fully made in the dephasing of time, the objects of the world—and particularly

\(^{131}\) Levinas' language of the draining of the self into objectivity at the hands of the Other, while still remaining a subject, is not dissimilar to Sartre's brief remarks on the relation between the subject- and object-poles of selfhood disclosed in a phenomenology of endoscopy, a phenomenology which is redeemed by Katie Couric's live endoscopy-without-pain on the American morning program *Today* in February 2000. Cf. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 466–68.
the other person with whom I exist in community—transcend me. In the phenomenology of the material world, I can only see myself as the object of that which I seek to objectify. This serves as a reversal of the idealistic movement seen in Rosenzweig. Objects do not exist for me, with an unessential essence from which I am to redeem them; rather, I exist for the objects of the world in responsibility in the sense that I am responsible to him for the very sense of self that I have. Subjectivity is a gift from the Other. In both the idealistic/Rosenzweigian and Levinasian view of the relationship between the self and the other, the other exists within the self. Yet whereas idealism interprets this state of being as the self’s cognizing and heterophagous control of the other, Levinas shows that this control is a fiction grounded in the other’s piercing through the permeable and vulnerable boundaries of subjectivity. The Other has rendered me passive before I have even taken note of it, and in this sense I am a hostage to his or her supplications. This idealist narrative is not completely false; I have no sense of my existence in time without my stretching of the present impression into time-consciousness, and this violence of the givenness of the Ur-impression is phenomenologically necessary to explain subjectivity. Thus, “I exist through the other” at the same time that “I exist for the other” (OB 114).\(^{132}\) Responsibility can never totally extricate itself from the knot of subjectivity which includes the necessary proto-violence of the operation of consciousness. The command to hearken to the Other’s call is thus inexhaustible, and as I continue in my life committing more conscious acts, the need to atone for this violence and hearken to the Other who lies in my pierced skin (OB 115) or localized on my skin in the caress only multiplies toward infinity (OB 142).

\(^{132}\) Levinas asserts the duality of these orders in other essays as well, again usually through an ambivalence about Husserl. For example, in “Philosophy and Transcendence,” Levinas writes at one point (12) “Does not Husserl’s analysis of time come down to expressing time in terms of presence and simultaneity?” while further on (17) asserting “a reduced consciousness ... also remains, as if supplementarily, non-intentional consciousness.” But this non-intentional aspect of consciousness can only be accomplished through the phenomenological reduction; I cannot exist for the other unless I exist through the other. The ontological order and the meontological order here follow the same vector, and are only distinguishable through phenomenology. Additionally, Levinas reminds the reader in “Diachrony and Representation” (in Entre Nous, 159–177) that “diachrony does not signify pure rupture” (176).
If the meontological analysis of time leads to a hyperbolic ethics that is certainly more attuned to the materiality of the Other than in the earlier representatives of the meontological tradition, it appears to lead to a more attenuated messianism in *Otherwise than Being* than that which we have seen in those earlier texts. Indeed, as mentioned above, messianism is not even mentioned, and *Otherwise than Being* seems to mark a shift from the earlier theorizings of messianism as the apex of ethical action. It would be incorrect to take this conclusion at its surface level. What Levinas refers to as prophecy is nothing less than a sacrifice of the self to (or a fulfillment of the self as) the path of divine agency which ends up effecting political autonomy for all—in other words, the Maimonidean concept of the Messiah seen in the previous chapter.

The dephasing of time which reveals my vulnerability to the objects of the world before consciousness constitutes them and represses this vulnerability is a sign of the other occupying the space of the self. Insofar as alterity is the transcendental condition for my being able to constitute anything at all, one can say that I am literally inspired by the Other. The Other is the source of my own breath and breathes in me as this source (OB 148). Yet although the other person expresses herself prior to my mental acts, and is thus intrinsically good, the Other does not decide to inspire me. This is not a contest of wills, and the phenomenology of subjectivity does not lead me to commit idolatry in worship of the Other. For the Other is himself, in the createdness of his very skin, also a vessel in which another agency communicates. Yet this communication takes place nowhere outside my own ego and its own disruption. This other agency is termed by Levinas “the glory of the Infinite” (OB 144ff). One cannot stress enough that this does not refer to the Other; the glory of the

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133 Thus, Bettina Bergo conflates the role of “messianic consciousness” and “prophetism” in Levinas, assuming that they are the same thing and failing to note that Levinas never refers to the reduction of subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being* as a “reduction to messianic consciousness” (164). Bergo is correct, but it is necessary to justify her claim. In response to the fear that her claim that “messianic freedom [is] accusation and election” may speak too quickly to a notion of messianism that depends on a singular reading of Isaiah 53 and the garden of Gethsemane and not speak at all to the power of the Davidic lineage, I point to a rabbinic text which already deforms this Davidic topos in the next chapter.
Infinite refers to what is communicated by the responsible subject. The glory of the Infinite announces itself in temporal dephasing which confuses the labelling of the origin of conscious mental acts: "the glory of the Infinite is the anarchic identity of the subject flushed out without being able to slip away."¹³⁴

This is a bizarre phrase. Levinas means it, I think, as an argument that the dephasing of time is predicated on an immemorial past which is absolutely irrecoverable to consciousness and thus radically transcendent, unable to be represented within the mind. To say that this radical transcendence can be named as "God" or even as "Infinite" is a theological abuse (OB 151), and Levinas chooses the term "glory" as a way of minimizing this violence of naming. Yet in Exodus 33:18–20, "glory" and "essence" or "presence" are synonyms; Moses asks to see God's glory and God refuses saying that "no one can see My face and live." In order to escape this problem, it is best—or perhaps even absolutely necessary—to interpret Levinas' gloire not in its Western sense of honor or light, but in the literality of the Hebrew kavod, rooted in k-b-d "to be heavy, to weigh down." Glory is thus what Levinas refers to in this section of Otherwise than Being as "the weight that exceeds my capacity" (OB 146).

As this weight, the glory of the Infinite is an attributive phrase which refers to the accomplishing of a relation and never to a static attribute that would offer insight into the Infinite-itself.¹³⁵ The weight of glory weighs down on me, and not on some scale that would quantify its mass. When I discover this weight through my phenomenological insight (or whatever one might want to call the break with the natural attitude, such as "faith"), this exteriority becomes interiorized in a humble attunement to the un cognizability.

¹³⁴ Thus, Edith Wyschogrod writes that glory refers to "the suspension of the conatus to know or do," Wyschogrod, "Corporeality and the Glory of the Infinite in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas," in Incarnation, ed. Marco M. Olivetti (Padova: CEDAM, 1999), 194.

¹³⁵ In other words, "glory" is an actional attribute in the Maimonidean sense. It is not strictly a relational attribute, since it does not posit any relationship between God's essence and the spatiotemporal order (G 117). Rather, it announces the incommensurability of these two orders within space and time.
of the objects and persons of the world. This is my testimony to the glory of the infinite (OB 147): “the infinitely exterior becomes an ‘inward’ voice, but a voice bearing witness to the fission of inward secret.” The infinite does not reveal itself to consciousness and mark the irrelevance or the inessentiality of the lived world, but announces itself within that very realm of inessentiality. The infinite happens and decays in consciousness (two possible meanings of the reflexive se passe) in the same act as it exceeds and crosses over (two possible meanings of the transitive passe) the finite (OB 147).

In this crossing between the infinite and the finite that occurs in the phenomenological insight of the fundamental humility and responsibility of consciousness, heteronomy and autonomy converge. I not only obey the command of the glory which tells me to assume the burden of the whole world that impresses itself upon my mind, but I do this from within my own conceptual matrix, out of my own self. (As in Husserl, it is the independence of consciousness from objects that guarantees human freedom.) It is this conjunction of two orders, appropriated by my consciousness with all the requisite fissures and gaps seen as all the fissures and gaps that they are, which Levinas defines as prophecy.

We call prophecy this reverting in which the perception of an order coincides with the signification of this order made by [faute par] the person who obeys it. Prophecy would thus be ... the other in the same, and all human spirituality —prophetic. (OB 148)

Prophecy is the coincidence of the heteronomous moment in which I intuit the fact that the world transcends me and the autonomous moment in which I act on this order freely and take on the suffering of others. What does this have to do with customary notions of the prophetic tradition? When speaking of mantic prophecy, absolutely nothing. When speaking of the Biblical prophets' critique of hegemonic institutions, one gets closer. Cornel West writes succinctly that “the distinctive features of prophetic activity are Pascalian leaps of faith in the capacity of human beings to transform their circumstances, engage in relentless criticism and self-criticism, and project visions, analyses, and practices
of social freedom.”136 All of this is true for Levinas, including the quasi-Heideggerean language of the projection of possibilities, as I shall show below. Yet what West leaves out—and although this is an obvious point, it needs to be said—is the Levinasian element of prophecy that critique is not simply made in the name of the command of divine justice, but that the critique is actually a speaking out of the infinite in which my agency is coupled with an infinite agency.137 In my prophetic acts of critiquing the state, feeding the hungry, attending to the poor, I announce the infinite. God (to abuse the term) is present in me—is the breath in my words —kerygmatically as the inspiration for my act.138

Prophecy also contains a futural push away from its own source. For I cannot live in the dephasing of time and space; the interruption of my consciousness can only be momentary. The customary work of consciousness is to resynthesize and gather the past impressions into the system of retentions and protentions, to represent objects. Here the political work of the prophetic tradition comes to the fore. For I need to adjudicate between the claims of different Others, and for this “intentionality and the intellect ... a system ... essence as synchrony” is necessary (OB 157). Here the a Kantian moment of universalizability—justice—becomes an imperative. But this does not mean that persons suddenly become fungible. Rather, as West writes, the pursuit of justice takes place through constant critique of the political system, or what Levinas refers to as “the


137 Thus, in “God and Philosophy,” Levinas writes that in the inspiration of prophecy, “I make myself the author of what I understand. ... In this inspiration, or prophesying, I am the go-between for what I set forth.” Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in Basic Philosophical Writings, 146.

138 But no more than inspiration. God’s presence in me is not the same as God coming to presence, especially since God comes to presence in the accusative “me,” the self who wills to substitute him- or herself for Others. Even so, the immanenst dimension of this rhetoric in Levinas cannot be extirpated, although surely one cannot highlight this rhetoric at the expense of the rhetoric of ultraspatiality with which it is always coupled. A thinking of immanence underlies the expressions “the Idea of the Infinite in me” which elates me and leads me to glorify it (“Infinity,” in Alterity and Transcendence, 75), “alterity in the same” (OB 114), and “the relation with the Other as a relation with his/her transcendence introduces into me what was not in me” (TI 203). The immanence of God is both a betrayal and a revelation of God’s transcendence.
periodized return of skepticism and its refutation" (OB 167). In the name of the Other, I challenge the tenets of the social group with various Pyrrhonistic arguments that reveal that the universality of the group or the State is a fiction. This skepticism can only be marginally successful; as soon as I attempt to communicate my phenomenological arguments in the language of the natural attitude (the scientism that undergirds politics), I fall into the language of the natural attitude and the cause becomes watered down. (The most obvious example is the withering of the Left during the Clinton era. Here the language of messianic arrival—what comes after having built the bridge to the twenty-first century?—continuously elides the ways in which universality is erratically deployed.) Here we have a repetition of Cohen's asymptotic path to redemption, yet the path proceeds not along a hyperbolic curve but along a series of epicycles rotating between the voice of the State and the stiller smaller voice of those who are not included in its notion of justice.

