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Melancholic Redemption and the Hopelessness of Hope

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Abstract

Since late antiquity, a connection was made between Jews and the psychological state of despondency based, in part, on the link between melancholy and Saturn, and the further association of the Hebrew name of that planet, Shabbetai, and the Sabbath. The melancholic predisposition has had important anthropological, cosmological, and theological repercussions. In this essay, I focus on various perspectives on melancholia in thinkers as diverse as Kafka, Levinas, Blanchot, Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Bloch, Scholem, and Derrida. A common thread that links these thinkers is the hopelessness of hope imparted by the messianic belief in a future that must be perpetually deferred.

Keywords

melancholia – mourning – nocturnality – insomnia – death – nothingness –
messianism – nihilism

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*In memory of Kalman, whose melancholic joy timelessly overcame the
rhapsodic suffering of our temporal destiny.*

•••

Wo viel Licht ist, ist starker Schatten.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

• • •

Les voix résonnent dans l'immense vide, le vide des voix et le vide
de ce lieu vide.
Les mots usent en elle le souvenir qu'ils l'aident à exprimer.
Dans sa mémoire, rien que des souffrances qui ne peuvent être
remémorées.

MAURICE BLANCHOT

• • •

I'll go along with the charade
Until I can think my way out
I know it was all a big joke
Whatever it was about
Someday maybe
I'll remember to forget

BOB DYLAN

• •

I commence with a brief but evocative exchange between Max Brod and Franz Kafka, transmitted by Walter Benjamin:

I remember a conversation with Kafka which began with present-day Europe and the decline of the human race.

"We are nihilistic thoughts, suicidal thoughts, that come into God's head," Kafka said. This reminded me at first of the Gnostic view of life: God as the evil demiurge, the world as his Fall.

"Oh no," said Kafka, "our world is only a bad mood of God, a bad day of his."

"Then there is hope outside this manifestation of the world that we know."

He smiled. "Oh, plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope – but not for us."¹

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927–1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

With his characteristic penchant for paradox, Kafka equates the possibility of boundless hope with a state of hopelessness, thereby reversing the old adage that less is more by postulating that more is less, indeed infinitely so, as the infinite expanse is reduced to the infinitesimal point. The irony casts a stark light on the intractable darkness of this world. Pushing against Brod's suggestion that his pessimism was reminiscent of the Gnostic view that the world arose as a consequence of the fall of the evil demiurge, Kafka protested that the misery and misfortune of this world can be explained simply as a result of a bad day or a bad mood on the part of God. The distinction, however, is undermined by Kafka's concluding presumption that even if there is an infinity of hope, it does not mean there will be hope specifically for Brod or for himself. Precisely the limitlessness of hope in general delimits the limit of the hopelessness of any individual in particular. One can be hopeful only in the recognition that the fulfillment of the hope one espouses will never come to pass except as the hope for fulfillment.

It is difficult to see how Kafka's final assurance to Brod averts the peril of nihilism. Perhaps more tellingly, his words convey a deep structure of thought amply instantiated in the concrete experience of countless Jews through the course of history.² The particular case of the Jews is indexical of the meta-

Press, 1999), 798. The comments of Kafka were first reported in Max Brod, "Der Dichter Franz Kafka," *Die neue Rundschau* 11 (1921): 1213. For a more recent discussion of this passage, see Ansgar Martins, *The Migration of Metaphysics into the Realm of the Profane*, trans. Lars Fischer (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 91–92.

2 The link between Jews and melancholy, based on the connection between melancholy and Saturn, and the further association of that planet and Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, has roots in late antiquity. See Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 161 n. 115. On the explanation of melancholy related to the astral influences of Saturn, see also Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 151–155. Following Panofsky and Saxl, Benjamin highlights the dialectical and antithetical nature of Saturn as the planet that confers on an individual both a sense of dejection and a spirit of delirium. For more in-depth studies on the connection between Jews and melancholy, see Ephraim Nissan and Abraham Ofir Shemesh, "Saturnine Traits, Melancholia, and Related Conditions as Ascribed to Jews and Jewish Culture (and Jewish Responses) from Imperial Rome to High Modernity," *Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei* 3 (2010): 97–128; Ephraim Nissan and Abraham Ofir Shemesh, "Melancholia in Jewish Rabbinic and Medical Sources through the Ages, I: From Antiquity to the Middle Ages," *Rivista di Storia della Medicina* 22 (2012): 7–33; Ephraim Nissan and Abraham Ofir Shemesh, "Melancholia and Diabetes? Clinical Description and Therapy in Nathan b. Joel Falaquera," *Rivista di Storia della Medicina* 232 (2013): 15–28; Irven M. Resnick, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 175–214. See as well the wide-ranging discussion

physics of melancholy applied more universally to humankind,³ that is, a melancholic state triggered by displacement in the world and the nostalgic yearning for transcendence. Consider the formulation in the discussion on the possibility of positing a force of evil within God in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809). After asserting that personality cannot be attributed to what exists without a condition (*Bedingung*) that facilitates its becoming real, Schelling notes that this applies as well to the divine existence, but in that case, the condition is internal and not external. This crucial distinction notwithstanding, like any other existent being, God cannot abolish the condition without abolishing himself, and thus, at best, God must “come to terms with the condition only through love and subordinate it to himself for his glorification [*Verherrlichung*]. There would also be a ground of darkness [*ein Grund der Dunkelheit*] in God, if he had not made the condition into *his own*, bound himself to it as one and for the sake of absolute personality [*absoluten Persönlichkeit*].”⁴ In a manner consonant with the theosophical ruminations of Jacob Böhme, which in turn resonate with kabbalistic speculation on the polarity of good and evil in the Godhead,⁵ Schelling is proposing that there is a force of darkness within the divine, but that its autonomy is ameliorated by the fact that God appropriates the disappropriated and makes it part of himself, an othering of otherness that is necessary for the glorification of the absolute personality.

Burning the candle at both ends, as the proverbial expression goes, Schelling is arguing that evil is necessary for the personal existence of God, but we cannot say that evil comes from the ground or that the will of the ground is the originator of evil.⁶ For Schelling, as for Böhme and the kabbalists, since there cannot be a genuine ontological dualism within the infinite, we must say of

of Saturn, Sabbath, and sorcery in Jewish sources in Moshe Idel, *Saturn's Jews: On the Witches' Sabbat and Sabbateanism* (London: Continuum, 2011), 1–46.

3 See Rok Benčin, “Melancholy, or the Metaphysics of Fictional Sadness,” *Filozofski Vestnik* 37 (2016): 101–117. As the author notes, his argument builds on the merging of thought and feeling in the analysis of Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*.

4 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. with an introduction by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 62 (emphasis in original); Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, ed. Thomas Buchheim (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1997), 70–71.

5 Elliot R. Wolfson, “The Holy Cabala of Changes: Jacob Böhme and Jewish Esotericism,” *Aries – Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 18 (2018): 44–47.

6 Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 63; idem, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 71.

the darkness paradoxically that it both is and is not God. Alternatively, the delimiting condition is incorporated into the limitlessness of the one in relationship to which there is nothing demarcated as outside the one, the other of that which has no other. By contrast, insofar as a human being can never gain control over the constraining condition, which remains autonomous and is not subject to absorption,

his personality and selfhood can never rise to full actuality [*nie zum vollkommenen Aktus erheben kann*]. This is the sadness [*Traurigkeit*] that clings to all finite life: and, even if there is in God at least a relatively independent condition, there is a source of sadness in him that can, however, never come into actuality, but rather serves only the eternal joy of overcoming [*Überwindung*]. Hence, the veil of dejection [*der Schleier der Schwermut*] that is spread over all nature, the deep indestructible melancholy of all life [*die tiefe unzerstörliche Melancholie alles Leben*]. Joy must have suffering, suffering must be transfigured in joy.⁷

Just as the sadness within the divine does not denote an intrinsic imperfection but rather the impetus that stimulates the eternal joy of overcoming, so in the case of the human being, the mandate is to transfigure suffering into joy, to take hold of the deep and indestructible melancholy of life by peering through – rather than discarding – the veil of gloom spread over nature. The veil, in other words, cannot be lifted, and the melancholia of which Schelling writes is not a pathological condition that can be remedied by the unveiling of

7 Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 62–63; idem, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 71. See Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 160; David F. Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 102–103; Elliot R. Wolfson, *The Duplicity of Philosophy's Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 125–126. For a more general background of the melancholic view of nature embraced by Schelling, see Fredrick C. Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Julian Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy: From Plato to Žižek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 68–94; and Christopher Iacovetti, “The ‘Almost Necessary’ Link between Selfhood and Evil in Schelling’s *Freiheitsschrift*,” *Epoché* 25 (2020): 35–55. Finally, it is worth comparing Schelling’s statement with the comment of Paracelsus cited by Benjamin, *Origin*, 149: “Joyfulness and mournfulness were born along with Adam and Eve. Joyfulness was given to Eve and mournfulness to Adam.... So joyful a human being as Eve was will never be born again, and no man as mournful as Adam will ever be born. For these two matters, Adam and Eve, have been mingled, so that mournfulness has been tempered by joyfulness and joyfulness likewise by mournfulness.”

some primeval desire or instinct – some naked truth – that has been repressed and obstructed.

The lachrymose view of finite reality is reiterated by Schelling in the reflection on the demeanor of the temperament (*Gemüth*) – which together with spirit (*Geist*) and soul (*Seele*) comprise the three pneumatic powers of the human being – in his *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* (1810):

The most obscure and thus the deepest aspect of human nature is that of nostalgia [*Sehnsucht*], which is the inner gravity of the temperament, so to speak; in its most profound manifestation it appears as *melancholy* [*Schweremuth*]. It is by means of the latter that man feels a sympathetic relation to nature. What is most profound in nature is also melancholy; for it, too, mourns a lost good, and likewise such an indestructible melancholy inheres in all forms of life because all life is *founded* upon something independent from itself (whereas what is *above* it elevates while that which is *below* pulls it down).⁸

Schelling identifies melancholia as the most profound dimension in nature, the inextinguishable force that resides in all forms of life, insofar as it bemoans a sense of a lost good that is presumed to be independent. However, if we are to construe the melancholic state as a form of mourning for a lost possession, then it is a possession that is irrecoverably lost, since it was lost from the beginning; what is absent, therefore, was never present except as absence.⁹ The melancholic nature of life revolves around this sense of irretrievable loss for which there is no reparation or consolation, only illimitable mourning that propagates, in Derrida's felicitous formulation, the "law of mourning" that is "always in mourning," a law that "would have to fail in order to succeed. In order to succeed, it would well have to *fail*, to fail *well*."¹⁰ The paradox of success that can

8 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 230 (emphasis in original); Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke 1805–1810*, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling, vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1860), 465–466.

9 No pun intended, but this point is lost in the description of Schelling's view of melancholy as "mourning for a lost possession" in Reinhold Brinkman, *Late Idyll: The Second Symphony of Johannes Brahms*, trans. Peter Palmer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 134.