Teleology seems to have disappeared in Otherwise than Being; there is no sense that we are on the way to anything resembling "messianic triumph." Instead, we are trapped in the oscillation between the State and those who critique it.139 Yet there is another way of looking at the question. Once I have gained the phenomenological insight into my need, in the social realm, to carry the weight of the glory of the Infinite, cannot I say that I have become the Messiah? I have made these ethical decisions autonomously out of my having been inspired by the Infinite, and thus have achieved "the absolute interiority of government" with which Levinas associated the Messiah in Difficult Freedom. I have become myself and appropriated the reduction of the ego to vulnerable subjectivity. And more importantly, this achieving of who I am—although always performed in light of realizing

139 Robert Gibbs has raised a Habermasian critique of Levinas, arguing (62) that "for the question of the possibility of justice within a community, Habermas takes us further than Levinas." Yet even if Gibbs successfully deconstructs the simplistic association of Habermas with mutuality and Levinas with asymmetry, Gibbs does not sufficiently reconcile the question as to whether justice in this world is really possible for any sociopolitical grouping of agents. If anything, this is the principle upon which Otherwise than Being seems to cast the greatest doubt. Cf. Robert Gibbs, "Asymmetry and Mutuality: Habermas and Levinas," Philosophy and Social Criticism 23:6 (1997), 51–63. For a claim that the Jewish tradition associates justice with apocalypse, cf. David Novak, Election, 152–56.
who I am not, since Levinasian meontology is always predicated on the belonging-together of allegedly incommensurable discourses (other and same, living present and immemorial past, body and mind)—ends up effecting political autonomy for those who are not included in the State's classification of autonomous citizens. As in the traditional Davidic ideology of the Messiah (Ps. 2: 6–7), my subjectivity is installed on (or inspired by) the divine agency of Zion. Even if this is only an irrecoverable memory, the origin of my consciousness in the having-passed of the Infinite still announces that I have been “fathered” by YHWH.

Conclusions

There is no denying the way in which meontological rhetoric—the not-yet in Rosenzweig and early Levinas, the rien of Otherwise than Being—is the motor of the development of ethical and messianic discourse in these two thinkers. Yet we have seen how the allegedly profane is essential to the Levinasian account of redemption. It is the body which announces a realm beyond meaning through its resistance to consciousness. It is the material impression of the object upon consciousness which announces the immemorial past which thrusts the weight of the world on me. In short, for Rosenzweig revelation comes from above. For Levinas the height of transcendence is found below, within the expression of matter, but not within materiality itself (that would be pantheism). For Rosenzweig, my selfhood is constituted before I constitute the world; for Levinas, the world must already be present before any act of my consciousness. The critique of totality in Levinas owes absolutely nothing in the form of its argument to Rosenzweig, but everything to Husserl’s inability to render phenomenology a pure uncovering of the sense of the material world. If the expression of another person is the precondition for my being able to partake in any mental activity whatsoever, then the other—mind and body—must be not only instrumentally good, but also intrinsically good. The ancillary role of the body in
Jewish philosophy, regnant at least since Maimonides' view of the body as only an instrument on the path to wisdom, is now conquered. On the other hand, in Rosenzweig's system, the hierarchization of the spiritual over the material leads to a model of hastening redemption in which others apparently only serve as voices in the chorus of "for he is good."

The main difference between Rosenzweig and Levinas is in the relationship between the religious attitude and the natural attitude. For Rosenzweig, the religious attitude leaves nature completely behind and persuades me that nature is something that I can redeem from its fallen state of "unessential essence." But for Levinas, the two discourses are like flip sides of the same coin, or a Janus-face. It is only in the coexistence of the other and the same, inside the order of the same which produces being through its temporal distensions, that the Infinite can take place or pass by. What we have in Levinas, then, is a view of meontology which surprises us by revealing itself to be not at all distant from the writings of Emil Fackenheim, despite what I presented in Chapter 1 as the standard Levinasian response of suspicion to any positive view of Hegelian thinking. Both Levinas and Fackenheim, in the use of meontology, teach us that it is through the social realm that one comes to know God. It is in the realm of history that one can make metaphysical judgments and come to know the mystery of the otherness beyond being. One cannot separate the particular events of history from their transhistorical synthesis; dialectical meontology is critical meontology.

What does this mean for readings of Levinas and Fackenheim? Using their (as we now see) common meontological approach to philosophy, what do each of them teach us about the other? Fackenheim shows us that Levinas is a Hegelian—not only a Hegelian to be sure, but that the Hegelian and idealist elements of his thinking are unavoidable. In prophecy, the finite aspect of the human individual is sublated into his or her infinite aspect.

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(cf. MH 140). How could the infinite aspect of the human individual be any different from the infinity of God? How could it be possible to distinguish them? Through finite qualities? The messianism that lies at the heart of the Jewish meontological approach to the world makes the Hegelian argument that the individual can express the transhistorical synthesis that is the condition of the possibility of there being any history at all (i.e. the Creator). While truly this is not a Hegelian absolute knowing in which God would rise to self-consciousness in himself in his incarnation in ethical subjectivity, the Levinasian goal of the complete interpenetration of the infinite and the finite—the glory of the Infinite in me which expresses itself through my appropriation of the burden of responsibility to the Other in my (ever-larger) community—is hardly anti-idealist. It is not necessarily anti-Hegelian either, for in prophecy the form of God gains content, in the persona of meontological subjectivity.\(^{141}\) Here, in the realization of the intrigue of same and other, or of immanence and transcendence, Levinas’ 1968 assertion that “humility and poverty are a bearing within being, an ontological (or meontological) mode”\(^ {142}\) finally makes sense as an expression of the necessary belonging-together of being and nonbeing.

Likewise, Levinas shows us that it is inadequate for Fackenheim to leave his expression of the religious life so vague as only to say that the social realm points to the Other \textit{par excellence} and even expresses it (MH 144), or that the actions of this Other are only apparent in Pelagia Lewinska’s sense of a command to perdure. Levinas shows us that this Other \textit{par excellence} reveals himself within the concrete human situation. It is not simply the case that human self-making is situated by the unique limitations of human finitude, and this finitude expresses a transcendent alterity as its ground. Rather, the unique limitations of human finitude express the inaccessibility of this transcendent alterity, and in the mourning of this transcendent alterity lead the human to a \textit{dialectical} alterity as the ground of his or her finitude. This alterity, written on the bodies of others, commands

\(^{141}\) Cf. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, par. 798.

and leads to the obsessive behavior of ethical responsibility by which transcendence comes to pass, ephemerally, in me.
CHAPTER 5

MEANTHOLOGICAL MESSIANISM IN THE JEWISH TRADITION: 
Contra the Derridean "Messianic"

In the last chapter, I extended through to Levinas a historical tradition that one could now call the "Jewish meontological tradition." It is meontological because it is grounded in an understanding of the Greek concept of nonbeing; it is Jewish insofar as Jewish theological concepts such as imitatio Dei and messianic anticipation are justified through philosophical argumentation. Still, there is a question, from the Jewish audience: how Jewish is this? As I have shown in the last two chapters, for Maimonides, Cohen and Levinas (and, to a lesser extent, Rosenzweig) the ethically responsible individual is identified with the Messiah. Where is this in the texts of the tradition? Here, the meontological tradition must admit its controversial nature. The public burning of Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed in 1232 was in part rooted in objections over his use of Aristotle.1 And with reference to the moderns, one has a right to be suspicious. Cohen uses prophetic texts selectively insofar as they express Leibnizian or Kantian views, or adhere to his overarching narrative of historical progress. Rosenzweig uses Scriptural and Kabbalistic motifs as a further application of Schelling's own earlier appropriations. And as I claimed in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 4, Levinas' uses of Talmud are primarily expressions his own post-phenomenological arguments, and either authorize ethics as a supersession of Talmudic Judaism or do not display an awareness of the coherence of the Talmud itself.2

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2 There is some debate over whether the adjective "Jewish" is even relevant for this tradition, in part or in whole. Perhaps one should perhaps use the term "Judaïsme." For critical remarks of the understanding of Judaism as ethical monotheism (an understanding which would include both Cohen and Levinas), cf. David Novak, The Election of Israel, ch. 2, and Natural Law in Judaism, 82–89. For an argument for the inappropriateness of the term "Jewish" for Levinas' understanding of religiosity, cf. Jill Robbins, Altered Readings.
There is a second question as well, from the audience of philosophers: since some argue that the lineage of Continental Jewish philosophy should be further extended to include the works of the French phenomenologist Jacques Derrida. Derrida is ethnically (but not religiously) Jewish, and it would be foolish to claim that this plays no role whatsoever in his thought, although it has never been at the surface of his essays. Indeed, in his own autobiographical work, the anti-Semitic policies in his boyhood Algeria appear to be of some importance in his own self-understanding. But to what extent is he a meontological thinker? Does the recent turn to religious matters in Derrida, often with recourse to Levinas, imply that meontology is a Leitmotif of deconstruction?

Yet at the same time that making these links seem to be a sure route of interpretation, they are not that easy to forge. For the history of the relationship between Derridean phenomenology and theology is long and complicated. It begins in 1961 with a brief and extremely tantalizing remark (in his introduction to Husserl’s late essay on the origin of geometry) which stakes the claim that God is only intelligible in terms of time. But beginning in the mid-1960s, Derrida’s God-talk ceases to be so overtly constructive and begins to take the form of vigorous critiques of the theological reflections of others. In “Differance,” the lecture delivered in 1968 which explains the French neologism of its title (a term that had already been used in Derrida’s earlier writings on Husserl), Derrida

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3 Most recently, in John D. Caputo’s The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). I will refer to Derrida as a phenomenologist—a term not usually associated with him in current academic conversations, and certainly not associated with him in culture at large—throughout this chapter. This is primarily for two reasons: 1) his first forays into God-talk were made in 1961, in his analysis of Husserl’s short essay on the origin of geometry, and 2) in his 1993 book Specters of Marx, which will concern us most here, the Husserlian concept of the phenomenological reduction (epoché) is key for adjudicating what can and cannot be included in the category of the “messianic.” Cf. n. 5 below and SM 59.


6 Derrida, Speech and Phenomena, 88–102.
refuses to capitalize on the ability to theologize a term which is resolutely mysterious and opaque, seeing as it expresses the self’s simultaneous appropriation and expropriation of its subjectivity within the temporal continuum. Nevertheless, differance is “not theological, not even in the order of the most negative theologies.” This leads to critiques of various theological positions on the grounds that they do not adhere to the strict dipolarity of thought (e.g. both appropriation and expropriation) which is the hallmark of Derrida’s phenomenological explorations. Thus, Levinas’ Totality and Infinity is critiqued on the grounds that it does not sufficiently address the need for a self-appropriated identity at the base of thought; Levinas is not identitarian enough. On the other hand, Derrida critiques the negative theologies of Pseudo-Dionysius and Eckhart on the grounds that they are too identitarian; the accounts of a mystical union with a hyperessential God does not sufficiently pay attention to modes of existence which phenomenologically disclose the self to be deprived of a stable identity in its relations with other persons.

In his search for historical instantiations of a mode of thinking, situated between the valorization and the dismissal of the self, which would reflect this simultaneous symmetry and asymmetry between persons, Derrida has turned to the theme of the Shoah in the context of the writings of the French-Egyptian poet Edmond Jabès and of Heidegger’s writings on sacrifice. Yet in these essays, Judaism is incorporated into the larger philosophemhe of “the question”; Derrida gives no sense that the ideas he is expressing could be situated within a specific religious tradition. This use of themes and texts associated with religious traditions in order to express a pure theology, exterior to history, has not changed since

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Derrida's earlier writings. Some other recent examples include: circumcision (for an essay on the poetry of Paul Celan), the Marrano and the crypto-Jew (for a slim volume on death in Heidegger's Being and Time), Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (for a book on the Christian practice of phenomenology in the Czech Republic, Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, and the Gospel of Matthew), and what is most relevant for this chapter, the messianic idea (for a book on Marx). Still more recently, in a lecture given at Villanova University and in a seminar on the island of Capri, Derrida has gone so far as to thematize his refusal to thematize, in his questioning whether the Judæo-Christian texts he appropriates have an intrinsic value as the transcendental conditions of his "pure" theology. These essays all mark a steady faithfulness to and questioning of the sentiment which Edmund Husserl wrote in a letter to D. M. Feuling in 1933: "Genuine philosophy is eo ipso theology."