10 Jacques Derrida, "By Force of Mourning," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Nass, *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996): 173 (emphasis in original), reprinted in Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Nass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 144.

only be measured as failure and failure that can only be measured as success is exemplified above all in the aporia that becomes clear when considering the language that might be suitable to speaking about mourning:

There is thus no metalanguage for the language in which a work of mourning is at work. This is also why one should not be able to say anything about the work of mourning, anything about this subject, since it cannot become a theme, only another experience of mourning that comes to work over the one who intends to speak.... And that is why whoever thus works *at* the work of mourning learns the impossible – and that mourning is interminable. Inconsolable. Irreconcilable.¹¹

The concession that there is no expiration of suffering that would not initiate further suffering – the Derridean interminability of mourning – is the tragic provision that undergirds Schelling's unsettling conjecture that

evil itself proves perhaps the most spiritual [phenomenon] yet, for it wages the most vehement war against all *Being*; indeed, it wishes to destroy the very ground of all creation. Whoever is somewhat acquainted with the mysteries of evil (and we ought to ignore evil only with our heart, yet not with our mind) will know that the most intense corruption is precisely the most spiritual one, and that under its sway everything natural, and consequently also our sensibility and even the most base pleasure, will disappear; such corruption will turn into cruelty, and a character of demonic-devilish evil is a [*sic*] far more of a stranger to pleasure than a good one. Hence, if error and evil are both spiritual in kind and origin, the spirit itself cannot possibly be the highest form.¹²

The proclivity to view nature as inherently melancholic underlies Kafka's excruciating intuition that even if – or precisely because – there is the prospect of hope external to the world, we will be denied access to it. Here it is pertinent to evoke the insight of Emmanuel Levinas regarding the melancholic rapture essential to the plight of one facing the “rustling of existence,” the “bare fact of presence” that “arises behind nothingness ... neither a *being*, nor consciousness functioning in a void, but the universal fact of the *there is*, which encompasses

11 Derrida, “By Force of Mourning,” 172; idem, *The Work of Mourning*, 143.

12 Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 232 (emphasis in original); idem, *Sämtliche Werke 1805–1810*, 468. For the influence of this dimension of Schelling's thought on Heidegger, see Wolfson, *Duplicity*, 141–143.

things and consciousness.”¹³ In the ecstatic encounter with the brute factuality of *il y a*, the ego “is swept away by the fatality of being,” and hence there “is no longer any outside or any inside.”¹⁴ The complete exposure to being in the vigilance of night results in the depersonalization of the persona – or, in Levinas’s precise language, the impersonal event of the *there is*, the wakefulness in which consciousness participates¹⁵ – the expansion of self through self-contraction. “Insomnia thus puts us in a situation where the disruption of the category of the substantive designates not only the disappearance of every object, but the extinction of the subject.”¹⁶ Levinas elicits support for this notion of nocturnality and the oblivion of self from Maurice Blanchot’s observation in *L’Attente l’oubli*, “Waiting is always a wait for waiting, wherein the beginning is withheld, the end suspended, and the interval of another wait thus opened. The night in which nothing is awaited represents the moment of waiting.”¹⁷

A nocturnal time ... But primordial forgetting is forgetfulness of self. Is not ipseity both absolute original and an insatiable turning back upon oneself, an imprisoning of self by self just as language is? ... Forgetting restores diachrony to time. A diachrony without protension or retention. To wait for nothing and to forget everything, the opposite of subjectivity ... A relaxing of the Self, and its tension in upon itself.¹⁸

In another passage from the aforementioned work of Blanchot, cited by Levinas, the attenuation of self is related explicitly to the state of despondency: “With what melancholy and yet with what calm certainty he felt that he would never again be able to say ‘I.’”¹⁹ The solitary waiting, therefore, is a “waiting for ourselves without ourselves, forcing us to wait outside our own waiting, leaving us nothing more to await.”²⁰

13 Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 61 (emphasis in original).

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 62.

16 Ibid., 64.

17 Maurice Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 24.

18 Emmanuel Levinas, “The Servant and Her Master,” in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 155.

19 Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 16.

20 Ibid., 14. See the section “Waiting for the End of Waiting” in Elliot R. Wolfson, “Not Yet Now: Speaking of the End and the End of Speaking,” in *Elliot R. Wolfson: Poetic Thinking*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuels and Aaron W. Hughes (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 142–156, and the revised version in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Suffering Time: Philosophical, Kabbalistic, and Ḥasidic*

In this subjectivity without a subject, the distinction between exteriority and interiority dissolves, an experience that Levinas relates phenomenologically to insomnia:

In insomnia one can and one cannot say that there is an “I” which cannot manage to fall asleep. The impossibility of escaping wakefulness is something “objective,” independent of my initiative. This impersonality absorbs my consciousness; consciousness is depersonalized. I do not stay awake: “it” stays awake. Perhaps death is an absolute negation wherein “the music ends” (however, one knows nothing about it). But in the maddening “experience” of the “there is,” one has the impression of a total impossibility of escaping it, of “stopping the music.”²¹

Death as the absolute negation, depicted metaphorically as the cessation of music, is contrasted with the mindfulness – or perhaps mindlessness would be more appropriate – confronting the *il y a*, the irreducible otherness of being, whose impenetrable force is exhibited as the inability to stop the music. Touching on this theme in slightly different terminology in the essay “De l'évasion,” published in 1935, Levinas wrote:

The experience of pure being is at the same time the experience of its internal antagonism and of the escape that foists itself on us. Nevertheless, death is not the exit toward which escape thrusts us. Death can only appear to it if escape reflects upon itself. As such, nausea discovers only the nakedness of being in its plenitude and in its utterly binding presence.²²

Reflections on Temporality (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 592–608. I will not repeat here the references to primary and secondary sources noted in that essay.

- 21 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 49. See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Giving beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 108–113, 136–138, and references to other scholars cited on 373 n. 171. For a broader context in which to understand Levinas's choice of musical imagery in his discussion of melancholy, see Michael P. Steinberg, “Music and Melancholy,” *Critical Inquiry* 40 (2014): 288–310.
- 22 Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 67. When considering this early essay of Levinas, it is worthwhile recalling the words placed in the mouth of the “old magician” in the section “The Song of Melancholy” in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 296–297: “And immediately, you higher men ... immediately my wicked spirit of deception and magic seizes me, my melancholy

The term *melancholia* is not used in this passage but it is reasonable to surmise that the description of the nausea one experiences in the face of the nakedness of being corresponds to what is described elsewhere as the melancholic engagement with the ferocity of the *ily a*.²³

Levinas's view on the melancholy of death is in accord with the critique of Heidegger that he extracts from Ernst Bloch's utopian speculation on the constant deferral of the future and the consequential incompleteness of the present:

For Bloch, the anxiety of death comes from the fact of dying without finishing one's work [*œuvre*], one's being. It is in an unfinished world that we have the impression of not finishing our work.... The work of man is historical, but it is not proportionate to utopia. There is failure in every life, and the melancholy of this failure is its way of abiding in unfinished being. This is a melancholy that does not derive from anxiety. On the contrary, the anxiety of death would be a mode of this melancholy of the unfulfilled (which is not a wounding of one's pride). The fear of dying is the fear of leaving a work unfinished, and thus of not having lived.... The subject, in the darkness of the pure fact of being, works for a world to come and for a better world. His work is therefore historical. In the immediate future, the utopia succeeds only partially; it is therefore always a failure, and the melancholy resulting from this failure is the way in which man reconciles himself with his historical evolution [*son devenir historique*]. This is a melancholy that does not derive from anxiety, as in Heidegger's case. On the contrary, for Bloch, it is the anxiety of death that would be a modality of melancholy. The fear of dying is the fear of leaving a work unfinished.²⁴

devil, who is through and through an adversary of this Zarathustra – forgive him! Of all of you, whatever honors you may confer on yourselves with words ... of all you who, like me, are suffering of the *great nausea*, for whom the old god has died and for whom no new god lies as yet in cradles and swaddling clothes – of all of you my evil spirit and magic devil is fond" (emphasis in original). It is significant that Zarathustra's nemesis is named the "melancholy devil" – or, alternatively, as the "spirit of melancholy" and the "devil of dusk," who desires to come naked – and that the higher men, together with the old magician, are said to be suffering from great nausea. Perhaps Levinas's description of nausea as that which discovers the nakedness of being in its plenitude and in its utterly binding presence is, in part, influenced by the Nietzschean text.

23 See Michael J. Brogan, "Nausea and the Experience of the '*ily a*': Sartre and Levinas on Brute Existence," *Philosophy Today* 45 (2001): 144–153.

24 Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 99–101.

According to Heidegger's view of being-toward-death, as may be gleaned from *Sein und Zeit*, the anxiety that pertains to death is signaled in the consciousness of the end of one's being, whereas Bloch unearths in the anxiety over dying a threat that is concerned with "what is higher or better than being."²⁵ Heidegger's discussion of the anxiety of death caused by the consideration of the inevitability of one's nonbeing – or, in his precise locution, the anticipatory resoluteness of the end that compels one to confront the "nonrelational ownmost potentiality," the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein²⁶ – presumes that the ultimate event is the event of being. However, in the case of Bloch, "the event of being is subordinated to a completion in which man finds his home. Being, in a certain sense, contains more or better or something other than being; for Bloch, this is the completion of the world, its quality as a home, which is attained in the perfected world." The messianic drive to the future, albeit a future that is always coming, betokens the diachronic surfeit of time, the not yet, that surmounts the anxiety of death linked to the melancholic dread of the work being left uncompleted.

What counts above all for Bloch, and what must be kept in mind here, is that such an emotion could dominate the ineluctability of death, that death might not be marked solely by the threat that weighs upon my being, and that death does not exhaust its meaning in being the sign of nothingness.... What we call, by a somewhat corrupted term, love, is *par excellence* the fact that the death of the other affects me more than my own. The love of the other is the emotion of the other's death. It is my receiving the other – and not the anxiety of death awaiting me – that is the reference to death. We encounter death in the face of the other.²⁷

That sleep should serve figuratively as a modulation of the absolute negation of death is not surprising. More interesting is the fact that Levinas highlights the disquietude of insomnia – encountering the destitution of the other as a fecundity that disrupts and disaggregates the self in its resisting rest²⁸ – as that which engenders the "absolute impossibility to slip away and

25 Ibid., 105.

26 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, revised by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), §50, 241; idem, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), 250.

27 Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 105. Levinas's comments are a philosophical exegesis of the verse "for love is as strong as death," *ki azzah kha-mawet ahavah* (Song of Songs 8:6).

28 Timothy K. Beal, *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther* (London: Routledge, 1997), 79–80.

distract oneself.”²⁹ The very structure of consciousness as consciousness of the other, a gathering into being or into presence whose luminosity permits no shadow, is a

modality or modification of *insomnia*.... Insomnia – the wakefulness in awakening – is disturbed in the core of its formal or categorical *sameness* by the *other*, which tears away at whatever forms a nucleus, a substance of the same, identity, a rest, a presence, a sleep. Insomnia is disturbed by the other who breaks this rest, breaks it from this side of the state in which equality tends to establish itself.... The other is in the same, and does not alienate the same but awakens it.³⁰

The lucidity of this confrontation shares with lunacy the stark clarity and profound obscurity of acquiescing to the inability to escape from the inability to escape, the unavoidability of being condemned to stand before the exit from which there is no exit.³¹ Like the figure in Kafka’s parable “Vor dem Gesetz,” only by being consummately outside does one imagine that one is inside; that is, there is no way to be embedded internally but from the vantage point of being positioned externally.³²

It is well to recall that Levinas begins the crucial chapter on substitution in *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* with an epigraph from Celan’s

29 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), 93; idem, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), 118.

30 Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 155–156 (emphasis in original).

31 Robert Bernasconi, “No Exit: Levinas’ Aporetic Account of Transcendence,” *Research in Phenomenology* 35 (2005): 101–117. Here it is worth recalling the comment regarding the melancholic individual made by Freud in his study “Trauer und Melancholie,” completed on May 4, 1915, but not published until 1917, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14: *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Meta-psychology and Other Works (1914–1916)*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 246: “He also seems to us justified in certain other self-accusations; it is merely that he has a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic. When in his heightened self-criticism he describes himself as petty, egoistic, dishonest, lacking in independence, one whose sole aim has been to hide the weaknesses of his own nature, it may be, so far as we know, that he has come pretty near to his understanding himself; we only wonder why a man has to be ill before he can be accessible to a truth of this kind.”