While there seems to be a return to the religious history of the Judæo-Christian West as Derrida's career has progressed, the murky religious existence which he argues for—crossing as it does the boundaries separating Judaism, Christianity, and secular philosophy—is, in his opinion, something heretofore unthought in the history of philosophy. The theology that arises from Derridean phenomenology thereby sees itself, I claim, as a completely new stage in the spiritual progress of thinking, Hegelian overtones intended. For example, in Specters of Marx, the messianic is described as a "messianic without messianism" (SM 59), "without content and without identifiable Messiah" (SM 28) and "absolutely undetermined" (SM 65), in order to give the reader an image of "a structure

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of experience rather than a religion” (SM 168). The goal of Derrida’s interpretation of the messianic idea appears to be a thinking of “the essence of faith par excellence, which can only ever believe in the unbelievable” (SM 143); it is this essence that Marx has ignored in his critique of religion. These undetermined and pure notions of faith and the messianic, and of the other concepts listed on the previous pages, are all elements of Derrida’s project of formulating (SM 91) the concept of “the event of a discourse in the philosophico-scientific form claiming to break with myth, religion, and the nationalist ‘mystique’” that always lies at a distance from dogmatic “forms of social organization.” Derrida explicitly includes the political party and the nation-state among these forms of dogmatism. He implicitly includes the religious institution (the building qua concept—church, synagogue, mosque, temple), and one could justifiably add to this list the institution of the rights-group (whether on behalf of the sexual, ethnic, or economic peoples without equal political voice). All these institutions are structured so as to prioritize its own interests in its heart, and hence collide with other institutions, in the hopelessness of social gridlock.

It is in the concept of the “messianic” where the greatest intersection lies between Derrida’s thinking and the messianisms discussed in the previous two chapters. Yet Derrida explicitly disavows himself from this tradition, despite the shared appropriation of the messianic idea for political ends, other shared tropes, and the oft-voiced suspicion of dogmatic forms of ontology. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida ineluctably links the messianic with the concept of the specter. This term, which Derrida takes over from its use in Marx (although it also has its own history in the writings of Derrida and Levinas) refers to that which is neither present nor absent, not even as hope (future present) or memory

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(past present) and therefore not an event in the Heideggerean sense of the term.¹⁴ As such, its structure is formally similar to the messianic promise which for Derrida is always to-come, absolutely futural without any protension into the lived present, and hence not an event in the Heideggerean sense either. In regards to the specter, Derrida flatly asserts that it is not meontological (SM 148). Of course, neither is it ontological. Its structure, like that of the other Derridean Leitwörter, must express in some way a position between two poles. If the specter is not meontological, neither can the messianic be meontological. A strict boundary between Derrida and Maimonides-Cohen-Rosenzweig-Levinas comes into focus, although Derrida uses the rhetoric of the “not yet”, which I have identified in Chapters 3 and 4 as the signifier of the temporalized understanding of to me on, at key places (SM xix, 97) in Specters of Marx.

The position of the messianic between ontology and meontology is also a temporally diffused position; Derrida expresses the experience of the messianic as “in memory of the hope” (SM 97, 178n. 3) for salvation. This experience between temporal extremes is, for Derrida, one of mourning. The messianic mourns the hope for a future-present salvation. It mourns presence itself, as well as the presence-absence dialectic. Mourning is the fitting word for the mood which discloses and does justice to the concepts of self and time, in the between-structure briefly outlined above, which Derrida has explored in countless texts. The tool in these works has always been, either explicitly or implicitly, a radical use of the Husserlian concept of the phenomenological reduction, the epoche which discovers essences through the abstraction of content. As such, the most important criterion for judging whether an experience can or cannot be included among the authentically messianic is its adherence to this Husserlian structure. The concrete messianisms—the monotheisms of the West—are excluded from the Derridean understanding of the messianic because (SM 59) “none of them can accept, of course, this epoche of the content, whereas we hold it

here to be essential to the messianic in general, as thinking of the other and of the event to come."

Nevertheless, this claim—so new! so pure!—contains an implicit prejudice that previous messianic movements and/or formulations of the messianic idea have never problematized the concept of the persona of the Messiah, have never atavistically thought along Husserlian lines, and have never linked the tropes of messianism and mourning. As it only takes the sight of one black swan to falsify the claim that all swans are white, so only one traditional example is needed to expose the falsity of Derrida’s assertion that the messianic must always and necessarily be abstracted from any determinate religious life. In this chapter, I will introduce as such an example Pesikta Rabbati 34 (hereafter PesR 34), a rather undatable and unplaceable—250 CE? 650 CE? 850 CE? Greece? Palestine? Italy?—rabbinic text that explains the messianology of a group who call themselves ‘avelei tzion, the Mourners of Zion. (Pesikta Rabbati is a collection of sermons which one can assume are in the interest of this community.) In this text, there is a conceptual link between the Messiah and the mourning faithful that eerily parallels the category of the messianic which Derrida describes as new. Nonetheless, what follows is in no way an argument for a nostalgia for a pre-modern era. We do not inherit from PesR 34 a Levinasian model of ethics. On the other hand, this text does give us the ability to inherit a concept of the Messiah within a specific religious tradition which meets Derrida’s criteria for the messianic, and can thus be enlarged to include the “thinking of the other” derived from Levinasian phenomenologies of the face, eros, and touch. In other words, I will argue here that PesR 34 is a historical example of a “messianism without content” because of this text’s decoding of the term “Messiah” at the same time that it leaves intact the force

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of its traditional signification. Here, "Messiah" does not only have its usual signification as another person who rescues Israel and institutes an era of peace and emancipation, but also represents the responsible self. Insofar as we have shown in previous chapters that Greek meontology has been used in the Jewish philosophical tradition for the purpose of demythologizing the concept of the Messiah as the ethically responsible self, we will be able to say that PesR 34 is a meontological text. Messiah will here be the metaphor of subjectivity itself, the drawing of the boundaries of the self.16

The argument will proceed as follows. First, I will explicate the relationship between mourning and messianism in the Derridean corpus, with specific attention to its forebears in psychoanalytic theory. After outlining the context and text of PesR 34, I will draw out the meontological and Derridean elements of its conceptualization of the Messiah, which takes place within an intra-institutional debate over the issues of law and covenant.

Mourning Between Introjection and Incorporation

Like Heideggerean phenomenology, Derridean phenomenology looks to limit-experiences in order to uncover the structure of the self that is necessary to make such experiences possible. For example, in Being and Time, Heidegger looks to the mood of anxiety in order to uncover the nature of the individuated Dasein as one that projects its future possibilities.17 A good deal of the Derridean corpus has examined the phenomenon of mourning as a similar limit-experience. However, mourning for Derrida reveals the impossibility of the self’s independent projection of its own tasks, from within itself as a seed sprouts a plant in an entirely organic process. Rather, the tasks of the self are given to it from outside by others (or the Other), and frustrated by this very alterity, so much so that the self is shown to be always already fractured and/or infected by an other that is within.

16 Marcus Jastrow, in his Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature, 2nd ed. (New York: Judaica Press, 1992) notes a use of the Hebrew mashiach in Yalqut Shimoni (a late homiletic text which quotes in part from PesR 34, 36, 37) to mean "to draw, measure."

17 Heidegger, Being and Time, 232.
Derrida’s work on mourning began in 1976 with the publication of “Fors,” his introduction to _The Wolf Man’s Magic Word_, a re-evaluation of Freud’s “Wolf Man” case by the Hungarian-French psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham (1919–1975) and Maria Torok (1925–1999). Several remarks and footnotes in _Specters of Marx_ (SM 97, 178n. 3) indicate to the reader that this essay is still operative for Derrida’s arguments some 17 years after its first appearance.

Some brief biographical details on Abraham and Torok can be found in Nicholas Rand’s elegant introduction to his English translation of their _The Shell and the Kernel_. Both emigrated from Hungary to France; Abraham in the late 1930s, Torok in the late 1940s. They began collaborating in the late 1950s, revisioning Freudian and Lacanian orthodox position with recourse (but not blind adherence) to the methodologies of Melanie Klein and early feminist psychoanalysis, the work of the Hungarian analyst Sandor Ferenczi, and Husserlian phenomenology. Their fundamental development of psychoanalysis was one in which analysis turns into phenomenology, in which the unconscious is seen as the sense-giving agent which Husserl himself associated with an allegedly self-aware consciousness. As Elisabeth Roudinesco points out in her history of the development of French psychoanalytic movement, they were very much mavericks in this community, in part because of their Jewishness. After Abraham’s death, Torok continued to elaborate on the ideas they had developed, as well as maintaining her private practice which was largely made up of survivors of the Shoah.

Brief comment should be made of the originary role of Abraham’s studies of negation for his and Torok’s psychoanalytic theories. In the 1961 essay “Le symbole ou

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au-delà de la phénomène,” Abraham takes over an understanding of negation that in
Chapter 2 we associated with middle-period Plato, in which being is constituted by the
nexus of relations with its others. Similarly for Abraham, ontology and meontology
always speak together. For A to be A, it must also discriminate itself from the other (B, C,
D, etc.), and hence “being ... consists in the indefinitely repeated affirmation of its
otherness.” Hence, A simply being A is associated by Abraham not with being per se, but
with “active nonbeing tending toward being.” Here enters the teleological understanding of
nonbeing, associated in Chapter 3 with Plotinus, Maimonides, and Cohen. Being is the
telos of the subject’s life-processes of forming relationships.21

This teleological view of the self underlies Abraham and Torok’s view of the psy-
chic life as an ongoing process of introjection, a term which they take over from Ferenczi,
who defined it in 1909 as “an extension to the external world of the original autoerotic
interests, by including its objects in the ego.”22 Yet Ferenczi himself never used the word
in any uniform fashion, and appropriations of the term by Freud, Karl Abraham, Melanie
Klein, and others only served to muddle the original sense of the term. Thus, in a 1968
essay, Torok elaborated the meaning of the term as follows (SK 113):

Like transference (that is, like its mode of action in therapy), introjection is defined as the process
of including the Unconscious in the ego through objectual contacts. . . . Introjection does not tend
toward compensation, but growth. By broadening and enriching the ego, introjection seeks to
introduce into it the unconscious, nameless, or repressed libido. . . . [I]ntrojection transforms
instinctual promptings into desires and fantasies of desire, making them fit to receive a name and
the right to exist and to unfold in the objectual sphere.


22 Sandor Ferenczi, Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis, trans. Eric
the Fantasy of the Exquisite Corpse,” in The Shell and the Kernel, 112.

Although references to The Shell and the Kernel are running in the text above, the
book—especially in its English translation—is a collection of essays spanning several decades, and hence it
is also necessary to distinguish between the essays of Abraham and/or Torok one cites. The two essays
cited most often in this chapter will be Torok’s 1968 essay “Illness of Mourning,” 107–24, and Abraham
and Torok’s 1972 essay “Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation,” 125–138. Other
pages from Shell and the Kernel cited will have explanatory footnotes attached.
Thus, introjection is a process of self-creation within the continually changing contexts of one’s life, an organic growth in which we see something new within (a desire, a feeling) or without (an event) and open ourselves to it, acquire it for ourselves, put ourselves into relation with it in a mode of love (SK 127) and self-awareness.

However, when the object of this erotic libido is lost, especially if lost in a traumatic or shameful manner, the possibility of the pathological response of incorporation appears. Incorporation is a consumption of the object into the self, and thus appears to be similar to the assimilative process of introjection. Yet, for Abraham and Torok, they could not be more different. Incorporation is incommunicable, and thus belies an inability to decathect from the object, due to some sort of conflictual desire. Incorporation is (SK 127) “a refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss” of the object of mourning. As such, the psyche creates a “fantasmic mechanism” (SK 114) which resurrects the lost beloved within itself in order to hold on to the intimacy of which the psyche cannot, for various reasons, let go. And instead of introjection’s process of including the world within the ego metaphorically as an object of desire, incorporation creates a topography within the psyche where the beloved is kept. For Abraham and Torok, the difference between the normality of introjection and the pathology of incorporation also manifests itself as a linguistic difference (SK 126–27).

The fantasy of incorporation merely simulates profound psychic transformation through magic; it does so by implementing literally something that has only figurative meaning. So in order not to have to “swallow” a loss, we fantasize swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing. Two interrelated procedures constitute the magic of incorporation: demetaphorization (taking literally what is meant figuratively) and objectivation (pretending that the suffering is not an injury to the subject but instead a loss sustained by the love object). The magical “cure” by incorporation exempts the subject from the painful process of reorganization. When, in the form of imaginary or real nourishment, we ingest the love-object we miss, this means that we refuse to mourn.

Introjection makes up for the absence of the world or the lost beloved inside the ego by giving it a linguistic shape, a metaphor that expresses the ego’s cognizance of the absence of the love-object and its recognition of that object as an object of desire. The ego caresses its desire and nourished it through figuration (SK 128): “language acts and makes up for
absence by representing, by giving figurative shape to presence.” (Admittedly, here
Torok’s denial that introjection is a means of compensation is a little difficult to swallow.)
On the other hand, incorporation manifests itself in the inability to use figurative language,
or the use of language in acts or speech that prohibits figuration; Abraham and Torok cite
coprophagy and “obscenities encouraging incest” as prime examples. Incorporation thus
destroys the metaphorical act of introjection (SK 132).