32 Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 252–253.

poem “Lob der Ferne,”³³ *Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin*, “I am you, when I am I.”³⁴ Ostensibly, Levinas’s analysis of the dependence of self-consciousness on the consciousness of the other is an exegesis of this comment. In his own words, “It is as though subjective life in the form of consciousness consisted in being itself losing itself and finding itself again so as to *possess itself* by showing itself, proposing itself as a theme, exposing itself in truth. This identification is not the *counterpart* of any image; it is a claim of the mind, proclamation, saying, kerygma.”³⁵ In some measure still indebted to Husserlian phenomenology, consciousness signifies the relationship with beings; however, deviating significantly from his mentor, Levinas maintains that this relationship is not to be construed as the adequation or correspondence between the thought of the knower and the object that is known. Moreover, in contrast to Heidegger, Levinas rejects the idea that the relationship of consciousness to being is determined primarily as the potential of Dasein’s being-in-the-world to disclose poetically the being that is veiled in its unveiling, a vision “where the relation of the subject with the object is subordinated to the relation of the object with light, which is not an object. The understanding of a being will thus consist in going beyond that being (*l’étant*) into the *openness* and in perceiving it *upon the horizon of being*.”³⁶ As Levinas correctly notes, Heidegger unwittingly reaffirms the tradition that has informed Western philosophy: “to comprehend the particular being is already to place oneself beyond the particular. To comprehend is to be related to the particular that only exists through knowledge, which is always knowledge of the universal.”³⁷ Despite Heidegger’s concerted effort to overcome the idealist correlation of thinking and being, epitomized by the Parmenidean dictum *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*, “For it is the same thing to think and to be,”³⁸ he succumbs nevertheless to the supposition

33 *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 24–25.

34 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 99; idem, *Autrement qu’être*, 125. Compare Eric Kligerman, *Sites of the Uncanny: Paul Celan, Specularity and the Visual Arts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 66; Matthew Del Nevo, “The Kabbalistic Heart of Levinas,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 52 (2011): 185.

35 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 99 (emphasis in original); idem, *Autrement qu’être*, 125.

36 Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 5 (emphasis in original).

37 Ibid.

38 Parmenides, Fragment 3, in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 42. See also Fragment 8.34, *tauton desti noein te kai houneken esti noēma*, rendered in Freeman, *Ancilla*, 44: “To think is the same as the thought that It Is,” which is to say, as the continuation of the aphorism

that our relation to being cannot be anything but the comprehension of that being unless the latter is the absolute other whose invocation of necessity – by virtue of its unassimilable alterity – overflows comprehension. If we presume that is the case, then the truth of being is implemented as the nonintentional simultaneity enunciated in the response of sympathy or love,³⁹ *the resistance of what has no resistance – the ethical resistance*.⁴⁰ Ethical resistance – facing the face of the other that cannot be subsumed under the stamp of the same and thereby effaced – portends the presence of infinity,⁴¹ whence it follows that the ethical condition, which is the essence of language, is “prior to all disclosure of being and its cold splendor.”⁴² Regarding the “presentation of the face,” we cannot say that it is true, “for the true refers to the non-true, its eternal contemporary, and ineluctably meets with the smile and silence of the skeptic. The presentation of being in the face does not leave any logical place for its contradictory.”⁴³ Hence, the “true universality of reason” is grounded in the irrecusable duty that results from the opening of the face to another human being, the epiphany that occasions the “discourse that obliges the entering into discourse.... Preexisting the disclosure of being in general taken as basis of knowledge and as meaning of being is the relation with the existent that

makes clear, without what is, that is, being, there is no thought, and hence thinking and that of which there is thinking are the same. See Néstor-Luis Cordero, *By Being, It Is: The Thesis of Parmenides* (Las Vegas: Parmenides, 2004), 81 n. 339, 86–87. Concerning these Parmenidean teachings, see Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 145–155; idem, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* [GA 40] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), 145–155.

39 Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 6. Particularly instructive is the remark in Emmanuel Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets de captivité suivi de Écrits sur la captivité et Notes philosophiques diverses*, ed. Rodolphe Calin (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2009), 409: “La pensée de l’origine – c’est **tradition**. Je ne dis pas que le contenu transmis sur l’origine est la vérité sur l’origine. La vérité sur l’origine – la **relation avec** l’origine = accueil d’un enseignement. Vérité n’est pas ici *adaequatio rei ac intellectus* – mais tradition. Vérité = simultanéité. Se débarrasser de la vérité = dévoilement.” The concluding statement – I have followed the suggestion in the accompanying note to correct *débarrasse* to *débarrasser* – that commends ridding ourselves of the sense of truth as unveiling strikes me as a critique of Heidegger’s *alētheia*. For the influence of this Heideggerian theme on Levinas, see Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 141–144, and the discussion in Wolfson, *Giving*, 100–101.

40 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), 199; idem, *Totalité et infini* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), 173.

41 Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 55.

42 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 200; idem, *Totalité et infini*, 175.

43 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 201; idem, *Totalité et infini*, 175.

expresses himself; preexisting the plane of ontology is the ethical plane.”⁴⁴ The attentive ear will assuredly hear the criticism of Heidegger in these statements: the indisputable truth disclosed through love in the visage of the other – the truth that does not logically allow for any contradictory – is not subject to the Heideggerian contention that truth as *alētheia*, the unconcealment of the concealment in the concealment of the unconcealment, necessitates that untruth belongs inextricably to truth.⁴⁵

The human subject becomes conscious of a particular being when it grasps that being across an unbridgeable chasm of ideality that disrupts the immanence of the said; indeed, insofar as an interlocutor can at all times break through and impede the said, discourse qua discourse belies the claim to totalize, even in the case of the ultimate discourse, that is, the discourse that presumes to thematize and to envelop all things.⁴⁶ The said “remains an insurmountable equivocation, where meaning refuses simultaneity, does not enter into being, does not compose a whole.” To the extent that the saying proceeds from and heralds the relationship of one-for-the-other, it is repeatedly a “subversion of essence.”⁴⁷ Levinas thus compares the verbal act of saying to the writing

44 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 201; idem, *Totalité et infini*, 175. The epiphany of the face translates theologically into the phenomenon of revelation. See Emmanuel Levinas, “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 208–209: “The Revelation, described in terms of the ethical relation or the relation with the Other, is a mode of the relation with God and discredits both the figure of the Same and knowledge in their claim to be the only site of meaning (*signification*).... Should we not go beyond the consciousness which is equal to itself, seeking always to assimilate the Other (*l'Autre*), and emphasize instead the act of deference to the other in his alterity, which can only come about through the awakening of the Same – drowsy in his identity – by the Other? The form of this awakening ... is obedience. And, surely, the way to think about the consciousness which is adequate to itself is as a mode or modification of this awakening, this disruption which can never be absorbed, of the Same by the Other, in his difference. Surely we should think of the Revelation, not in terms of received wisdom, but as this awakening?”

45 For a more extensive discussion of the inseparability of truth and untruth in Heidegger's idea of *alētheia*, see Wolfson, *Giving*, 48–52, 130–131 (where I discuss Levinas's interpretation of this matter in Heidegger and Blanchot); idem, *Duplicity*, 6, 131–145; idem, *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Poiesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 4, 17 n. 31, 20 n. 61, 39, 94 n. 170, 120, 158, 266, 304–305, 324 nn. 66 and 72. For previous studies on Heidegger's notion of truth, see the sources cited in Wolfson, *Giving*, 314–315 n. 106, 316 n. 128, 347 n. 339; idem, *Duplicity*, 251–252 n. 1; idem, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 17 n. 29; to which may be added Rudolf Bernet, “Phenomenological Concepts of Untruth in Husserl and Heidegger,” in *Husserl: German Perspectives*, ed. John J. Drummond and Otfried Höffe, trans. Hayden Kee, Patrick Eldridge, and Robin Litscher Wilkins (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 239–262.

46 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 170; idem, *Autrement qu'être*, 216–217.

47 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 170; idem, *Autrement qu'être*, 216.

of a book. Prima facie, we might think that “writing the saying” results in the “pure said,” that is, the “simultaneousness of the saying and of its conditions.” However, Levinas insists – perhaps reflecting the plurivocality of the rabbinic hermeneutic⁴⁸ – that the book displays the nature of an interrupted discourse, calling for other books and being subject to a process of interpretation – a process that continues potentially ad infinitum – whereby the saying will be rendered distinct from the said.⁴⁹ Traditionally, saying is the act of making signs to communicate with the other, the sign that signifies the giving of signs. But the saying to which Levinas refers is an excess of words that

opens me to the other before saying what is said, before the said uttered in this sincerity forms a screen between me and the other. This saying without a said is thus like silence.... If silence speaks, it is not through some inward mystery or some sort of ecstasy of intentionality, but through the hyperbolic passivity of giving, which is prior to all willing and thematization. Saying bears witness to the other of the Infinite which rends me, which in the saying awakens me.⁵⁰

We revert again to the issue of sleep or the lack thereof, the arousal or the awakening that ensues from the testimony of the saying that precedes the said, the testimony of the responsibility that I have toward the other, a “pure testimony” that is not dependent on the disclosure of a prior religious experience, an obedience that precedes the hearing of any order, a testimony that attests “to the Infinite which is not accessible to the unity of apperception, non-appearing and disproportionate to the present.”⁵¹

By gesturing toward the proximity of the absolutely other, the other that cannot be conceived noetically or visualized imagistically,⁵² the saying divulges the trace of infinity configured in its disfiguration as the *imageless image of*

48 Wolfson, *Giving*, 135 and reference cited on 392 n. 368.

49 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 171; idem, *Autrement qu'être*, 217. The same sentiment underlies the remark in Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 120: “Whatever our mistrust towards the letter and our thirst for the Spirit may be, monotheistic humanity is a humanity of the Book. Scriptural tradition provides the trace of a beyond of this very tradition.”

50 Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 170.

51 Ibid.

52 See Philippe Crignon, “Figuration: Emmanuel Levinas and the Image,” *Yale French Studies* 104 (2004): 100–125; Hagi Kanaan, “Facing Images: After Levinas,” *Angelaki* 16 (2011): 143–159; and my own comments in Wolfson, *Giving*, 141–146, esp. 144–145.

the possible,⁵³ the appearance of the inapparent,⁵⁴ the invisible manifest as the nonmanifest in the face of the stranger for whom I am unconditionally responsible,⁵⁵ a responsibility that “does not derive from any commitment, project or antecedent disclosure, in which the subject would be posited for itself before being-in-debt.”⁵⁶ The devotion to the other is a form of passivity in the extreme that Levinas most often characterizes by the image of exposedness to the face of the other, the awakening to the “shudder of incarnation through which *giving* takes on meaning, as the primordial dative of *for another*.”⁵⁷

A face does not function in proximity as a sign of a hidden God who would impose the neighbor on me. It is a trace of itself, a trace in the trace of an abandon, where the equivocation is never dissipated. It obsesses the subject without staying in correlation with him, without equalling me in a consciousness, ordering me before appearing, in the glorious increase of obligation.... A face as a trace, trace of itself, trace expelled in a trace, does not signify an indeterminate phenomenon; its ambiguity is not an indetermination of a noema, but an invitation to the fine risk of approach qua approach, to the exposure of one to the other, to the exposure of this exposedness, the expression of exposure, saying. In the approach of a face the flesh becomes word [*la chair se fait verbe*], the caress a saying. The thematization of a face undoes the face and undoes the approach. The mode in which a face indicates its own absence in my responsibility requires a description that can be formed only in ethical language.⁵⁸

Polemicalizing against the foundational myth of Christianity, Levinas emphasizes that the word does not become flesh through the hypostatic presencing of the father in the body of the son – the theological dogma that is the philosophical corollary to the thematization of the face as a result of which the equivocation between transcendent and immanent is dissipated – but rather the flesh becomes word through the saying of the other, the face of the trace expelled in the trace, the trace that perseveres in the absence of being present, the evocation that fosters the “primordial discourse whose first word is

53 The expression of Adorno is applied to Levinas by Bettina Bergo, “The Face in Levinas,” *Angelaki* 16 (2011): 34.

54 On the phenomenology of the inapparent in Heidegger and Levinas, see Wolfson, *Giving*, 94–102.

55 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 91, 93; idem, *Autrement qu'être*, 115, 118.

56 Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 169.

57 Ibid., 168 (emphasis in original).

58 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 94; idem, *Autrement qu'être*, 119–120.

obligation.”⁵⁹ In facing the face, the breach is not eliminated; the tender beauty of the face preserves

the very gap between approach and approached, a disparity, a non-intentionality, a non-teleology.... Proximity, immediacy, is to enjoy and to suffer by the other. But I can enjoy and suffer by the other because I-am-for-the-other, am signification, because the contact with skin is still a proximity of a face, a responsibility, an obsession with the other, being-one-for-the-other, which is the very birth of *signification* beyond *being*.⁶⁰

Levinas effectively inverts the premise and the conclusion of Celan’s poetic syllogism: the subjectivity implied in the tautological statement “I am I” is realized only to the extent that one gauges that “I am you,” which is not to say that the difference between self and other is overcome, but rather that the interiority of being-for-oneself is constituted by the exteriority of being-for-the-other, the exterior that one absolutely can neither take in nor possess.⁶¹ Freedom consists of renouncing the imperialism proper to the ego⁶² by fathoming that the obligation with regard to the other is to be placed before the obligation to oneself, that justice enduringly demands that the other takes priority to the same.⁶³ “The relation with the Other as a relation with his transcendence – the relation with the Other who puts into question the brutal spontaneity of one’s immanent destiny – introduces into me what was not in me.”⁶⁴ The I that says I is thus “not that which singularizes or individuates a concept or a genus. It is I, unique in its genus, who speaks to you in the first person. That is, unless one could maintain that it is in the individuation of the genus or the concept of the ego that I myself awaken and expose myself to others, that is, begin to speak.”⁶⁵ The deeply personal nature of the encounter with the face is predicated, therefore, on a depersonalization, the infinite task of liberation, as opposed to nihilation, which consists of the I drawing back from its object and from itself⁶⁶ – the consciousness of self depleted of the self of consciousness,⁶⁷ a depletion that Levinas demarcates as the incessant reception of the teaching

59 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 201; idem, *Totalité et infini*, 175.

60 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 90 (emphasis in original); idem, *Autrement qu’être*, 114.

61 Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 55.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 53.

64 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 203; idem, *Totalité et infini*, 178.

65 Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 168.

66 Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 84.

67 Wolfson, *Giving*, 111, 137.

of infinity, an incessant overflowing of self, which he further presumes is commensurate with the nature of time.⁶⁸ Bearing this in mind, Gillian Rose spoke of “Levinas’s *Buddhist* Judaism,”⁶⁹ which she further explains: “The self, according to this new ethics, cannot experience truly transforming loss, but plunders the world for the booty of its self-seeking interest. To become ethical, this self is to be devastated, traumatised, unthroned, by the commandment to substitute *the other* for itself.”⁷⁰ The altruistic underpinning of the ethics promulgated by Levinas comes with the sacrificial price of the self-divestiture and self-negation before the infinite other that the ego identifies as the transcendence against which it must constantly struggle.⁷¹

Levinas further depicts the anonymity of this nocturnal experience as “the very return of presence into the void left by absence – not the return of *some thing*, but of a presence,” a presence, that is, with nothing present, the “reawakening of the *there is* in the heart of negation.”⁷² This can be compared profitably to mourning without an object to be mourned, the melancholic feeling of bereavement determined by the intransience of there being nothing that can be lost and therefore nothing that can be found.⁷³ The disenchantment of melancholia on the psychological plane corresponds on the more communal-historical plane to Jewish messianism and its propagating an overflowing of sense by the nonsense of the disequilibrium wrought as a consequence of the disconnect between expectation and denial, the pure evacuation of

68 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 204; idem, *Totalité et infini*, 178–179.

69 Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37 (emphasis in original). On the possible similarity between the Levinasian *ily a* and the Buddhist notion of the emptiness that is the fullness of being, see the brief comment in Wolfson, *Giving*, 136.

70 Rose, *Mourning*, 37.

71 Espen Hammer, “Being Bored: Heidegger on Patience and Melancholy,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12 (2004): 292.

72 Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 62 (emphasis in original).

73 John Drabinski, “Beginning’s Abyss: On Solitude in Nietzsche and Levinas,” in *Nietzsche and Levinas: “After the Death of a Certain God,”* ed. Jill Stauffer and Bettina Bergo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 134–149, esp. 136–137. See as well Stine Holte, *Meaning and Melancholy in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 133–139. The pairing of mourning and melancholia on the part of Levinas should be contrasted with Freud’s classic study “Trauer und Melancholie,” translated in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 14, 243–258. Whereas Levinas delineated the melancholic state as a mourning without an object to be mourned, Freud maintained that both mourning and melancholia are psychic strategies to deal with a sense of libidinal deprivation, the former a reaction to the loss of a person or to the loss of some abstraction that has taken the place of a person, and the latter a turning inward predicated on the loss of the capacity to love, which leads to a diminution of one’s self-regard and an inhibition of all activity.

the prospect of repair beyond the acceptance of the nonreparative character of repair. In Levinas's own turn of phrase, the messianic resolve of *awaiting without an awaited* is disclosive of the diachronic nature of time as inadequation, the "always of noncoincidence, but also the *always* of the *relationship*, an aspiration and an awaiting, a thread finer than an ideal line that diachrony does not cut."⁷⁴ The insatiable desire underlying the messianic ideal peculiar to Judaism reveals more universally the cadence of temporal transcendence that comports as the distance that is distant by being proximate and proximate by being distant. Expressing a similar sentiment, Gershom Scholem mused in the essay he wrote to honor Bloch, "The water that separates us is too shallow to provide the necessary depth for the development of a true encounter."⁷⁵ In Levinasian terms, I can approach the other only if the infinity of the fissure between us is preserved. Furthermore, as I have argued with respect to the phenomenological landscape of the dream,⁷⁶ the hope imparted by the messianic belief so construed renews itself sporadically as the hope deferred perpetually. Neither pessimism nor optimism seems apposite to categorize the bequeathing of hope through its adjournment, a pure futurity that would be compromised if the future were ever to abandon its status as that which is present only by being absent and absent only by being present. Hope can be envisioned as the unremitting projection of an elementally calibrated retrospection, to foretell what has been in the recollection of what is to come. Every undertaking, on this score, entails a relapse of what never was, divulging thereby the department of time as the recurrence of the same difference that is differently the same, the loop of the double negative that yields the positivity of our becoming the being we are not, a penchant well understood through the centuries by mystic visionaries.

The philosophic import of the melancholic nature of the asymptotic curvature of messianic time, and by extension of the finitude of temporality more generally, that we educed from Levinas strikingly parallels the despondent implications of Scholem's theopolitical Zionism. We would do well to draw attention to the beginning of the poem "Traurige Erlösung," composed by Scholem in 1926, three years after his arrival in Jerusalem:

74 Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 32 (emphasis in original). See Wolfson, *Giving*, 113–120.

75 Gershom Scholem, "On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time" and *Other Essays*, ed. Avraham Shapira, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1997), 216.

76 Elliot R. Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 222. I have taken the liberty to repeat some of my language here.

Der Glanz aus Zion scheint vergangen
 das Wirkliche hat sich gewehrt.
 Wird nun sein Strahl, noch unversehrt
 ins Innere der Welt gelangen?

The light of Zion is seen no more,
 the real now has won the day.
 Will its still untarnished ray
 attain the world's innermost core?⁷⁷

Remarkably, at this early stage, Scholem was already expressing doubt about the potential of Zionism to transform the world materially.⁷⁸ The poem ends with an ostensible glimmer of hope:

Nie konnte Gott dir näher sein,
 als wo Verzweiflung auch zerbirst:
 in Zions selbstversunkenem Licht.

77 Gershom Scholem, *The Fullness of Time: Poems*, trans. Richard Sieburth, introduced and annotated by Steven M. Wasserstrom (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2003), 68–69. The influence of Benjamin's preoccupation with mourning (*Trauer*) in Scholem's poem is duly noted by Wasserstrom, *ibid.*, 146. The poem is reproduced with slight modification in Gershom Scholem, *Poetica: Schriften zur Literatur, Übersetzungen, Gedichte*, ed. Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink, Hannah Markus, Martin Treml, and Sigrid Weigel with the assistance of Theresia Heuer (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019), 717.

78 Lina Barouch, "The Erasure and Endurance of Lament: Gershom Scholem's Early Critique of Zionism and Its Language," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 21 (2014): 13–26. It goes without saying that the bibliography of scholarly analyses of Scholem's Zionism is quite extensive. I will here mention a modest sampling of the relevant studies: David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 8–10, 53–72, 171–196, 207–210; *idem*, "Scholem und der moderne Nationalismus," in *Gershom Scholem: Zwischen den Disziplinen*, edited by Peter Schäfer and Gary Smith (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 257–274; Nathan Rotenstreich, "Gershom Scholem's Conception of Jewish Nationalism," in *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 104–119; Daniel Weidner, *Gershom Scholem: Politisches, esoterisches und historiographisches Schreiben* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2003), 40–54, 69–73, 91–103, 105–121; Pierre Bouretz, *Witnesses for the Future: Philosophy and Messianism*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 224–351, esp. 231–251, 335–348; Zohar Maor, "Scholem and Rosenzweig: Redemption and (Anti-)Zionism," *Modern Judaism* 37 (2017): 1–23; Amir Engel, *Gershom Scholem: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 26–61, 94–123, 168–198; Noam Zadoff, *Gershom Scholem: From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back*, trans. Jeffrey Green (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2018), 3–83.

God never comes more close
 than when despair bursts into shards:
 in Zion's self-engulfing light.⁷⁹

To my ear, the image of God coming close when despair bursts into shards likely reflects the cosmological myth of Lurianic kabbalah, according to which the light of infinity is dispersed into the world through the cataclysmic shattering of the vessels. From Scholem's perspective, the image is ambiguous insofar as hope is framed in apocalyptic terms whence he adduces in a manner that is consonant with Levinas that the most proximate is the most distant: the divine presence is most palpable in the place from which that presence has absconded; the God most exposed is the God who is hiding.⁸⁰ The light that engulfs Zion can emerge only from a rupture just as Luria taught that the light that sustains reality is constituted by the sparks attached to the fragments of the vessels that have been broken. Extrapolating further we can postulate that the juxtaposition of redemption and melancholy in the poem's title amply underscores the unassailable sense of the tragic and catastrophic nature of reality, on the one hand, and the saturnine distrust⁸¹ in the prospect of rectification of the world's blemish, on the other hand. The point is accentuated as well in the concluding stanza of Scholem's poem "Begegnung mit Zion und der Welt (*Der Untergang*)," dated June 23, 1930:

Was innen war, ist nach Außen
 verwandelt, der Traum in Gewalt,
 und wieder sind wir draußen
 und Zion hat keine Gestalt.

What was within is now without,
 the dream twists into violence,

79 Scholem, *Fullness of Time*, 68–69; idem, *Poetica*, 717.

80 See the emotive beginning of the poem "W. B." in Scholem, *Fullness of Time*, 62–63: *Trauernder, nah mir und doch stets verborgen*, "Mournful one, near to me yet always in hiding." See Scholem, *Poetica*, 702.

81 See my application of this term to Benjamin in Wolfson, "Not Yet Now," 169–170 n. 160, and the citation there of other studies that address the phenomenon of melancholy in Scholem and Benjamin. For the revised version, see Wolfson, *Suffering Time*, 628 n. 177. In *Origin*, 155, Benjamin remarks that Renaissance thinkers "reinterpreted saturnine melancholy in the sense of a theory of genius, and did so with a radicality unprecedented in the thought of antiquity." The nexus between melancholy and creativity can be attributed to late antiquity. See the reference cited below, n. 131.

and once again we stand outside
and Zion is without form or sense.⁸²

Striking a similar note in the opening stanzas of the poem “Media in Vita,” composed between 1930 and 1933, Scholem wrote:

Ich habe den Glauben verloren
der mich hierher gebracht.
Doch seit ich abgeschworen,
ist es um mich Nacht.

Das Dunkel der Niederlage
zieht mich unheimlich an;
seit ich keine Fahne mehr trage,
bin ich ein ehrlicher Mann.

I have lost the faith
that brought me to this place.
And in the wake of this forsaking,
night is my surrounding space.