Incorporation erases the gap between the self and the lost beloved in an operation
which Abraham and Torok describe as the creation of a crypt within the self. Through this
crypt which serves as the psychic space in which the beloved is kept, the beloved continues
to haunt the self (as per its unconscious desire) who simultaneously denies the existence of
this very crypt, because his or her mourning for the lost beloved cannot be expressed in
any linguistic form. In this act “a whole world of unconscious fantasy is created ... [and]
sometimes in the dead of the night, when libidinal fulfillments have their way, the ghost of
the crypt comes back to haunt the cemetery guard” (SK 130), and causing varied neuroses
and/or psychoses to manifest themselves. The crypt is also the repository of phantoms
who are themselves unsayable, the site of yet another unconscious, that of the lost beloved
(in Abraham and Torok’s clinical experience, usually but not always a parent). Thus the
neurosis exhibited by the analysand as cryptophore—the carrier of a crypt—is one which
has little to do with a primal scene in the life of the analysand him- or herself, but rather in
the life of the parent. The cryptic reality functions “in relation to a vital intersubjective
drama located ‘elsewhere,’ in a ‘beyond the self,’ in the crypt of the [parent], and it will
provoke, as a result, the playing out of a repetitive and lethal scene in the child who suffers
the effects of haunting.”

23 This quotation is from Torok’s addendum to Abraham’s “Notes du séminaire sur l’unité duelle et le
fantôme,” in L’écorce et le noyau, 423. This article, to be included in the forthcoming second English
volume of The Shell and the Kernel, is discussed in some detail in the opening chapter of Esther Rashkin’s
excellent linking of the theory of the phantom to literary works by Conrad, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, Balzac,
James, and Poe: Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1992), 13–48 and the delicious notes at 167–79. For a reading of the crypt alongside Emily Brontë’s
to get beyond the traumatic loss by denying that it ever happened. For in his or her mind, the lost beloved always exists.

Nevertheless, as Derrida points out in “Fors,” the logic of the crypt is paradoxical. The crypt is not only located within the self, but also outside the self, since the inner forum is technically “a safe, an outcast outside inside the inside.” At first, this reads nonsensically. Yet Derrida is, in my opinion, adequately expressing the fact that the cryptophore does not consciously know what he carries. Hence, when s/he discovers the crypt in the course of (psycho)analysis, it is as if it were a sudden discovery of something in the outside world. Thus, from the Levinasian vantage-point from which Derrida appears to be implicitly working in this essay, the crypt ironically obeys an imperative of alterity. Inside the crypt, the lost beloved is retained as other qua other in the mind of the analysand, although not in “reality.” Introjection, on the other hand, would on this view deny the alterity of the Other since it sees the objects of the world only as extensions of the autoerotic impulse, in accordance with the original definition of the term by Ferenczi. Introjection would thus be for Derrida the mechanism of Hegelian heterophagy. (Recall the section of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, on the “reconciling Yea,” cited in the previous chapter. It is introjection writ large.) Derrida’s deconstruction of Abraham and Torok’s distinction between introjection and incorporation results in the claim that an introjection of the lost object which seeks to respect his or her alterity (insofar as this is possible, given the limits of memory) cannot avoid the move of “pathological” incorporation. In mourning which is faithful to the otherness of the Other, the mourner situates him- or herself between introjection and incorporation. It is necessary to incorporate the other into the self, to attempt to eliminate all the metaphorical resonances of memory that mark the distance between the Other and the other-whom-I-remember. Yet this experience is used for the introjective purposes of self-creation and self-transformation.

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What kind of self is the result of this process? The signification of the crypt robs the self of any claim to a unitary reality; after all, I am pregnant with the memory of another. In its place, the self instills a world which is both fantasmic (in accordance with Abraham and Torok's description of incorporation) and openly governed by desire (in accordance with their description of introjection), the desire to mourn authentically. For the responsibly mourning self, this virtual reality, both fantasmic and metaphorical in Abraham and Torok's use of the terms, is the only possible reality.25

The link between figurality, mourning, and incorporation appears almost a decade later in Derrida's lectures given in memory of Paul de Man, collected as Mémoires. Here, Derrida focusses on the nature of memory in the act of mourning, specifically the gap between the mourner's impossible desire to resurrect the beloved in memory and the impossible assertion that otherwise one would be mourning someone or something else besides the lost beloved. We want to mourn the beloved as s/he really was, with all the tangible overtones of this phrase. Yet the smiles, the tears, the kisses and the lovable neurotic outbursts are, in mourning, now only mental concepts. We must supply the face that expresses these moods if mourning is to be successful. This great difference between the beloved an sich and the beloved as constituted by the mourner's imagination reveals that mourning is a figural act. The figure here is one of prosopopeia, face-giving; mourning gives a voice and a face to one who is no longer able to speak or express. Every time that, in mourning, I recall a conversation with the beloved, the structure by which memory constitutes this image inaugurates a subtle shift in which the mourned enters a no-man's-land between life and death. S/he is "really" dead, yet resurrected in the fantasmatic realm of the imagination. As Derrida points out, it is not only the status of the beloved that shifts

25 In an essay from 1971 ("The Topography of Reality: Sketching a Metapsychology of Secrets," in The Shell and the Kernel, 157–61), Abraham and Torok shift their rhetoric slightly, and thereby give the appearance that their position is actually the same as Derrida's position. Hence (SK 158): "To call desire by the very name of its prohibition is the law of hysteria's transparent opacity. And that is fundamentally what we all do." (Emphasis mine.) Writing "Fors" in 1976, Derrida had both this essay and the essays on mourning which this passage contradicts in front of him—a situation which calls for the formulation of the space between incorporation and introjection.
in the act of mourning. Since the beloved now resides in me, in my memory, this new intentional position shows that I have changed as well. The fact that I am able to take another person into myself through memory demonstrates that the self is not a bounded ipseity that is always staring at the objects of consciousness as if on the visitors' side of an athletic field. For Derrida, the figuration of the mourner can be directly deduced from the figuration of the mourned.

Derrida's claim in nuce can be found near the center of the opening lecture in this series. In mourning

we are never ourselves, and between us, identical to us, a "self" is never in itself or identical to us. This specular reflection never closes in on itself; it odes not appear before this possibility of mourning, before and outside this structure of allegory and prosopopeia.26

This is a traditionally transcendental argument: the condition for the possibility of mourning (and thus of death and finitude) is the figuration of the self. If persons were bounded and self-sufficient, then death would not be painful. But since death is painful, and the incorporation of the beloved is necessary, the reality in which we mourn must be figural through and through. As a result, what Freud would describe as "normal mourning" in the classic 1917 essay on "Mourning and Melancholia" — the prolongation of the existence of the lost object in order to make time for the psychic work of detaching from the beloved and realigning oneself with reality27 — is nothing less than a denial of pain and a denial of finitude. For here, the prolonged lost object is nothing more than the beloved seen strictly and only as for-me. If put into practice, one would end up as tragically sad as Marcel in his mourning of Albertine in Remembrance of Things Past: here Albertine is reduced to "no more than a memory, insignificant and full of charm."28 But for Derrida contra Freud, it is


the weight of the Other’s alterity, felt in the trauma of death, which is significant above any other signifier. The fact that I can have such an intentional relation to the Other in the limit-experiences of mourning means that, in other experiences well within the limit—experience of objects, dead or alive, in general, my experience—I must have this same figural intentionality. Experience always takes place in an environment which can best be named by the sublimely ironic phrase “virtual reality.”

The only option for responsible mourning, then, is to be hijacked by the beloved as the mourner’s own ego disappears and ethical schizophrenia takes its place. If I want to honor my attachment to the beloved, mourning must become pathological. I must honor the rupture in me which the figuralizing memory of the beloved has instituted. We are here neither wholly in the realm of introjection nor that of incorporation. In Derrida’s account, the mourner is certainly expressing his or her loss, and hence introjecting the lost love-object. Yet the full expression of this loss forbids introjection: to include the other in the ego, while mourning, would only be to mourn an idealized, whitewashed version of the beloved, without the ambiguities in which the erotic attachment had been crystallized in the first place. Introjection hence becomes incorporation as soon as it expresses itself.

The mourning I has created and assented to an imaginary universe in which the lost beloved calls to me from inside me, not so kindly informing me that it has taken me hostage. But this act of the imagination is obeying a law which dictates that there is a point at which any analogy between myself and other persons must fail. There is necessarily a point at which the actions of others can surprise me and catch me, my various intentions and desires, off guard. As I obey this law by incorporating the other into myself, I leave myself open (“this specular reflection never closes on itself”) and transformed by my imaginative response to the dilemma of alterity. As I incorporate/introject the other into myself, I realize that the self has collective (or at least intersubjective) roots. Even though the Other comes after me in ordo cognoscendi, the timeline of empirical knowing, s/he comes before me in ordo essendi, the order of transcendental priority. In and via
mourning-consciousness, others are part of what it means to say “I am x.” Thus, Derrida speaks of the “other who always speaks in me before me.” The other speaks in me because I remember her; the other speaks before me because I cannot adequately respond to the limit-event of mourning without having already incorporated others into my ego and punctured the ipseist myth. Alterity is something which can never be introjected into the self; rather, it takes the self over, impoverishing its aspirations and projections of a closed specular reflection—the state of pure autoeroticism. Because the figularity of the other determines the figularity of the self, and because mourning discloses this situation, Derrida is able to claim that the mourning-consciousness in its relation with others “already carries, always, the signature of memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave,” the no-man’s-land of resurrection. Of course, in line with his tendency to formalism, Derrida leaves the issue of what precisely lies beyond the grave completely vague.

How is the deconstruction of the opposition between introjection and incorporation related to messianism? The rupture of the self shows itself also to be a temporal rupture. For Derrida, the responsible mourner’s incorporation of the other into itself, done in faithfulness to the other’s singularity, takes the structure of a promise: “the self has that [quasi-narcissistic incorporative] relation to itself only through the other, through the promise (for the future, as trace of the future) made to the other as an absolute past, and thus through this absolute past.” This sentence calls for parsing. The first clause (up to “through the other”) is a re-statement of the argument made above, namely that mourning and its necessary pathology demonstrates the strangely dialectical between identity and alterity, the chiasm in their roles in ordo cognoscendi and ordo essendi. The second clause is far more difficult. Mourning promises to keep the lost beloved as unique in memory as the beloved was in life—it promises to erect a psychic space that resurrects the beloved and


30 Ibid.

protects him/her from the elements. But the pathology of this crypt-building renders this past (with the beloved "really" alive) inaccessible for the work of mourning. Ironically, the mourner is thus given freedom to focus on future activity as a way of honoring the singularity of the other. The comportment of the mourner to the absolute past suddenly changes direction midstream and becomes involved in making singularity endure. The world becomes the locus of my desire to mourn; incorporation, in expressing itself, becomes introjection. A passage from an essay of Paul de Man's (quoted by Derrida) on the Proustian project of conquering anomie through literary production is helpful here:

The power of memory does not reside in its capacity to resurrect a situation or a feeling that actually existed, but it is a constitutive act of the mind bound to its own present and oriented toward the future of its own elaboration. The past intervenes only as a purely formal element, as a reference or a leverage that can be used because it is different and distant rather than because it is familiar and near.\(^\text{32}\)

For Derrida and de Man, it is through memory that one creates the time in which one can honor ones promise to be faithful to unconditioned alterity, the promise that was inherent in the desire to mourn truly and authentically. Note that this involves a turn to universalist rhetoric, at the same time it moves presses forward in the rhetoric of singularity that began Derrida's deconstruction of the introjection/incorporation opposition. But this universalist rhetoric is shrouded in negativity. I exchange the beloved to whom I promised singularity for the others with whom I will deal in the future because alterity is a universal characteristic of persons. Others are not like me because we share something such as reason or religion, but because we are all exterior to whatever our essence might be, and thus exterior to each other.

Yet in what manner can one say that the promise to the other is a trace of the future? Despite the similarity between this phrase and the locution "memory of hope" in *Specters of Marx*, this is not clear. In the surface meaning of this phrase, a certain kind of future—one

in which the singularity of all individuals will not be subsumed into the various ego-mechanisms of institutions (i.e. justice as fairness regardless of political status)—has already been subtly posited as being the goal of thinking. Derrida at one point in Mémoires states that this is an "act of faith," and this is less bizarre than it sounds. Faith here is a hope that the universal structures underlying experience will at some point correlate to the ways in which people actually behave. From the phenomenology of mourning, the values of the singularity of the individual and the transcendental precedence of the other have come into focus. And so I hope that the values I see empirically will become true in an ordinary correspondence theory of truth; I hope that life will correspond to phenomenology. This hope is uncertain, since it comes only from my intentional relation to the lost beloved. It is simply not an Aristotelian-style teleology in which people act for the sake of a certain state of affairs. For in the Aristotelian model, the telos is still capable of being grasped by the imagination as universal happiness, in which the nature of others' happiness is imagined in an analogical substitution of the self for the other. This teleology can describe only a world in which there does not exist the kind of pleasure which one receives in noticing or experiencing something for the first time, in which one is carried by the mysteriousness of the object. There is nothing mysterious in a pre-anticipated telos. But when one is touched by death (either through experience or through art), the desire to be faithful to the alterity of the other necessitates that the future for which I am acting be completely different from anything that I could possibly imagine. It must take me by

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34 In spite of the constant reading of Kant as merely a modern version of Aristotle (substitute nation-state for city-state, stir), Kant's second Critique actually dismisses this sort of analogical thinking. In the remark on the third theorem of pure practical reason, Kant quite insightfully points out that making hedonism the ground of practical reason can only lead to "the extreme opposite of harmony, the most ardent conflict, and the complete annihilation of the maxim itself and its purpose. For the wills of all do not have one and the same object." Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 27.
surprise, or else it would not be other than myself. Hence one must classify it as eschatological and not as teleological.\footnote{Here, then, appear the stakes of Derrida’s anti-meonological rhetoric. Cf. Levinas’ distinction between eschatology and messianism in the Kearney interview.}

In *Specters of Marx*, mourning takes on the general definition of the failed attempt to ontologize remains, to pretend them into the present (SM 9). As the analyses of the earlier essays show, mourning speaks to a dislocation, or a disjointing of time.\footnote{Derrida is here referring both to Heidegger’s concept of Unfug in “The Anaximander Fragment” (in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi [New York: Harper & Row, 1975], 13–58), as well as to Hamlet’s “The time is out of joint” in the fifth scene of the first act of Shakespeare’s tragedy.} The past becomes the future in an elision of the present, or at least in an elision of presence seen as constitutive of being, of the “what x is.” The elision of presence is thus also an elision of content. For this reasons, the Derridean eschatology organized around the concept of the “messianic” in *Specters* cannot have any content whatsoever. If the nature of mourning implies giving the lost beloved a status “in me” between presence and absence, in order to be as faithful as possible to his/her alterity, so then the status of the eschaton must be as equally vague as this shadowy otherness, with its shadowy memoirs of the shadowy place beyond the grave. To claim otherwise, and to give the eschaton a certain content, either with miraculous creations or miraculous destructions, is already an imaginative taking-over of the future which deadens it. In speaking of the absolute nature of the eschatological event, Derrida stresses the necessity of thinking of it in absolutely formal terms:

An event cannot be reduced to the fact of something happening. It may rain this evening or it may not, but that is not an absolute event. I know what rain is; so it is not an absolutely different singularity. In such cases what happens is not an arrival . . . if I am sure that something will happen, then it will not be an event.\footnote{Derrida, “The Deconstruction of Actuality,” *Radical Philosophy* 68 (Autumn 1994), 32–33.}

The messianic (the eschaton seen through the lens of the alterity of persons) cannot belong to anything that I know or of which I can be sure. Indeed, Derrida argues that the radically
other must be anonymous as well, since having a name belongs to precisely that order of subjectivity which alterity contests (SM 172).

So what is to be done? Derrida’s solution in *Specters of Marx*—a formulation of a "New International" (SM 84–87) which is remarkably concrete given the formalism of his conceptual vocabulary—is structured as a double critique. On the one hand, it is a critique of the telos of Marxian politics as universal emancipation through a rigorous questioning of the concepts (human, rights, equality, representation) which determine it. On the other hand, it is a critique of the existing institutions which are not hastening the onset of this telos urgently enough. All this is done in the name of a radical hospitality which, in a photographic negative of romanticist humanism, universally sees every individual—even faces on CNN (as problematic as they are, due to the natural selection that drives the evolution of American news)—as a singular, exterior to any class that would putatively swallow it. This hospitality to the objective stranger (SM 172) is grounded, however, in the realization that there is already a stranger encrypted within me that issues a call to me. Derrida envisions this task, like Cohen, as an infinite process (SM 86), and indeed Derrida’s description of the New International as a link of “affinity, suffering, and hope” is strikingly Cohenian. This ethics and politics, then, is hardly postmodern in the sense of a departure from modern Enlightenment scientific modes of thinking, but is rather a rigorous and radical reading of the modern. One hastens the era of ethics by acting as if one were already bringing it to the world at every moment (as is the case for Rosenzweig).

To sum up, the Derridean analysis of mourning naturally has an eschatological component to it. Yet in honoring the memory of the other in his or her singularity, the mourner also engenders the future, and so becomes part of the very eschatological move to which s/he is responding. What Derrida refers to as the *epoche* of the content of the messianic (SM 59) ends up enacting itself as a doubleness regarding the issue of precisely who is acting messianically or Messiah-like. On the one hand, the coming of the other in his or her absolute singularity marks a futural break at the site of the limits of the ego’s
imagination. At the same time and on the other hand, the relation of singularity is what marks the messianic, and it is this relation which I intentionally constitute in my act of mourning and in my radical hospitality to the Other, I am myself part of the messianic. As shown in the previous chapter, Levinas argues similarly in his exegesis of B. Sanhedrin 99, in which he describes messianism (perhaps wrongly) as “my power to bear the suffering of all ... the moment when I recognize this power and my universal responsibility.” Yet Derrida must see himself as saying more than this, or else (one might surmise) he would not be so quick to distance himself from the meontological tradition. Perhaps the statement “I am the Messiah,” even with all the ambiguities inherent in this statement, is too much knowledge, too much identity. On the other hand, Derrida’s suspicion of the meontological tradition also ends up expressing the very belonging-together of meontology and ontology which we have seen throughout this work from Democritus through Levinas. To say, “I am the Messiah,” means also to put myself at/in the hands of the singular Other. This person saves me, and I save myself. Or, when I decide to save myself, I let others save me, I let the Other within save me. The name “Messiah” is stretched across subject and object, lying somewhere in the between-space that should by all means make Derrida happy. Thus, the Messiah is both within and without, both myself and the Other. This name, this title, lies in the crypt which I build for the Other; there is no hope for future salvation without this labor. But who is this Other? God? And why am I mourning Him?

The Mourners of Zion, ha-domim lo

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38 This apocalyptic break with history would seem to be similar to the messianic historiography of Walter Benjamin, for whom the historian, in remembering two diachronically distant moments of history synchronically, is able to “explode” the normal sequence of time and establish “a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.” Nevertheless, Derrida is devoted to seeing the figure of each person as messianic in his or her otherness, while Benjamin finds the messianic in the juxtaposition of diachronically distinct eras. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” trans. Harry Zohn, in Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 261, 263.

In the Jewish tradition, the term “mourners for Zion” first appears in the Bible at Isaiah 61:1-9, in one of the so-called suffering servant songs. Here, the rhetoric of anointing in the opening verse already establishes a context which links mourning with messianism.\textsuperscript{40} Because of the centrality of the images of Is. 61 to the text of PesR 34, we quote in full:

\begin{quote}
(v. 1) The Spirit of YHWH God is upon me because YHWH has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
(v. 2) to proclaim the year of YHWH’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;
(v. 3) to grant to the mourners of Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of YHWH, blessed be He.
(v. 4) They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.
(v. 5) Aliens shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall be your plowmen and vine-dressers;
(v. 6) but you shall be called the priests of YHWH men shall speak of you as the servants of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.
(v. 7) Instead of your shame you shall have a double portion, instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; theirs shall be everlasting joy.
(v. 8) For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery with a burnt offering; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
(v. 9) Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are a people whom YHWH has blessed.
\end{quote}

The first midrashic reference to a group of Jews who appropriated this name for themselves is in Pesikta Rabbati 34. Given the late date which interpreters over the last century have, by and large, assigned to this text, this is somewhat surprising. One might suppose that after the destruction of the Second Temple, these verses should have an obvious source for the rabbis to express their messianic yearning. But they were not. It took some centuries

\textsuperscript{40} For a definition of messianism, see the introduction.
for the rabbinic tradition to appropriate these verses in a messianic context or for a sect to refer to themselves as “the mourners of Zion”—exactly how many is not, and perhaps cannot, be known—and even when these verses were appropriated, the movement that arose was a highly heterodox one.

We do know that in the ninth and tenth centuries, Palestinian Karaites, Jews who rejected the rabbinic development of Oral Torah, identified themselves as mourners of Zion. The Karaites movement peaked approximately a century before the destruction of the Jewish settlement in Jerusalem in 1099. Since Karaitism is generally linked to a wave of Jewish immigration into Jerusalem, the Karaites ‘avelei tzion are seen as ascetic fundamentalists who stressed ‘aliyah as a precondition for redemption. But, as Arnold Goldberg established, this is not sufficient to date PesR 34 as originating in this period, as has been the dominant interpretation since Leopold Zunz and Heinrich Graetz first proffered it around the turn of the century.41 For there are no explicit references to Palestine or Jerusalem in the text, it is written in a pure Hebrew, without the loan words from Aramaic or Greek (Fremdwörter) which by and large can be found in later midrashim. And even in the extant Karaites literature, the references to ‘avelei tzion are few and far between; in addition, one might suspect that PesR 34, in its open yearning for the coming of the Messiah, is too heterodox to have been written in the Christian context of the ninth century. On the other hand, the text is equally absent of marks (especially frequent quotation of other rabbis) that would definitely place the text—as Meir Friedmann and Arthur Marmorstein claimed—in the third century CE, the age of the amoraim (the “second wave” of post-Maccabean rabbis). Hence, Goldberg concludes that “even now, no one can say for sure [schlüssig] when and where this Hebrew was written.”42 And if this issue is


undecidable, so is the issue of whether a concept of the suffering Messiah is native to rabbinc Judaism.43

In all cases, PesR 34 is seen at the very least as a forerunner of Karaism, if not a Karaite document itself, and thereby is understood to share the anti-rabbinic sentiment of later Karaite texts. A locus classicus of the connection between anti-rabbinism and self-identification as one of the ‘avelei tzion in Karaism is an epistle from a scholar who identified himself as a mourner of Zion and missionized in the diaspora in order “to awaken the hearts of His people of Israel [and] turn them back to the [written] law of the Lord ... and to warn them not to rely upon ordinances contrived by men and learned by rote.” Only Israel’s rejection of the rabbinic Oral Torah (the “ordinances contrived by men” which, in the eyes of this author, are not God-given and hence not Torah), will engender the fulfillment of the divine promise “to turn the ashes covering the heads of the mourners of Zion into an ornament of splendor.”44 This reference to Is. 61:3 states that it is a mass movement of mourning the absence of God which will instigate God’s return, and implies that this stance of anticipation is just as important, if not more so, than a complacent observance of Torah regulations which have not served to redeem Israel. The Karaite mourners of Zion are also ascetics, in opposition to the rabbis who “vaunt their holiness and purity, but demand that the people bring them all kinds of sweetmeats and wine ... so that they may eat and drink.”45 Finally, the Karaite movement also emphasizes mourning for Zion in the very city of the holy mountain; the Karaite ‘avelei tzion do not simply want the people of Israel to turn back to Written Torah alone, but also to do so in the land of Israel. Barry Walfish has argued that the ‘avelei tzion movement is “an exclusively Karaite


43 Cf. Braude’s notes on this subject at II:678n. 5 and II:685n. 2.


phenomenon” intended “to counteract the forces of assimilation in the Dispersion.” Walfish cites a letter generally attributed to the Jerusalem Karaite scholar Daniel al-Qumisi which uses Jeremiah 31:21 (“Return, Maiden Israel! Return to these towns of yours!”) as a prooftext for his exhortation “prior to the ingathering of the Diaspora [to] come to Jerusalem and stand before the Lord in watches, day and night.”; al-Qumisi interprets “return” and “these towns of yours” at the surface level (pesher) of the text, as a call for immigration to the land of Israel (’aliyah). On these readings, the Pesikta Rabbati text is either missing its accompanying Karaite context or is only waiting for the passage of time to supply it.