I am uncannily attracted
by the darkness of this defeat;
since I no longer carry any banners,
I'm as honest a man you'll ever meet.⁸³

Despite – or perhaps on account of – his allegiance to Zionist ideology, Scholem's faith turned, as it did for Kafka, on the bleakness that hope inescapably galvanizes. There is a sense of pride in the honest acknowledgement that he is attracted to the darkness of defeat, having lost the fervor that motivated his emigration to Palestine. Scholem's melancholy is brought to the fore in his candidly admitting that he can no longer carry any banners for the ideology that failed to materialize historically. In the concluding part of another poem composed in 1933 on the occasion of the wedding of Kitty Marx and Karl Steinschneider, “Mit Einem Exemplar von Walter Benjamins ‘Einbahnstraße,’” Scholem reiterated the primacy accorded to melancholy in the religious outlook of Benjamin and in his own worldview:

82 Scholem, *Fullness of Time*, 88–89; idem, *Poetica*, 726.

83 Scholem, *Fullness of Time*, 94–95; idem, *Poetica*, 727.

In alten Zeiten führten alle Bahnen
zu Gott und seinem Namen irgendwie.
Wir sind nicht fromm. Wir bleiben im Profanen,
und wo einst "Gott" stand, steht Melancholie.

In days of old all roads somehow led
to God and to his name.
We are not devout. Our domain is the profane,
and where "God" once stood, Melancholy takes his place.⁸⁴

An arresting intonation of the disconsolate disposition that informed Scholem's spiritual sensibility: the sacred has given way to the profane and melancholia takes the place of the divine. Reality is described in the last stanza of the poem "Media in Vita" as *der Abgrund des Nichts, in dem die Welt erscheint*, "that abyss of nothingness in which the world appears."⁸⁵ It is probable that this language is indebted to the kabbalistic axiom that all existents are manifest in the concealment of *Ein Sof*, the nihilating nonground of being.⁸⁶ For Scholem, however, this abyss of nothingness is not an infinite being – the supreme gradation on the ontological ladder, the nonimplicative negation of the *hyperousios* of the Neoplatonic tradition, the being beyond being, the being otherwise than being, the essence not properly called essence, in the locution of John Scotus Eriugena, the essence above essence (*superessentia essentia*)⁸⁷ – but the aggregate of finite beings that constitute the infinitude in the very absence of such a being. The metaphysical distinction between real and apparent is no longer viable because there is no reality behind or beyond the appearance;

84 Scholem, *Fullness of Time*, 98–99; idem, *Poetica*, 731. Regarding this statement of Scholem, see Idel, *Saturn's Jews*, 91.

85 Scholem, *Fullness of Time*, 96–97; idem, *Poetica*, 728. Mention should be made of Scholem's expression "nothingness of revelation" (*Nichts der Offenbarung*) referenced in the letter of Benjamin to Scholem from August 11, 1934, and in Scholem's response to Benjamin from September 20, 1934, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932–1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem, trans. Gary Smith and Andre Lefevere (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 135 and 142. See Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 233, and references to other scholars cited in n. 166, to which one might add David Kaufmann, "Imageless Refuge for All Images: Scholem in the Wake of Philosophy," *Modern Judaism* 20 (2000): 154–155; Ilit Ferber, "A Language of the Border: On Scholem's Theory of Lament," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 21 (2013): 169–170.

86 Elliot R. Wolfson, "Nihilating Nonground and the Temporal Sway of Becoming: Kabbalistically Envisioning Nothing Beyond Nothing," *Angelaki* 17 (2012): 31–45.

87 Dermot Moran, "Spiritualis Incrassatio: Eriugena's Intellectualist Immaterialism: Is It an Idealism?," in *Eriugena, Berkeley, and the Idealist Tradition*, ed. Stephen Gersh and Dermot Moran (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 131.

what is real is the cleft in space-time wherein the really apparent is apparently real and the apparently real is really apparent.

Scholem's words about the abyss of nothingness bring to mind Benjamin's comment in the "Theologisch-Politisches Fragment" that humanity's quest for happiness, which is the foundation of the secular world or the profane order, "runs counter to the messianic direction," and thus it is inevitable that the "immediate messianic intensity of the heart, of the inner man in isolation [*des inner einzelnen Menschen*], passes through misfortune, as suffering."⁸⁸ The messianic is inexorably intertwined with torment since it provokes not happiness (*Glück*) but misfortune (*Unglück*). Insofar as the "worldly restitution," which corresponds to the spiritual *restitutio in integrum*, leads to an "eternity of downfall" – the agonizing adjudication that the only thing permanent is impermanence – the method appropriate to the "task of world politics" (*Aufgabe der Weltpolitik*) is nihilism.⁸⁹ I concur with Rose's educing from this passage – following the reading proffered by Jacob Taubes – that the political agenda envisaged by Benjamin "presupposes the inner man in isolation, able to bear a suffering that promises neither realization nor redemption. *E contrario*, it implies misfortune which is unable to bear this suffering, a thirst for

88 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3: 1935–1938, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et al., ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 305; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2.1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 203–204.

89 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 3:306; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2.1:204. For an analysis of this text as the framework within which to evaluate Benjamin's early thinking on history and redemption, see Eric Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 19–51. See also the attempt of Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann et al., trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 72–74, to read Benjamin's insistence on world politics as nihilism in light of the use of the expression *hōs mē* ("as not") by Paul in his description of the *kairós* in 1 Corinthians 7:29. On Heidegger's explication of this locution, which he translates as *als ob nicht*, "as if not," see Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 33–34, whose reading has much affinity to the interpretation I proffered in Wolfson, *Giving*, 231–232, of Heidegger's rendering of the expression *ouk edexanto*, "they received not," in 2 Thessalonians 2:10, as an "enactmental not" (*vollzugsmäßige Nicht*). For discussion of Agamben and the structure of messianic time, and Paul's exhortation for the community to love *hōs mē*, see Elizabeth A. Castelli, "The Philosophers' Paul in the Frame of the Global," in *Paul and the Philosophers*, ed. Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 151–153. On *hōs mē* and Paul's meontology according to Heidegger, see also Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 177–183; idem, "You Are Not Your Own: On the Nature of Faith," in *Paul and the Philosophers*, 236–240.

the realization of entreated redemption, for the politics of the world, and total perdition.”⁹⁰ As Rose astutely observes,

The object, style and mood of Benjamin’s philosophy converge, not in the Christian mournfulness or melancholy, discerned from the Baroque *Trauerspiel* to Baudelaire, but in the Judaic state of desertion – in Hebrew, *agunah* – the stasis which his agon with the law dictates.... Benjamin is the *taxonomist of sadness*, and he adds figures of melancholy to the philosophical repertoire of modern experiences ... stoicism, scepticism, the unhappy consciousness, resignation and *ressentiment*.⁹¹

Benjamin together with Bloch, as Scholem judiciously noted, shared what he deemed to be the innately impossible goal of superimposing mystical experience, understood as an anarchistic turning toward messianism, upon the coordinates of a Marxist system.⁹² The hybridity, in no small touch of irony, led the two atheist metaphysicians to reclaim the melancholic temperament of Jewish utopianism predicated on the obdurate impossibility and noneschatological nature of the future. History does not progress toward any end nor is the anguish of time alleviated by a divine fiat. And just as there is no advance to a utopia at the end, so there is no return to a paradise at the beginning. The psychogenic structure of melancholia, consequently, does not entail the retrieval of a lost object à la Freud’s taxonomy of the abandoned object-cathexis, that is, the response to a loss that redirects the allocation of psychic energy from the external entity to the internal space of the ego.⁹³ Melancholia is precisely

90 Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 189. See Rebecca Comay, “Benjamin’s Endgame,” in *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), 246–285.

91 Rose, *Judaism and Modernity*, 181 (emphasis in original). The topic of melancholia and Benjamin’s thought has been explored by a number of scholars. For instance, see Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Ilit Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin’s Early Reflections on Theater and Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

92 Scholem, *On the Possibility*, 217–218. See Warren S. Goldstein, “Messianism and Marxism: Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch’s Dialectical Theories of Secularization,” *Critical Sociology* 27 (2001): 246–281.

93 Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 167–198, and especially her comment on p. 174: “The internal topography by which melancholia is partially explained is itself the effect of that melancholia. Walter Benjamin remarks that melancholia spatializes, and that its effort to reverse or suspend time produces ‘landscapes’ as its signature effect. One might profitably read the Freudian topography that melancholy occasions as precisely such a spatialized landscape of the

the absence of such an absence and the consequent discovery that there is nothing to discover and hence nothing to recover. The melancholiac is marked by an inability to speak because there is nothing of which to speak, not even the unspeakable. As Judith Butler put it in her analysis of Freud,

What cannot be declared by the melancholic is nevertheless what governs melancholic speech – an unspeakability that organizes the field of the speakable.... What the melancholic does declare, namely, his own worthlessness, identifies the loss at the sight of the ego and, hence, continues to fail to identify the loss. Self-beratement takes the place of abandonment, and becomes the token of its refusal.⁹⁴

Mystical anarchists wear the melancholic reprimand of self as a badge of honor.

Mention should be made of Benjamin's "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen," written in 1916 but not published in his lifetime. According to Benjamin's reading of the Genesis narrative, originally, there was a clear-cut distinction between the blissful life of the human in the "pure spirit of language" and the mute constitution of nature, which becomes somewhat blissful when it is named by Adam.⁹⁵ The *Sprachgeist* initially entailed the "immediacy in the communication of the concrete," that is, the name that Adam gave to all beings, but, as a consequence of his transgression in the Garden of Eden – referred to in the overtly Christian-inflected term *Sündenfall* – the "immediacy in the communication of abstraction came into being as judgment," the "abyss of the mediateness" symbolized by the Tree of Knowledge, which does not "dispense information on good and evil" but is rather "an emblem of judgment" over the one who would question about good and evil, an irony that "marks the mythic origin of law."⁹⁶ After the fall,

mind." For comparison of Freud and Benjamin on melancholy and the commitment to the lost object, see also Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy*, 32–41. For another comparison of Freud and Benjamin, related to the depiction of Shakespeare's Hamlet as the paradigmatic melancholiac, see Steinberg, "Music and Melancholy," 293.

94 Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 186.

95 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 72; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2.1.154.

96 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:72; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2.1.154. Benjamin revisited the Genesis narrative in the *Trauerspiel*. See Benjamin, *Origin*, 255–256: "The Bible introduces evil with the concept of knowledge. To become as one 'knowing good and evil' – this is what the serpent promises the first human beings.... Knowledge of good and evil is thus contrary to all objective knowledge. Referring as it does to the depths of the

God cursed the earth and the appearance of nature was “deeply changed” from an aboriginal speechlessness (*Sprachlosigkeit*) to a muteness (*Stummheit*) that bespeaks a melancholic mourning far more profound than the need to be named that arises from the incapacity to name:

Now begins its other muteness, which is what we mean by the “deep sadness of nature” [*der tiefen Traurigkeit der Natur*]. It is a metaphysical truth that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language (though “to endow with language” is more than “to make able to speak”). This proposition has a double meaning. It means, first, that she would lament language itself [*sie würde über die Sprache selbst klagen*]. Speechlessness: that is the great sorrow of nature [*das große Leid der Natur*] (and for the sake of her redemption the life and language of *man* – not only, as is supposed, of the poet – are in nature). This proposition means, second, that she would lament [*sie würde klagen*]. Lament, however, is the most undifferentiated, impotent expression of language [*der undifferenzierteste, ohnmächtige Ausdruck der Sprache*]... Because she is mute, nature mourns. Yet the inversion of this proposition leads even further into the essence of nature; the sadness of nature makes her mute. In all mourning there is the deepest inclination to speechlessness, which is infinitely more than the inability or disinclination to communicate.⁹⁷

Reflecting on this passage, Derrida noted that, according to Benjamin, “the sadness, mourning, and melancholy (*Traurigkeit*) of nature and of animality are born out of this muteness (*Stummheit, Sprachlosigkeit*), but they are also born out of and by means of the wound without a name: that of having *been given a name*. Finding oneself deprived of language one loses the power to name, to name oneself, indeed to answer [*répondre*] for one’s name.”⁹⁸ It is

subjective, it is at bottom only knowledge of evil.... As the triumph of subjectivity and the inception of an arbitrary rule over things, this knowledge is the origin of all allegorical vision. In the very fall of man emerges the unity of guilt and signifying before the tree of ‘knowledge’ as abstraction. The allegorical lives in abstractions; as abstraction, as a capacity of the spirit of language itself, it is at home in the fall. For good and evil, being unnameable as they are nameless, stand outside the language of names, the language in which paradisiacal man named things and which, in the abyss opened by this question, he forsakes. The name is, for languages, only a ground in which the concrete elements are rooted. The abstract elements of language, however, are rooted in the judging word, in judgment.”