Yet one could argue, through comparing the usage of Jer. 31:21 by Daniel al-Qumisi and PesR, that the ‘avelei tzion are slightly more sophisticated than their anti-rabbinic intellectual descendants. Jer. 31:21 also appears amidst a long series of scriptural citations in Piska 33, during the course of an elucidation of Jer. 30:17 (“For I will restore health to you, and out of your wounds I will heal you, says YHWH”). The author of the piska interprets the grammar of the verse not to mean that God will heal Israel out from her wounds, but rather that God will fashion healing out of the wounds themselves: “the very thing He wounds with is the very thing He heals with.” Here, however, the “return” of Israel is interpreted at a metaphorical level (derash), as only referring to God’s “restoration” of Israel’s virginal purity. Yet there is no implication that there is anything which Israel

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47 Ibid., 44.

48 It should be noted that, in 1920, Jacob Mann interpreted the ‘avelei tzion less as a Karaite hypernomian sect than as a precursor to practical Kabbalah. Cf. his The Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 1:47.

49 The entire final section of Piska 33 is a series of examples of how God will “heal wounds with wounds,” and lists how the structures of Israel’s sin or the very structures of Israel’s comfort: for example, Israel sinned through the creation of the golden calf, but will redeem itself by “going forth like stall-fed calves” Mal. 3:20. The citation of Jer. 31:21 occurs in an analysis of Israel’s virginity: “Israel was ravished like virgins (“They have ravished women in Zion, the virgins of the cities of Judah [Lam. 5:11]), yet they will be comforted with the restoration of their virginal purity (“Return, return, O virgin of Israel, to these cities
must do in order to hasten this restoration. Indeed, there is almost a quietist element to this sermon; God must necessarily keep his promise of redemption, no matter what sins Israel may commit. This is the ultimate theodicy: according to this reading of Jer. 30:17, there can be no restoration without prior woundedness, no redemption without its dialectical opposite, exile.50 In addition, the current prejudice for reading the 'avelei tzion as ascetics is tempered by the opening paragraph of PesR 31, which begins by accepting straightforwardly the halakhah that after Tisha B’Av (the fast day commemorating the destruction of the Temple) every kind of food is permitted. In other words, ascesis is not necessary outside its prescribed seasons, as one might surmise in a text supposedly used by a group who identified themselves as ascetic missionizing Karaites. The text neither prescribes nor proscribes outward ascetic practices, but the internal disposition of mourning is incumbent upon all: “it is still required that sighing for Jerusalem continue in our hearts until the Holy One, blessed be He, returns to Jerusalem.”51 To be sure, there is the objection that it is improper to compare Piskot 31 and 33 with Piska 34; the formats of the sermons follow different structures, with the former two beginning with Yelamdenu("let him instruct us") and the latter with the words ruach ha-qodesh ("the holy spirit [inspired to say]"). Hence, it seems that they are different strata of the final document, and quite likely from different historical periods if not from different communities. The final redacted text of the complete Pesikta Rabbati is thus naturally filled with tensions that are the result of multiple original authors. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the fact that Pesikta Rabbati represents a combination of various homilies, all of which serve the interests of a certain community at a specific time. Moreover, all three piskot are meant for a certain season of the liturgical year, and thus can be read as a redacted unit. (Piskot 29/30B through 36 are

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51 PesR 31:1, Braude II: 600.
commentaries for the haftarot for the Sabbaths of Consolation, the seven Sabbaths after Tisha B’Av.) If the mourners of Zion were as anti-rabbinic at the time of the composition of PesR 34 as they were during the period of Karaite flourishing, then serious doubts arise as to how the text of Pesikta Rabbati, especially its center of commentaries for the Sabbaths of Consolation, came to be redacted in the way it did. It seems more rather likely that PesR 34 represents a pre-Karaite period in the history of ‘avelei tzion. What is of greatest interest for the group in this period is not a fundamental return to the letter of the Written Torah, but rather a serious reflection on the question of how to worship God and conceptualize the Messiah after the destruction of the Temple.

Piska 34 is a commentary on Zechariah 9:9 (“Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion ...
Behold, your king is coming to you. He is submissive, and yet he promises salvation, afflicted, and he is riding upon an ass.”) which argues that when the Messiah comes, He will come only and precisely because of the actions of the Mourners of Zion. Through a thematic link of affliction in eschatological times rather than a specific wordplay, the author of the piska connects Zech. 9:9 to Isaiah 61:9. Yet it is necessary to amplify this connection, since the mappings between verses which the rabbis make are as much to the context of the cited verses as they are the verses themselves; Zech. 9:9 is therefore linked to the entirety of Isaiah 61, the prophecy of the comforting of the Mourners of Zion.\textsuperscript{52} The author then decides to reread “their offspring” (zar’am) in Is. 61:9 as a shortened form of “their arm” (zaro’am). With this rereading, he can forge a textual link between Is. 61:9 and Is. 33:2, which also includes the phrase “their arm,” and in this link make a claim for the close relationship between the ‘avelei tzion of Is. 61 and God: “O Lord, be gracious to us! It is to You we have looked; be their arm at morning, also our deliverance in time of stress.” From this point, the author circles back to Isaiah 61, and argues that the “at

\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, it is intriguing to hypothesize that the base verse should not really be Zech. 9:9 but Zech 9:10, which mentions Ephraim as a salvific figure, and thus connects not only with the close of PesR 34, which cites Jer. 31:9 on Ephraim as God’s first-born, but also to PesR 36 and 37 which name Ephraim as the suffering Messiah. For more on the interrelations between PesR 34, 36, and 37, cf. Goldberg.
morning" (lavqarim) of Is 33 "alludes particularly to the Mourners [of Zion] who desire [shechamdu] deliverance morning, evening, and noon."53

This interpretation contains a rather ingenious solution for a grammatical problem contained in Is. 33:2. There is a sudden grammatical shift from the first-person plural (chanenu, "be gracious to us") to the third-person plural (zaro'am), and then returns back to the first-person plural (yeshu'atenu, "our deliverance/redemption"). This is strange. Who is the "they" of "their arm"? Why pray for God's strength for a "they" when one could pray for the entire "we"? Indeed, this is so strange that the Revised Standard Version translates the verse as "be our arm every morning." But the divine word makes no such mistakes. For the midrashist, the verse implies that whereas God will eventually deliver all Israel, His immediate power actually lies behind, and His agency lies immediately within, some smaller community, a community which is a "they" to the majority of the community who is actually uttering the prayer here. In making the connection between Is. 33 to Is. 61, the author claims that it is precisely the 'avelei tzion who constitute this minority community. After all, if the Mourners of Zion are eventually to receive a double portion and profit off of the labor of the nations, as Is. 61:5-7 makes clear, the strength of God must be on their side, and Scripture must declare this explicitly. The closeness of the relationship between the 'avelei tzion and God—because the messianic figure who narrates Is. 61 relates only to this subgroup—implies that the mourners are the only persons who are comforted in the Messianic "day of vindication and revenge by our God" described in Isaiah 61:2. It is therefore apparent that if one is going to be redeemed, comforted by the anticipated messianic figure, one should become a mourner of Zion. Only in the context of mourning and identification as a mourner can one be sure that the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that "your king is coming to you" (with which PesR 34 opens) is imminent.54


54 PesR 34 is not the first text to connect the themes of mourning and redemption. In the second parshah of Lamentations Rabbah, there is an account of R. Elea'zar the Modi'ite sustaining Bar Kokhba and his troops in battle against Hadrian by praying while sitting in sackcloth and ashes. When Bar Kokhba kills R.
The author of the midrash tears Isaiah 61:9 from its original context, reinterpreting the relationship between God and Israel as the original text seems to do as a narrower relationship between God and a subsect of the community. This allows the midrashist to explain conflict between the self-styled mourners of Zion of his day and the greater community, as well as to imagine a mending of this conflict through greater Israel’s realization that the mourners are interpreting the text and its underlying issues correctly. This becomes clear as PesR 34 goes on to establish parallels between the mourners of its day and the mourners of Is. 61, especially in regard to the issue of social status. In Is. 61:7, we read that before the arrival of the Messiah the mourners are in a state of shame and disgrace, presumably criticized by Gentiles for their attachment to the messianic ideal. Yet in Piska 34, the origin of this naysaying is from within Israel herself: “the Mourners of Zion suffered great distress because it was the children of Israel who both mocked and scorned them.” Obviously strong ideological differences here are at play here between the mourners of Zion and the rest of the community. And the dispute is expressed through violent rhetoric, which may or may not have been expressed through actual violence. The midrashist writes that immediately preceding the arrival of the Messiah “the Mourners of Zion, like a man visiting with his fellowman, will walk among and beside the angels of destruction” who are causing affliction for the remainder of Israel.

What is the source of this dispute? It appears that the mourners of Zion have a heterodox relationship to the Law. It is difficult to construe from the text at this point whether there are antinomian aspects to their ritual practice, or whether the debate between the ‘avelei tzion and others in their community is about a larger “spiritual” principle. I claim that it is the latter: the ‘avelei tzion are arguing with the majority of the community about whether, in the unredeemed state of exile, adhering to Torah is the complete and

Elea’zar on suspicion of betrayal, God tells Bar Kokhba that he has destroyed “the right arm of Israel” and thus his own chances of victory. Nevertheless, PesR 34 does seem to be the first text in the midrashic corpus that implies that the identity of the mourner is not relevant to the degree of redemption’s nearness. In other words, there is nothing in PesR 34 that would lead one to believe that the loss of one individual mourner of Zion would dash Israel’s hope for redemption.
sufficient focus of religious life, or whether mourning God’s presence and awaiting its return through the Messiah should be the overriding dimension of faith. There are two passages which are particularly relevant to answering this question. The first describes the reaction of those termed “the children of Israel”, i.e. those who are not mourning Zion, to the seven-year period before redemption, filled with evil events. According to the prophecy of the narrator, the famine to take place at this time will cause

the righteous men of the generation [to] stand up and [in mourning] remove their tefillin, place them upon the ground, and say before Him: “Master of the universe, we have not acted rightly all these years—like sheep we have gone astray.” The Holy One, blessed be He, will say: “Your straying is forgiven you.”

In the first place, the very people who mock and scorn the mourners of Zion are described here as righteous—a fact that would seem to soften the otherwise antagonistic relationship between the ‘avelei tzion and others in the community. Their righteousness manifests itself, I would argue, in the sudden decision on the part of greater Israel to remove their tefillin (phylacteries) when confronted with the correctness of the mourners’ mode of worship. They immediately desire to imitate the ‘avelei tzion whom they have previously ridiculed. On this reading, one would conclude that the Mourners of Zion regularly prayed without tefillin, and that this heterodox ritual praxis that might appear outright antinomian to others was at least one ground of their outsider status within the community. But why would the ‘avelei tzion be praying in this fashion? Praying without tefillin is halakhically prescribed during periods of individual mourning. It would therefore seem to be the case that the mourners of Zion are claiming that the laws pertaining to mourning must be observed at all times by the entire community after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. The mourners of Zion mourn the loss of God’s presence in the Temple as a child mourns the loss of a parent; their halakhic practice relies upon a resolutely non-metaphorical reading of the numerous Biblical descriptions of God’s parental relationship with Israel. The piska takes the side of the ‘avelei tzion. God will indeed forgive the strayings of the righteous ones of the generation, but only when they recognize that the liturgical praxis of the Mourners of Zion is halakhically correct, when they realize that
existence without a Temple necessitates a shift in ritual praxis. Only when the entirety of the community attains this recognition will the redemption of all Israel occur.