97 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:72–73; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2:1:155.

98 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 19. Derrida compares Benjamin’s

precisely the deprivation of language – the inability to name that commences with being stripped of the name that once had been given – that constitutes the great sorrow of nature, the deeper sadness expressed disconcertingly by Benjamin as nature’s lamentation, an undifferentiated and impotent expression of language, a speech without speech, the speechlessness of mourning and melancholia.

What is already more interesting is that this putative sadness doesn’t just derive from the inability to speak ... and from muteness, from a stupefied or aphasic privation of words. If this putative sadness also gives rise to a lament, if nature laments, expressing a mute but audible lament through sensuous sighing and even the rustling of plants, it is perhaps because the terms have to be inverted.... There must be a reversal, an *Umkehrung* in the essence of nature. According to the hypothesis of this reversing reversal, nature (and animality within it) isn’t sad because it is mute (*weil sie stumm ist*). On the contrary, it is nature’s sadness of mourning that renders it mute and aphasic, that leaves it without words (*Die Traurigkeit der Natur macht sie Verstummen*).⁹⁹

For Benjamin, the suffering of nature is alleviated redemptively by human language that finds expression in nature that has no language but the no more of language that is more than language, that is, the naming of the named that cannot name itself. The speechlessness of nature consists of this redemptive gesticulation, the language of lament that laments language by speaking aphasically. Melancholia mimics this desolate longing to utter the unutterable.

One can discern the impact of Benjamin on Scholem’s attempt in “Über Klage und Klagelied” (1917) to translate a series of Hebrew lamentations into German out of the conviction that the genre of lament conveys the essence of “language on the border, language of the border itself. Everything it says is infinite, but just and only infinite with regard to the symbol. In lament, nothing is

discussion of the muteness (*Stummheit*) or speechlessness (*Sprachlosigkeit*) of nature to Heidegger’s delineation in *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, based on the seminar given in 1929–1930, of the essence of animality (*das Wesen der Tierheit*) as a stupor (*Benommenheit*), the absence of language (*alagon*), that renders the animal “poor in the world” (*weltarm*). The Heideggerian text is discussed at greater length by Derrida, *The Animal*, 141–160, and especially 142–143. See also Wolfson, *Duplicity*, 70–71.

99 Derrida, *The Animal*, 19.

expressed and everything is implied.”¹⁰⁰ For Scholem, lament is a language that both reveals nothing because the being it reveals has no content and conceals nothing because its entire existence is based on a revolution of silence through which there is a restoration (*Zurückführung*) of the symbolic to the revelation that induces mourning’s self-overturning (*Sichselbst-überschlagen*) and the consequent reversal (*Umkehrung*) that “allows for the course toward language to emerge as expression.”¹⁰¹ The expression that emerges from this revolution, however, is an expression of the inexpressible, the language of silence, a kataphatic avowal of the apophatic disavowal. These dimensions of Scholem’s youthful despondency became critical to his more mature understanding of the messianic element in Judaism and to his use of the term “gnostic” as a tool of historical and phenomenological inquiry of kabbalistic sources, especially the depiction of the cosmic drama as a crisis within the inner workings of the Godhead according to the Lurianic teaching and its elaboration in the heretical myth of Sabbatian theology.¹⁰² Scholem’s celebrated remark that the messianic idea in Judaism “compelled a life lived in deferment, in which nothing can be

100 Gershom Scholem, “On Lament and Lamentation,” in *Lament in Jewish Thought: Philosophical, Theological, and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 313; idem, *Tagebücher nebst Aufsätzen und Entwürfen bis 1923*, vol. 2, 1917–1923, ed. Karlfried Gründer, Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink, and Friedrich Niewöhner, with the assistance of Karl E. Grözinger (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 2000), 128. See Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 314–315, and references to other scholars cited on 327 nn. 140–141.

101 Scholem, “On Lament,” 316; idem, *Tagebücher*, 2130.

102 Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1956), 260–264, 267–268, 269, 279–280, 286; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 143. See also Isaiah Tishby, “Gnostic Doctrines in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 6 (1955): 146–152. The Sabbatian and Frankist heresies were also characterized by Scholem as gnostic on account of their nihilism and antinomianism, as well as the positing of a dualism between the hidden God and the demiurgic potency. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 297–299, 316, 322–323; idem, “The Messianic Idea” and *Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 104–107; idem, *Sabbatai Ševi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, translated R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 253, 311–312, 797. On the importance of gnosticism in Scholem’s historiography of Jewish mysticism, see Moshe Idel, “Subversive Catalysts: Gnosticism and Messianism in Gershom Scholem’s View of Jewish Mysticism,” in *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*, ed. David N. Myers and David B. Ruderman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 39–76. See also Michael Brenner, “Gnosis and History: Polemics of German-Jewish Identity from Graetz to Scholem,” *New German Critique* 77 (1999): 45–60. For a different approach, see Agata Bielik-Robson, “The God of Luria, Hegel and Schelling: The Divine Contraction and the Modern Metaphysics of Finitude,” in *Mystical Theology and Continental Philosophy: Interchange in the Wake of God*, ed. David Lewin, Simon D. Podmore, and Duane Williams (London: Routledge, 2017), 40–41.

done definitively, nothing can be irrevocably accomplished”¹⁰³ is indicative of a pessimistic utopianism that rejects the possibility of a lasting socio-political redemption.¹⁰⁴ Scholem remained beleaguered by a sense of disjointedness in the world that was askew with his ethno-nationalist politics, a melancholic dislocation that led him to feel like a *stranger in a strange land*,¹⁰⁵ even when entrenched in the soil of what he demonstrably considered to be the Jewish homeland. Parenthetically, it is of interest to note Rosenzweig’s remark about Scholem in a letter to Rudolf Hallo, written on May 12, 1921: “He may be the only one who has actually returned home. But he came home *alone*” (*Er ist vielleicht der einzige schon wirklich Heimgekehrte, den es gibt. Aber er ist allein*

103 Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 35.

104 I have taken the liberty to repeat my analysis in Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 319–321. Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 140, reports that Rosenzweig regarded him as a nihilist. This is corroborated in the description of the “evil Scholem” (*der böse Scholem*) in Rosenzweig’s letter to Rudolf Hallo, dated March 27, 1922: “Am wenigsten mit einem Nihilisten wie Scholem. Der Nihilist behält immer recht.... In Scholem steckt das Ressentiment des Asketen.... Wir haben nicht Nichts, wie Scholem dem zionistischen Dogma zuliebe möchte, aber auch nicht Alles, wie du, verstört von Scholems kalt dir zugeschleudertem ‘Nichts’, es nun am liebsten bei mir fändest, sondern beide nur Etwas, wirklich und wahrhaftig nur Etwas.” Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften I. Briefe und Tagebücher*, vol. 2: 1918–1929, ed. Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann, with the assistance of Bernhard Casper (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 768. The connection Rosenzweig made between nihilism, the resentment of an ascetic, and the Zionist dogma is a topic that merits a separate discussion. For a preliminary analysis, see Elliot R. Wolfson, “Rosenzweig on Human Redemption: Neither Nothing nor Everything, but Only Something,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 29 (2021): 121–150. On the anarchistic and nihilistic dimensions of Scholem’s theological politics, see Jacobson, *Metaphysics*, 52–81. For discussion of the German-Jewish background of Scholem’s apocalyptic pessimism and the repudiation of the world, see Anson Rabinbach, “Between Enlightenment and Apocalypse: Benjamin, Bloch and Modern German Jewish Messianism,” *New German Critique* 34 (1985): 78–124, esp. 80–82, and my own reflections on messianic time and historical disjointedness in Benjamin in Wolfson, “Not Yet Now,” 156–180, and the revised version in idem, *Suffering Time*, 608–640. See also the intriguing discussion of the Weimar paradox as it relates to understanding National Socialism as a form of Jewish heresy predicated on the annihilation of Israel and God in William H. F. Altmann, *The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 281–300, esp. 283–287.

105 The expression, which is the scriptural etymology for the name of the firstborn son of Moses and Zipporah, Gershom, *ger hayyiti be-ereš nokhriyyah* (Exod 2:22), is appropriated from George Prochnik, *Stranger in a Strange Land: Searching for Gershom Scholem and Jerusalem* (New York: Other Press, 2016). Scholem’s disappointment with Zionism and his sense of personal despair are documented by Engel, *Gershom Scholem*, 109–115, and Zadoff, *Gershom Scholem*, 83–94.

heimgekehrt).¹⁰⁶ I gather that what Rosenzweig meant is that Scholem's Zionist ambition lacked fidelity to the traditional sense of community.¹⁰⁷ Curiously, despite their obvious differences regarding the prognosis of the future of German Jewry (*Deutschjudentum*) versus the renewal and rebirth of Jewry in the land of Israel,¹⁰⁸ Scholem and Rosenzweig shared anxieties about the

106 Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2:704.

107 It is of interest to consider the perspective on Zionism affirmed by Scholem in the essay "Abschied," published in *Jerubbaal, Eine Zeitschrift der jüdischen Jugend* 1 (1918–1919): 125–130, and translated in Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 54–60. The relevant passage appears on 55–57: "The great demand of Zionism, which is eternally one, to be a holy people, has a presupposition the misunderstanding of which is in a real sense the chimerical basis for that objective mendacity against which witness is to be given here. Community demands solitude: not the possibility of together desiring the same, but only that of common solitude establishes community. Zion, the source of our nationhood, is the common, indeed in an uncanny sense, the identical solitude of all Jews, and the religious assertion of Zionism is nothing other than this: the midst of solitude happens at the same time to be where all gather together, and there can be no other place for such a gathering together.... There is only one place from which Zion can be reached and youth restituted: solitude. And there is only one medium, brought to radiance by labor, that will be the source of renewal: the existence that must be the argument against a youth that has desecrated words." Scholem's essay was a critique of what he referred to as the "pseudo-Zionist lie of community" (p. 55) promulgated by the German Zionist youth movement, but his view is related to an idea proffered by a number of thinkers in the early part of the twentieth century, including Landauer and Buber, to the effect that true individuality is expressive of community, that the latter can only proceed from an originary aloneness, that the solitude of the contemplative is precisely what generates the possibility of genuine sociality. For discussion of this theme and citation of some of the relevant sources, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Theolatriy and the Making-Present of the Nonrepresentable: Undoing (A)Theism in Eckhart and Buber," in *Martin Buber: His Intellectual and Scholarly Legacy*, ed. Sam Berrin Shonkoff (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 5–9. Recently, David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 60–61, suggested that the tension between desire for community, on the one hand, and the need for solitude, on the other hand, may explain why Scholem "found it so hard to fulfill his Zionist dreams." Finally, mention should be made of the analysis offered by Nitzan Lebovic, *Zionism and Melancholy: The Short Life of Israel Zarchi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), of the left-wing political melancholy in the generations of Israelis in the second half of the twentieth century arising from the gap between the utopian hope of Zionist ideology and the stark reality of the realpolitik of the state.

108 Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 139–141. See Stéphane Mosès, "Langage et sécularisation chez Gershom Scholem," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 60 (1985): 87–88; idem, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 171–172. In addition to the passage from Scholem's autobiography, Mosès refers to Rosenzweig's letter to Scholem from January 5, 1922, in which he reproached the latter for positing as a "central dogma" that Judaism in the Diaspora

secularization of the holy language expedited by Zionism and the quest to become a nation state governed by the dictates of geopolitics. For both thinkers, the essence of Hebrew lies in a holiness that cannot be rendered mundane or limited territorially without distortion or destruction.¹⁰⁹ Ironically, a sense of uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*) results from the updating and actualization (*Aktualisierung*) of Hebrew in the Jewish homeland as a vernacular of everyday life and the ensuing transition from linguistic sacrality to profanity.¹¹⁰ Early on,

was in a state of apparent death and that only in the land of Israel could it be restored to life (*das Judentum scheintot ist und erst "drüben" wieder lebendig werden wird*). For the original German, see Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2:741. The material is discussed as well by Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 192–194, and see Galili Shahar, "The Sacred and the Unfamiliar: Gershom Scholem and the Anxieties of the New Hebrew," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 83 (2008): 302–308.

109 See especially the letter "Bekanntnis über unsere Sprache," in Scholem, *On the Possibility*, 28. A Hebrew version appeared in Gershom Scholem, *Explications and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance*, vol. 2, ed. Avraham Shapira (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1989), 59–60 [Hebrew]. The text was translated into French by Stéphane Mosès, "Une lettre inédite de Gershom Scholem a Franz Rosenzweig. A propos de notre langue. Une confession," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 60 (1985): 83–84, and analyzed by Mosès, "Langage et sécularisation," 85–96; idem, *The Angel of History*, 168–182. See also Michael Brocke, "Franz Rosenzweig und Gerhard Gershom Scholem," in *Juden in der Weimarer Republik: Skizzen und Porträts*, ed. Walter Grab and Julius H. Schoeps (Stuttgart: Burg Verlag, 1986), 127–152; Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 191–227; Shahar, "The Sacred," 299–320; Annabel Herzog, "'Monolingualism' or the Language of God: Scholem and Derrida on Hebrew and Politics," *Modern Judaism* 29 (2009): 226–238; Lina Barouch, *Between German and Hebrew: The Counterlanguages of Gershom Scholem, Werner Kraft and Ludwig Strauss* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 47–48. The essay, which includes a transcription of the original letter, is also available at http://www.steinheim-institut.de/edocs/bpdf/michael_brocke-franz_rosenzweig_und_gerhard_gershom_scholem.pdf. According to the signature of the German text, the letter was written on 7 Tevet 5687, which corresponds to December 12, 1926. The date given in the Hebrew, English, and French versions is December 26, 1926, which refers not to the date of composition but the date of the occasion for which the letter was written, namely, the celebration of Rosenzweig's fortieth birthday. To be precise, Rosenzweig's birthdate is December 25, but apparently it was commemorated one day after the Christmas holiday. Particularly perceptive is the conjecture of Shahar, "The Sacred," 303, that the letter written by Scholem in December 1926 was "a gesture of confession that displays the signature of friendship and rivalry."

110 On Rosenzweig's theo-philological view of Hebrew and his anxieties about Zionism as a mimicry of German nationalism, see Shahar, "The Sacred," 306: "Rosenzweig's argument on the *Unheimlichkeit* of Hebrew, its 'homelessness,' its 'uncanniness,' is bound up with the view that its theological depth and its fullness cannot be reduced to a particular historical or territorial experience, but rather should be attributed to its transcendence, its foreignness, its being like a 'guest.' Hebrew is like an eternal wanderer who lives *un-heimlich* in the world. This is how Hebrew reveals itself as an abyss – the gap, the absence, the wound of *Heimat*." Shahar, *ibid.*, 304, draws the reader's attention to

as is attested in the 1926 letter written to celebrate Rosenzweig's fortieth birthday, Scholem predicted that the secularization of Hebrew would ultimately fail since, like an abyss, the language is "pregnant with catastrophe," and the latent power therein, which consists of the divine names comprised within the ineffable name, will one day surface and assume new form.¹¹¹ The sanguinity expressed by Scholem in all likelihood was never realized, or at least there is no indication that he thought that the calamitous eruption he foretold ever came to fruition. It seems rather that the particular unease he detected as a young man with respect to the desecration of Hebrew mirrored his larger concern about the inability of the utopian ideal to be realized in space and time.

Scholem's understanding of the messianic as continual deferral has deep roots in Jewish sources, but his particular formulation is in accord with another passage from the "Theologisch-Politisches Fragment" where Benjamin writes that since the Messiah alone can redeem and complete history, nothing "historical can relate itself, from its own ground, to anything messianic [*Darum kann nichts Historisches von sich aus sich auf Messianisches beziehen wollen*]. Therefore, the Kingdom of God is not the telos of the historical dynamic; it cannot be established as a goal [*Ziel*]. For the standpoint of history, it is

Rosenzweig's "Neuhebräisch? Anlässlich der Übersetzung von Spinozas Ethik," a review of Jakob Klatzkin's Hebrew translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*, where he criticizes the hope of Zionism to create a genuinely national culture ("*echt nationale Kultur*") based on a conception of the language that is indigenous (*bodenwüchsige*). The sense of newness and future-orientation is misguided as it obscures the sanctity of Hebrew connected to the past and empowers one to invent a language that is novel and unique. To speak Hebrew correctly, one must speak it as it is and not as one wants it to be: "Man kann eben nicht so Hebräisch sprechen wie man möchte, sondern man muß es schon so sprechen, wie es einmal ist." Rosenzweig agrees that the core of all national existence is language, but he insists that this is a matter of traditional inheritance and not territorial emplacement: "Was hier allgemein gesagt ist, das gilt nun ganz und gar von dem Kern alles nationalen Daseins, von der Sprache. Sie kann nicht werden wie sie will, sondern sie wird werden wie sie muß. Und dieses Muß liegt nicht wie bei jeder natürlich-nationalen Sprache in ihr selber, sondern außerhalb ihrer Gesprochenheit, in der Erbmasse der Vergangenheit und in dem gewahrten Zusammenhang mit denen, deren Judentum notwendig wesentlich das des Erben ist." See Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften III. Zweistromland: Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken*, ed. Reinhold Mayer and Annemarie Mayer (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 727–728. Rosenzweig's review is translated into English in Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1953), 263–271. The passages to which I alluded appear on 268–270. See also Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Hebrew as a Holy Tongue: Franz Rosenzweig and the Renewal of Hebrew," in *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile*, ed. Lewis Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 222–241.

111 Scholem, *On the Possibility*, 28.

not the goal but the terminus [*Ende*].¹¹² Benjamin distinguishes sharply between the profane and the sacred, the political notion of a secular order and the theocratic idea of the divine kingdom. If we are to think of nature as messianic, it is only “by reason of its eternal and total passing away. To strive for such a passing away – even the passing away of those stages of man that are nature – is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism.”¹¹³ Scholem’s interpretation of Jewish messianism, especially as it intersects with Lurianic kabbalah and its aftermath in the Sabbatian and Frankist movements, is faithful to Benjamin’s insight that messianic redemption is not the goal of history but its end, and hence the method most appropriate to *Weltpolitik* is the nihilistic passing away of nature. The messianic objective, on this account, is not an enduring ideal to be attained at the cessation of history but rather the relentless passing away that is indicative of the eternal transience of history,¹¹⁴ a notion that pivots around the paradox of time as the present that is always the same in virtue of never being the same. To be sure, Scholem insists that the constant postponement of messianic redemption – what he calls the “anti-existentialist idea” – accounts for both the greatness and the constitutional weakness of Jewish messianism: whenever the tension between the expectation and the delay has been alleviated by an actual messianic movement, when the abyss that separates the internal-symbolic and the external historical has been crossed, it has been decried or unmasked as pseudo-messianism.¹¹⁵ The Zionist establishment of the modern state may have been born out of horror and destruction, but it jeopardizes the metahistorical and antipolitical nature of traditional Jewish eschatology, compromising its anarchic and antinomian lifeblood. Scholem thus wondered if Jewish history “will be able

112 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 3:305–306; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2.1: 203–204. Compare the detailed analysis of this text in Jacobson, *Metaphysics*, 19–51, and see Bouretz, *Witnesses*, 165–223, esp. 212–221.

113 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 3:306; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2.1:204.

114 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 407; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Herman Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 1.3:1245.

115 I have discussed this aspect of Scholem’s understanding of the messianic element in Lurianic kabbalah and Sabbatianism in Elliot R. Wolfson, “The Engenderment of Messianic Politics: Symbolic Significance of Sabbatai ʿSevi’s Coronation,” in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Mark Cohen (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 204–206. From Scholem’s perspective, the failure of Sabbatian messianism was the split between the political and the mystical, and the eventual privileging of the latter. Compare Gershom Scholem, *History of the Sabbatian Movement: Lectures Given at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1939–1940*, ed. Jonathan Meir and Shinichi Yamamoto (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 2018), 81 [Hebrew].

to endure this entry into the concrete realm without perishing in the crisis of the Messianic claim."¹¹⁶ The apocalyptic predilection incarnates the infinite negativity of time, the impossible possibility that makes it incontrovertibly possible – indeed necessary – that the future that is coming will not be the future that has been anticipated. In this space of time wherein nothing is certain but the certainty of uncertainty, belief and skepticism are no longer viably distinguishable – the messianic spectacle must be enacted, to quote Blanchot again, in the “extreme point of waiting where for a long time what is awaited has served only to maintain the waiting.... Waiting, waiting that is the refusal to wait for anything, a calm expanse unfurled by steps.... The impossibility of waiting belongs essentially to waiting.”¹¹⁷ Building on this paradox, we might say that the hopelessness of hope proceeds from the fact that the future we are awaiting can never transpire in time and the homeland we are coveting can never materialize in space.

It is feasible to construe the emphasis on open-endedness optimistically in the spirit of Bloch's ontology of not-yet.¹¹⁸ The end can be imagined only as the terminus that can never be terminated, and hence belief in the future that never comes because it is continuously coming may seem to be an unending source for the possibility of change, renewal, resurrection. The apocalyptic secret orients one to the decisive interlude in time, the future, the limitless limit, the limit that is the limit by exceeding any limit, the end close at hand impermissibly persisting in the distance. The notion of the unending end – the end that can have no ending to being the end – facilitates the inculcation of the wisdom that liberation consists of being liberated from the need to be liberated; that is, if the ending can never end, and still remain as the end, then it can never come as the end. Ingrained in the texture of Jewish apocalyptic, therefore, is the double structure of secrecy as the mystery of the past that conceals the concealment of the future revealed in the present as not being present. What is yet to be, accordingly, reverts to what has already been, but what has already been issues from what is yet to be. The melancholic *jouissance*¹¹⁹ of the apocalyptic passion stems from this linear circularity. As Scholem perceptively opined in the concluding stanza of the poem “Paraphrase, aus der Prosa des ‘Tagebuchs,’” inspired by reading Benjamin's “Metaphysik der Jugend” and written on May 12, 1918:

116 Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 35–36.

117 Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 6, 8, 24.

118 Wolfson, “Not Yet Now,” 188–193; idem, *Suffering Time*, 653–658.

119 The expression is borrowed from Steven Wasserstrom, “Melancholy *Jouissance* and the Study of Kabbalah: A Review Essay of Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 32 (2008): 389–396, at 394.

Die Zukunft war. Vergangenheit wird sein
 Die Gegenwart wird uns vor Gott entzwein
 In der Entfremdung werden wir befreit.

The future was. The past shall be
 The present will disunite us before God
 In this estrangement we shall be free.¹²⁰

We can perceive here an intricate nexus between the reversibility of time and the quest for liberation: the future was, the past shall be, and the freedom we experience is the alienation of the present that divides us before God. Counterintuitively, it is not union but division that constitutes our emancipation, which is keyed to the present, the moment of decision¹²¹ that cuts the timeline.¹²² The messianic underpinnings of the diremptive temporality alluded to in Scholem's words can be understood better if we recall his diary entry from June 17, 1918:

As a religious category, Time becomes the eternal present.... The notion of God correlates to the idea of the messianic realm. God is *'ehje asher 'ehje* – "I will be who I will be." ... In Hebrew *'ehje* means both the present ("I am") and the future. For God, Time is always future. Hebrew has no other means to express the concept of the eternal present than by making the future permanent. Cohen writes, "In the future when the meaning of the present is given, the difference between present and future will also be reduced. Existence will not be fixed in the present but will float above it. Present and future will be bound together in God's being."¹²³ ... God's true name is thus the Self of Time.... The contempo-

120 Scholem, *Fullness of Time*, 52–53. In the version of this poem in Scholem, *Poetica*, 694, the last line "In der Entfremdung werden wir befreit" is missing and in its place the transcription reads "Mich und das Tagebuch das aus dir schreibt."