The alternation between bellicose and pacific rhetoric to describe the relationship between the ‘avelei tzion and the community at large leads one to believe that liturgical praxis is not the primary bone of contention here. Rather, what is occurring in this text is a debate over the interior mood or stance that should accompany ritual praxis during the time of exile, whether the expression of the hope for redemption through mourning the destruction of the Temple should become the central motif of Judaism and determine ritual life. The crux of the issue is therefore one of teleology: is Torah-observance its own telos, or does the unredeemed nature of the world in which Jews observe Torah disclose a higher telos which determines the framework in which one lives a Jewish life? The narrator of PesR 34 describes the children of Israel as having “scorned the possibility of redemption.” Instead, they adhere to the Torah for its own sake, believing it to be sufficient for maintaining Israel’s covenantal obligations. Yet from the perspective of the mourners, this is an insufficient, as it fails to take into account the reality of exile, and the necessity of positing the hope for redemption as the essential ground of halakhic praxis. This is stressed in the text’s following prophecy of a speech by God to the tzadiqe hador:

O righteous men of the world, even though words of Torah are sweet and necessary for me [and will be rewarded], you only attend to my Torah—you do not wait for my kingship. Hence I have declared on oath that for him who waits for My kingship I myself shall bear witness in his behalf, as is said (Zeph. 3:8) “Therefore wait for me, says the Lord, until the day that I rise up to witness [le’ed].” Those who have waited for Me are the Mourners of Zion who grieved [suffered pain] with me because of my house which is destroyed and because of my temple which is desolate. Now I bear witness for them, each of whom Scripture describes in the verse (Isaiah 57:15) “with one that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” Do not read “with one that is of a contrite and humble spirit”; read rather “he that is of a contrite and humble spirit grieves with Me.” Such are the Mourners of Zion who humbled their spirits, listened meekly to those who reviled them, keeping silent the while, and yet did not consider themselves particularly virtuous therefore.

55 Braude, 665-66. The text is difficult at many levels, owing to differences in manuscripts. The sentence I have translated as “words of Torah are sweet and necessary for me” reflects the editio princeps’ reading of she-divre torah tzerikhim (“necessary”) hem ‘alay, and the Parma manuscript’s reading of she-divre torah ‘arivin (“sweet, pleasing”) hem ‘alay. In addition, I have changed the meaning of the first two sentences in the quotation above in order to reflect what in my opinion must be the original motive for the citation from Zephaniah. The use of “wait for” (chikhu) in the verse should be paralleled by a similar use of the root chet-kaf-he in the sentences before. But instead, both the editio princeps and the Parma manuscript use corrupt forms of the root chet-bet-bet, “to love, honor.” Thus the verse should read, “you only love my Torah, you do not love my kingship,” and this is how Michael Fishbane interprets the text. Similarly, the Parma
One does not relate to God through Torah alone; the text states that there is another dimension of the Godhead—His kingship to come—which stands beside Torah and is of equal importance, if not even the center of Torah that gives it its efficacy. Attending to Torah is an act which recreates the past era in which God was present with Israel while the Temple stood. It sees no need to mourn the past; it is content to experience the past in each present moment, without realizing that the past moment is past. Waiting upon kingship is an act which, according to Zephaniah, breaks from the past and awaits an era which is both like and unlike the present moment. In the era of exile, there is no place for God to make Himself manifest ("my house is destroyed, my temple is desolate"). This implies that the day of God’s testifying to the devotion of the Mourners of Zion occurs in a time other than the present. The ‘avelei tzion await divine witness.

Yet the rhetoric of the passage undergoes a striking shift as the proof-text moves from Zephaniah 3 to Isaiah 15. Suddenly God bears witness for the Mourners of Zion in the present (“Now I bear witness for them”), despite His formal absence. Rather, the presence of God is manifest through the ‘avelei tzion themselves. The demeanor of mournful humility acts as a vector toward God. A shadowy and fantasmic presence—a trace, if you will, given the absence of the Temple and the impossibility of immanentist conceptions of presence—can be magically conjured up through the act of mourning. By

\[\text{manuscript reads "I have declared an oath for him who loves my kingship," while the editio princeps, uses the nonsensical root kaf-chet-he, which is most likely based on a scribal error which switched the first two letters of the root. But if the midrashist means the text to be about the love of God, there is no reason for the text to cite the verse from Zephaniah. It may be that the orthographic similarity between the two words led to the corruption of extant manuscripts. In addition, a lost manuscript may have contained the odd phrase "shechitiym letorati," which literally means "you wait for my Torah." This makes little sense, since the Torah has already been given and there would be no reason to wait for it. Jastrow remarks that the verb here can also mean "to be anxious for," which I have emended to "to attend to." In Friedmann's critical edition, he notes that medieval commentators on the text interpreted the verb as chet-kaf-he, although they also understood the Parma manuscript’s use of 'arivin to describe words of Torah to synonymous with chavivin, "beloved," thus reinserting the surface meaning of the manuscript back into the text. Cf. Michael Fishbane, "Midrashic Theologies of Messianic Suffering," in The Exegetical imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 78; Meir Friedmann, Pesikta Rabbati (Tel Aviv, 1962 [1880]), 276. A selection of all the manuscripts of this text can be found at Ulmer, Pesikta Rabbati: A Synoptic Edition, 819.} \]
saying this, I am not imposing the Derridean or the deManian rhetoric of prosopopoeia upon the text. PesR 34 itself shows how mourning renders the absent present, in its interpretation of Is. 57:15. A yod is added to the ‘et in the phrase ‘et daka’ ushefal ruach ("with the contrite and lowly of spirit"), on the assumption that the ‘et is a shortened form of ‘itti. This emendation of the text renders the text "and with Me [is] the contrite and lowly of spirit." In his translation, Braude adds "grieves" into this phrase in order to explicitly tie the derash on Is. 57:15 back to the midrashist's earlier assertion that God grieves with the mourners of Zion. Yet this is Braude's strong translation; the essential link between humility and the presence of God is actually more suggestive without this insertion. Indeed, Goldberg translates the passage in this more literal manner. The addition of the yod seems to argue that mourning is more than simply anticipation of the future. It is behaving as if the future of God's witness were now, since God makes himself present to the mourner in the very act of mourning. Alongside this, there is an awareness that this cannot be literally true; if it were, anticipation would no longer be necessary, and God would already be present. Thus, PesR 34 gives the reader a picture of a belief-system in which what has become normative is the projection onto the real world of an imagined utopia. The type of existence that characterizes PesR 34's description of authentic faith is located somewhere on the threshold between imagination and reality. Only in reality can one hear the command to wait for God, but only in imagination can one obey it. To taste and see the goodness of the Lord, contra Rosenzweig, is to taste and see the future (S 182), and to rip oneself out of the present. Only by emptying oneself of the present through an act of mourning which is dispersed simultaneously toward memory of the lost and irrecoverable past and towards the radical futurity in which this past is restored in the hope of the

56 Friedmann's critical edition reads the re-emended text to include 'itti, and Braude and Goldberg translate accordingly. However, the editio princeps manuscript which both Goldberg and Ulmer produce reads 'oto, which would lead the text to be translated as "and with Him..." Since this sentence takes place within God's speech to the tzadiqe hador, the shift in pronouns makes little sense, and Friedmann seems to have corrected the text accordingly. The Parma manuscript reads 'al dakah, which is corrupt.
fulfillment of the divine promise does an image, a phantasma, of divine presence become possible.

The end of PesR 34 paints just such a picture of the human, in its final clarion call. At first, it seems like an afterthought to the previous discourse on ‘avelei tsion, the interpolation of another tradition for purely thematic reasons. This final sixth of the piska never once explicitly mentions ‘avelei tsion, and is concerned instead with the nature of the Messiah. These lines describe the Messiah as “submissive” because “when they laughed at him while he sat in prison, he submitted for the sake of Israel to the judgment imposed on him,” and further, “transgressors in Israel laughed at him.” Nevertheless, the Messiah has so much merit that he redeems these wicked people, and “guides them in a straight path (vemoleykhim derekh yesharah). The prooftext for this unwarranted kindness is Jeremiah 31:9, where derekh yashar is used in a context which the ‘avelei tsion regard as messianic, for it mentions Ephraim as a salvific figure: “With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I bring them back. I will make them walk ... in a straight path in which they shall not stumble. For I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.”

Nevertheless, this is not a discourse about the Messiah. It is meant to bolster the status of the ‘avelei tsion in their community, whenever and wherever it may have been, by emphasizing the similarities between the current status of the Mourners of Zion and that of the Messiah. These similarities are inescapable. The Messiah is laughed at by Jews who transgress the Law; the Mourners of Zion are mocked and scorned by the “children of Israel” who refuse to adhere to laws of mourning which, in their view, are necessary after the destruction of the Temple. The Messiah calmly submits to his sufferings; the Mourners of Zion “listened meekly to abuse of their persons, keeping silent the while.” The Messiah redeems his antagonists; the narrative voice of the ‘avelei tsion has God forgive the sins of the “righteous.”

Finally, PesR closes with a dramatic yet brief discussion, apparently from nowhere, of the second half of Psalms 132:18 (“And upon himself [ve’alav] shall his
crown shine"). In answering the question of why there is an apparently superfluous “and” in the verse, the piska states that the first two words of this phrase must really mean ‘alav ve’al hadomim lo, “upon himself and upon those who resemble him.” Braude goes as far as to translate hadomim lo as “those who are at one with him”; Goldberg captures the nuance perfectly with the German verb gleichen, which can mean both to resemble and to be identical with.

This last sentence marks the pinnacle of the remarkable externalization of the self-image of the ‘avelei tzion, one which perhaps justifies Braude’s stretching the lexical limits of hadomim lo. The entire piska has undergone a shocking shift from identifying the Mourners of Zion with the consoled mourners of Is. 61 to identifying them with the Messiah himself. Yet the text never openly states that the Messiah is simply a trope that represents the ‘avelei tzion. On the one hand, PesR 34 almost begs to be read as reducing the concept of the Messiah to refer to the spirit of the sect of ‘avelei tzion. After all, the mourners are not simply consoled by God, as in Is. 61. They console themselves, since their mourning actually inaugurates redemption. All Israel will come to “understand that it was because of the unending prayers of the Mourners of Zion that the Messiah will ap-

57 In addition, I note a point of interest, as flawed as it may be, with regards to PesR 34’s use of Jer. 31:9, esp. its closing clause “I have become a father to Israel and Ephraim is my first born. (ki-hayiti leyisrael le’av ve-ephraim bekhori hu)” In Jastrow’s dictionary of rabbinic and midrashic literature, he traces the etymologies of the words’ three-letter roots back to two-letter roots for the entries for the first three letters of the alphabet. Jastrow notes in his preface [vi] that this task was “found too cumbersome and too much subject to misunderstanding” to sustain throughout the entire dictionary. Indeed, this theory of bilateral roots at the ground of Hebrew linguistics is now largely dismissed. Yet the following chain of thoughts is thought-provoking nonetheless, in the same manner as Heidegger’s false yet gorgeous etymologies. The entry for “mourner” (‘evel) is drawn back to the bilateral root aleph-bet, or ‘av, which means “father” or “originator.” On the basis of the fact [x] that the letter lamed is a formative suffix, one can retranslate ‘evel as “the one who originates the father” or “the one who points out the origin.” Of course the origin of the father is the child; one is not a father unless one has children. In the context of Jeremiah 31:9, the origin of God as father is the eldest child, Ephraim, who is identified as the Messiah in PesR 36 and 37. Ephraim is the origin of God as father; the Messiah is the ‘evel, the mourner. As a result, one can claim that the addition of the yod in PesR 34’s rereading of Is. 57:15 (“the contrite and humble [are] with me”) is not completely unjustified, despite its lack of midrashic elegance. In fact, it pays homage to this lexical tradition of mourning and origination. If one also takes note of Jastrow’s etymology of bekor (“eldest son”) to the root bet-kaf, one can then trace this root forward to the verb bakkah, which has a double valence of “to split” and “to weep in mourning,” and thus give another dimension to this interconnection of mourning and the temporal anticipation of the future through parenthood. Messianic discussions of parenthood are indebted to Levinas’ discussion of paternity at Ti 278–80.
pear.” And PesR 34 is strangely silent about what the Messiah actually does; the descriptions of him are to be understood as representing the situation of the ‘avelei tzion.58 And yet this symbolism is never expressed as such on the surface of the text; there is no reason to believe that the Mourners of Zion have ceased to believe in an external transcendent Messiah. As a result, messianic agency lies both inside and outside the mourner, as the expression of mourning and the anticipated result of it. The mourner both is and is not the Messiah. The Messiah has been encrypted.

Swallowing Tears

Obviously, a demonstration that PesR 34 displays in the personae of the ‘avelei tzion a portrayal of a meontological subjectivity cannot rest on any references in this text to Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus. Yet the previous two chapters have shown that the Jewish meontological tradition uses the concept of to me on to express three concepts: 1) an overriding teleological arc of existence, 2) a notion of ethics centered around humility and the taking on of suffering for the sake of the community or world, and 3) an identity confusion between the ethically/rationally responsible self and the Messiah. PesR 34 exhibits the first and third in spades, and contains a strand which expresses the former in the constant rhetoric of humility and also in the mercy which the ‘avelei tzion show to those who are, in their opinion, halakhically incorrect and thus not as favored in the eyes of God. One must grant that PesR 34 and Derrida are not facilely interchangeable; again, we note that there is not a radical thinking of the other in the rabbinic text as there is in Derrida. The mourners of Zion are convinced of the rightness of their messianic idea, although the element in PesR 34 that humility is a necessary precondition for effective mourning is a start

58 To be sure, there is more explicitness about the persona of the Messiah himself in PesR 36 and 37. Yet even here, what the Messiah does from his own agency is suffer. In his victory over the nations, he is merely a placeholder for the agency of God who “will brighten the light of the king Messiah and of Israel” (PesR 36; Braude II:682), tell the Messiah not to fear the nations and make him a collection of seven exaggeratedly sparkly canopies with four rivers flowing out of each (PesR 37; Braude II:687). There is no evocation of the dominant association of the Messiah with political power, mediated either through a kingly or priestly figure.
to interpretations which broaden the horizon of what alterity might mean in this rabbinic text. But the confusion in PesR over the question “who am I?” when this question is pushed to the limits of an eschatological context marks the beginning of a path of religious thinking which is certainly not averse to these phenomenological models of alterity. There is nothing preventing current readers of PesR 34 from valuing its discussion of the meaning of “waiting on kingship” over and above the narration of the mourners’ cavorting with angels of destruction. This text’s disclosure that I am carrying the Messiah within myself means that I must imagine the future into the now; it means that I must work for emancipation in and through the work of mourning (terminated only by this emancipation/ redemption itself). In PesR 34 it is primarily a question of my emancipation, and only secondarily a question of emancipation for greater Israel. Yet humility is a necessary element of this work, and the others before whom I humble myself include even those who mock me for believing that Torah-observance is insufficient for maintaining my covenantal responsibilities. One can certainly interpret the text violently, and draw the conclusion that I can turn humility on and off depending on the company I keep (humility towards Jews, haughtiness towards non-Jews). In response, one can make a qal ve-chomer argument (i.e. a fortiori, from the greater to the lesser): if I am not to be haughty towards Israel, how much the more so is it necessary for me not to be haughty towards the nations, who (at times) in Israel’s worldview are so much less significant?\textsuperscript{59}

In this questioning of the simple objectivity of the Messiah, PesR stakes out a meontological space within the sphere of institutionalized religion in which the Derridean understanding of the messianic and mourning can dwell. But PesR 34 does more than simply make space for Derrida; in so doing, it calls attention to the weakness of Derrida’s account. For PesR 34 displays the two fundamental traits which Derrida refuses to associate with meontology, in his apparent belief that meontology is merely otherworld-

\textsuperscript{59} Cf. Numbers Rabbah to 14:10, which narrates the story of the nations’ rejecting the Torah. Nevertheless, this passage hardly exhausts the complexity of Israel’s relationship with the nations of the world.
liness. PesR displays a) an intra-institutional *epoche* of the concept of the messianic, i.e. a bracketing of the world in which the idea of the Messiah is given without leaving Judaism behind, as well as b) a concept of mourning that is between introjection and incorporation.

A. PesR34’s account of the ‘avelei tzion manifests a phenomenological reduction of the concept of the Messiah. As Husserl states in the first volume of the *Ideas*, the phenomenological reduction exposes the intentionality-structure of consciousness, namely that consciousness is always consciousness of something. The intuition of essences which is the result of the phenomenological reduction are an intuition of the essence of the object *in terms of* the subject’s intentional comportment. In the correlation between subject and object, perception of an object is seen as contingent upon the determinate position of the subject. Likewise, in the Pesikta Rabbati text, the mourners have an intentional relation to the messianic future. The mourners of Zion do not simply wait for the Messiah; they engender redemption through the act of mourning and thus take messianic agency into themselves.

A contrast between PesR 34’s messianic account and apocalyptic accounts within the Jewish tradition is helpful here. Apocalyptic descriptions of redemption are characterized by their mysteriousness which unexpectedly interrupts the present continuum. Because the apocalyptic future lies outside of the realm of human agency, and is hence described in utterly fantastic and hyperbolic rhetoric, it is pure object. On the other hand, PesR 34’s account of the messianic future, like the futural accounts of Maimonides,

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62 The recognition that such hyperbolic rhetoric exists within the Jewish tradition, and notably in PesR 36, should confirm that the argument here is not an argument about Judaism *in toto*, or about an alleged philosophical superiority of Judaism to Christianity, but about a strand of Judaism which, in my opinion, is more amenable to Derridean phenomenology than the descriptions of Christianity which have been heretofore associated with it. (And there are undoubtedly other descriptions of Christianity which fit it better.) Cf. my “A Phenomenological Gift for John D. Caputo,” in *Journal for Contemporary Philosophical Theology* 1.1 (http://www.jcrt.org/archives/01.1/kavka.shtml).
Cohen, and Levinas (at least, on our readings of them in the last two chapters), stretches out from the object toward the subject. The subject, in these texts, is an agent that engenders the very future which it anticipates, even though the messianic era is still understood as radically future. The subject realizes that it contains within itself the engine of time's progression. As such, the mourning subject of PesR 34 intends the future in a sense that the believer who awaits the apocalypse does not. (There is no such thing as a phenomenology of the apocalypse; there can be no consciousness of it.)

This intentional comportment towards the messianic future is paired with an intentional comportment towards the persona of the Messiah himself. Like the future, the Messiah in PesR 34 is more than an object; the Messiah also stretches back into the subject, as the similarities between the Messiah and the 'aveleitzion demonstratewithout reducing the Messiah to a mere symbol, a code for the subject's aspirations. The essence of the Messiah is seen in terms of the mourners' desire for the future. Their intentional relation to the messianic future grounds the account of the Messiah in PesR 34, and the Messiah is hence phenomenologically reduced, abstracted away from the coronation narratives of the Hebrew Bible and the priestly figures of the Second Temple period. However, because the 'aveleitzion never threaten to secede from their community and do not turn away from their belief toward something purer (as Derrida has), their epoche of the messianic idea and the messianic persona is always intra-institutional. The Mourners of Zion are able to do what Derrida does, without leaving Judaism indeed, with a justification for their departure from normative Judaism's view of the commandments regarding mourning that does not depart from halakha, as is arguably the case for liberal Judaism in the modern period.

B. The rhetoric of swallowing which Abraham and Torok use in their essays on mourning is not foreign to the Hebrew Bible. The prophet Isaiah describes the eschato-

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63 Indeed, it is essential to the passages from Ezekiel on the dedicatory page of Levinas' Otherwise than Being. For analyses of the significance of Ezekiel's swallowing the words he has been commanded to prophesy, cf. Bettina Bergo, Levinas Between Ethics and Politics, 73–81; Martin C. Srajek, In the Margins of Deconstruction: Jewish Conceptions of Ethics in Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 89–95; James L. Kugel, "Early Interpretation: The Common Background of Late Forms of Biblical Exegesis," in Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, Early Biblical
logical future as a time at which God "will swallow up death forever" (25:8); PesR 36 shifts the passage toward messianic agency by interpreting this verse as a fictionalized assertion by Satan that "the Messiah will cause me and all the counterparts in heaven of the princes of the earth's nations to be swallowed up in Gehenna." As the Messiah (or is it God?) swallows death, so do the Mourners of Zion swallow the Messiah. But is this an act of introjection or incorporation? Clearly, it is introjection insofar as it openly expresses an eros for the future as an autoerotic impulse. The mourners wear their messianic libido on their sleeve; it is their basic instinct, the most fundamental drive of their psychic lives. The concept of the Messiah, and the concept of divine proximity associated with it, lies within the potential for authentic selfhood. One waits for God through waiting for the Messiah; one waits for the Messiah through awaiting the universal conversion of Israel to the ideology of the 'avelei izion'; the reader of the text is exhorted by the text to take on this messianic agency by taking on the stance of mourning him- or herself. Thus, the libidinal desire for God's return is expressed through love of self and hope for the redemption of its suffering; messianism has become a tool for self-making. As Ferenczi wrote in his original definition of introjection (SK 112), "in principle, man can love only himself; if he loves an object he takes it into his ego." In the rhetorical slippages between the Messiah and the 'avelei izion, PesR 34 exemplifies this demythologizing impulse which does not completely divorce itself from myth.


Derrida also invokes the rhetoric of eating in an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, where he elliptically claims that "eating well" (bien manger), the introjection which appears on the surface to be a simple heterophagy, is also eating the good, and hence becomes a "rule offering infinite hospitality." Although Derrida does not say so, one would surmise that the hospitality of eating which sustains the life of the Other inside the self marks a turn from introjection to incorporation. Cf. Derrida, "'Eating Well,' of the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," trans. Peter Connor and Avital Ronell, in Who Comes After the Subject?, eds. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1990), 114–15.

Braude, 678.

As stated in n. 53 above, the language of messianic yearning for the 'avelei izion is transferred from an originally erotic and libidinal context.
Yet at the same time, this shift from love of God to love of the self, visible on the surface of the text of PesR 34, is written in a context of a mourning which cannot be normalized. Here, after the loss of the Temple, it is God who is the lost beloved. The death of a parent is natural; the death of a sibling or even a child can be explained, if only on the basest of biological strata, by the mortality which all humanity shares. But as seen in Chapter 3, philosophical accounts of God such as that of Maimonides center on God’s being external to space and time, in the interest of preserving the uniqueness of His utter simplicity. Therefore, God cannot be lost in the same sense that persons can. As a result, introjection, vis-à-vis God, cannot function, since God is not like other objects of erotic cathexis. To introject God would be more than to simply admit that He is no longer present. It would be to admit that He was never present in the first place, that all the instincts toward and arguments for God and the covenantal relationship are and were for nought, that the memories which console in other mourning-processes are not memories at all, but myths. This only adds additional traumas to the original loss. Who could possibly admit this, when it is easier (and, more important, still valid) to create new stories, halakhot and myths which explain a—of course, only temporary—disjunction between the temporal continuum and the God of history? Or (in a far less charitable interpretation), who could admit that the loss is due to Israel’s shameful and taboo acts?

Thus, the mourners are unable to admit the loss, much less communicate it. This failure to communicate (in accordance with Abraham and Torok’s clinical research) marks the transition from introjection to incorporation. Hence, the redeemer who symbolizes God’s strength, presence, and “arm” is literally swallowed—encrypted—by the ‘avelei tzion, in order to magically resuscitate the divine-aided agency of the Messiah within themselves (which they then take as proof of the Messiah’s imminence). Nevertheless, the rest of the community does not recognize the legality of their resulting actions.66 This points to

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66 Of course, to say that the ‘avelei tzion are seen within their community as neurotic would be anachronistic. Yet the association between incorporation and actions which fall outside communal norms/regulations is common to both PesR 34 and Abraham and Torok’s clinical research. In “Mourning or Melancholia,” they give the following example (SK 130–31), which is illustrative, although most likely only in terms of
the central irony of PesR 34. The Mourners of Zion are, in the context of modern
psychoanalytic descriptions of mourning, refusing to mourn. Their actions are in no sense
a decathexis from the beloved God. Rather, the cathexis is moved within the persona of
the group. The ‘avelei tzion, through their humility, have realized divine agency within
themselves.

its structure:

One of us has analyzed a boy who “carried” inside him his sister. This sister, who had died when the boy
was eight, had “seduced” him. Several years of analytic relationship and a providential slip of the
tongue, in which the boy gave as his own the age his sister would have been ... revealed the motivation
behind his kleptomania. “Yes,” he said, explaining his thefts, “at fourteen she would have needed a
bra.” This example shows why the introjection of the loss was impossible and why incorporation of the
object became for the boy the only viable means of narcissistic reparation. His prohibited and shameful
sexual games did not admit of any form of verbal communication.
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