121 Gershom Scholem, *Lamentations of Youth: The Diaries of Gershom Scholem, 1913–1919*, ed. and trans. Anthony David Skinner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 246; idem, *Tagebücher*, 2:236: "Religious time is always a decision, i.e., the present" (*Die religiöse Zeit ist immer Entscheidung, d.h. Gegenwart*). I have modified the translation.

122 On the diremptive nature of the present, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 71–72.

123 The citation is from Hermann Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1915), 22: "Wenn dem Futurum die Bedeutung des Präsens zuerteilt wird, so wird dadurch eben auch die Differenz zwischen Gegenwart und Zukunft verringert. Das Sein wird nicht in der Gegenwart festgelegt, sondern es schwebt über sie hinaus. Gegenwart und Zukunft werden in diesem Sein Gottes verbunden."

rary moment expresses this central point better than the future because the true unreality [*Unwirklichkeit*] of the present – because the present only has existence as a *source* [Ursprung] ... whose nothingness [*Nichts*] gives birth to the eternal Time as the empirical future – makes it suitable to express what we intend to say here. This notion of Time corresponds to the messianic realm.... The messianic realm is history in the present. The prophets could speak about the idea only hypothetically by using the image of the future.... The kingdom of God is the *present*, for the present moment is the beginning and the end. It has no metaphysical future. The God who “will be” demands from Time that it “will be.” But just as God *is*, so also *is* Time.... God has no Existence; he has only Being [*Gott hat kein Dasein, nur Sein*].¹²⁴ Being represents itself. Why does Rambam deny that God has life? Because by saying he’s alive contradicts the thought of the eternal present.... *Time is transformed through fusion* [In der Verbindung verwandeln sich die Zeiten]: the past is in the future and the future is in the past [*Vergangenheit in Zukunft und Zukunft in Vergangenheit*]. How does this happen? Through the vehicle of the present [*Im Medium der Gegenwart*]. The Time of the *waw ha-hippukh* is the messianic Time.¹²⁵

Messianic hope hinges on the dialectical intertwining and transposability of the restorative and utopian poles, the past and the future that meet in the present. The convergence of the two temporal modes is signified in the name revealed by God to Moses at the burning bush, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, “I will be what I will be,” a future that is actualized in the unreality of the present, the nothingness that gives birth to the eternal future of the end that is recollected

124 Scholem has in mind the passage on negative attributes in Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion*, 46–47: “Maimonides aber unterscheidet daher das Sein Gottes vom Leben. Dies aber bedeutet, obwohl er diese Bedeutung nicht ausdrücklich ausspricht, die Unterscheidung zwischen dem Sein Gottes und seinem Dasein.... Wir dürfen nur denken: Gott hat nicht das Dasein. Damit ist nach Maimonides gesagt: Gott ist der Ursprung des Daseins; ohne ihn gäbe es kein Dasein.” For discussion of this text, see Wolfson, *Giving*, 17–18. On the distinction between the attribution of *Sein* and *Dasein* to God, see also Hermann Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kaufmann Verlag, 1929), 51; idem, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 44, and the analysis in Wolfson, *Giving*, 19–20.

125 Scholem, *Lamentations*, 245–246 (emphasis in original); idem, *Tagebücher*, 2:235–236. The translation has been slightly modified. I have here offered an abbreviated version of the more extensive analysis of Scholem’s idea of messianic time in Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 279–281. See as well Willem Styfals, “Predicting the Present: Gershom Scholem on Prophecy,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 28 (2020): 259–286, esp. 270–271.

and the eternal past of the beginning that is anticipated. Hebrew, we are told, has the rhetorical peculiarity of not being able to express the concept of the eternal present except by making the future permanent. This is the nature of biblical prophecy as well: seemingly predicting the future, the prophet is actually speaking about the eternal present that is the time of the kingdom of God.¹²⁶ Scholem illustrates the point by referring to the *waw ha-hippukh*, that is, the consecutive or conversive *waw*, the prefix that converts the perfect tense of the predicate into the imperfect tense, as in the case of *we-hayah*, which can mean “and it was” in the past or “and it shall be” in the future.¹²⁷ If the *waw* of reversal is placed before a verb in the past, the word gets a futuristic meaning, but if it is placed before a verb in the future, the meaning changes into the past. From the comparatively simple grammatical rule, Scholem deduces an intricate theoretical assumption about the nature of messianic time as the crevice of the present wherein there is a reciprocal transmutation of past into future and future into past.

126 Compare Gershom Scholem, “On Jonah and the Concept of Justice,” trans. Eric J. Schwab, *Critical Inquiry* 25 (1999): 356–357 (*Tagebücher*, 2:526): “The deep conflict of the Book of Jonah resides in Jonah’s desire to see an identity between prophecy, which from an empirical point of view is a prediction of the future, and historiography, which is a prediction of the past. The prediction about the future should not be any different from one about the past: Nineveh is annihilated in the prophecy (precisely from a historian’s standpoint).” And see *ibid.*, 359–360 (*Tagebücher*, 2:529–531): “The historical ideas of the Bible all relate to the temporal concept of the eternal present. Messianic time as eternal present, and justice as something that is present and substantial, are corresponding notions. Were justice not present, then the messianic realm too would not only not be present but would be altogether impossible. Justice, like all Jewish concepts, is not a border concept, not liminal, not some mechanically infinite, ever-approachable regulative idea. (Whatever is liminal can be anticipated: the secret of Christianity.) ‘The reason for what the wise men call the world to come is not that this coming world is not already present, and that only after the demise of this world the other one would come. This is not how things are; rather, that world is continually present’ (Maimonides). Prophetism is the prediction of the eternal present.... Seen from this standpoint, the problem of the Book of Jonah can also be grasped in this way: its conflict is based on a fundamental confusion. For why does Jonah want to identify prophetism with historiography? It is clear that he is confusing the eternal and the noneternal present. In Nineveh he is supposed to make a prediction about the eternal present, but he himself considers this prediction as bearing on the noneternal one. The times that *transform* themselves within the eternal present are supposed to be identical. But what is identical does not transform itself, and what transforms itself is not identical” (emphasis in original).

127 On Scholem’s use of the *waw ha-hippukh* as grammatical support for his conception of the conflation of the future and the present, see Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 281 and references cited on 297 n. 217.

Cast even more broadly, we can speak of Jewish messianism – not definitively or unequivocally, but with respect to one conspicuous trajectory – as a nonteleological teleology, an agency that is comparable to the quietude of acting without a specific purpose to act, exemplified in the Taoist idea of *wu-wei*,¹²⁸ or in the Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* as the will that wills with a willfulness outside the distinction between activity and passivity,¹²⁹ the will of nonwilling that is not merely the renunciation of the will but the nonwilling

128 Laozi, *Daodejing*, ch. 2, in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. and comp. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 140: “Therefore the sage manages affairs without action and spreads doctrines without words.” See *ibid.*, ch. 3, 141: “By acting without action, all things will be in order.” *Ibid.*, ch. 10, 144: “Can you understand all and penetrate all without taking any action?... To act, but not to rely on one’s own ability, to lead them, but not to master them – This is called profound and secret virtue (*hsüan-te*.)” *Ibid.*, ch. 16, 147: “Attain complete vacuity, maintain steadfast quietude.” *Ibid.*, ch. 37, 158: “Tao invariably takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone.... Simplicity, which has no name, is free of desires. Being free of desires, it is tranquil.” *Ibid.*, ch. 43, 161: “Non-being penetrates that in which there is no space. Through this I know the advantage of taking no action. Few in the world can understand teaching without words and the advantage of taking no action.” *Ibid.*, ch. 48, 162: “The pursuit of Tao is to decrease day after day. It is to decrease and further decrease until one reaches the point of taking no action. No action is undertaken, and yet nothing is left undone.” *Ibid.*, ch. 63, 169: “Act without action. Do without ado. Taste without tasting.” *Ibid.*, ch. 64, 170: “He who takes action fails. He who grasps things loses them. For this reason the sage takes no action and therefore does not fail. He grasps nothing and therefore he does not lose anything.” The paradoxical logic that is the foundation of the ethics of *wu-wei* is made explicit in ch. 22, 151: “To yield is to be preserved whole. To be bent is to become straight. To be empty is to be full. To be worn out is to be renewed. To have little is to possess. To have plenty is to be perplexed. Therefore the sage embraces the One and becomes the model of the world.” See *ibid.*, ch. 36, 157: “In order to contract, it is necessary first to expand. In order to weaken, it is necessary first to strengthen. In order to destroy, it is necessary first to promote. In order to grasp, it is necessary first to give. This is called subtle light.” On *wu-wei* and the nonaction of the *dao*, which is prior to all events, see Chung-Ying Cheng, *The Primary Way: Philosophy of Yijing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), 86–87.

129 Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 48–50, 68; *idem*, *Feldweg-Gespräche* [GA 77] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995), 76–79, 106. See Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 14–17. On the attempt to distinguish his own sense of the willing of nonwilling and Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit*, see Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 70; *idem*, *Feldweg-Gespräche*, 109. Many have discussed the Eckhartian term and its influence on Heidegger. See John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 118–127, 173–183; Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 18–20, 122–145, 195–197; Christopher Rickey, *Revolutionary Saints: Heidegger, National Socialism, and Antinomian Politics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 81–91; Barbara Dalle Pezze, *Martin Heidegger and Meister Eckhart: A Path Towards Gelassenheit*

of the will that does not pertain at all to the will.¹³⁰ The spontaneity of calculating the incalculable – the elusiveness of conceptualizing truth and the falling silent of every effort to verbalize it in speech or in writing, the too much that is always too little, the surplus of meaning that resounds as inadequate and insufficient – is a facet of the melancholia that is the underpinning of human creativity.¹³¹ The very same sensation, however, is prone to yield a desperation in the realization that the future one is expecting is ceaselessly arriving and therefore can never have arrived. To paraphrase Dylan, night after night we look for salvation and find none, only another broken heart.¹³² And yet, in this brokenness, we remain unbroken; in the inability to find salvation, we are saved. The messianic impulse acquires its vitality from the melancholic spectrality of the nonspectral – the savior is a ghost that arrives by not arriving, that appears by not appearing.¹³³ Drawing out the implications of this coming of a coming beyond coming, Werner Hamacher writes:

If the future is to be thought in its pure movement, if it is to be thought as itself, and thus as mere coming without the arrival (*Ankunft*) of any sort of present, and thus thought without any determination through this present, then it must be thought as come-able – as the mere possibility of coming or as the possibility that is itself nothing other than coming, the coming of the coming without term or determination. If, however, the coming itself is merely coming, then it is in no sense already there; it is not an actual, in some way empirical or sensory coming, nor does it accord with a transcendental schema that would constitute its coming-to-be. It rather voids the sense of its ever being present and dissolves

(Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 127–188; Vincent Blok, “Massive Voluntarism or Heidegger’s Confrontation with the Will,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* 13 (2013): 449–465.

130 Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 69; idem, *Feldweg-Gespräche*, 106.

131 The archaic idea is attributed to the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*; see Wolfson, *Duplicity*, 128, 250 n. 104. For an extensive exploration of this theme, see László F. Földényi, *Melancholy = Melankólia*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

132 Bob Dylan, *The Lyrics*, ed. Christopher Ricks, Lisa Nemrow, and Julie Nemrow (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 734. For a more elaborate discussion of the gnostic dimension of Dylan’s creativity, see Elliot R. Wolfson, “Saturnine Melancholy and Dylan’s Jewish Gnosis,” in *The World of Bob Dylan*, ed. Sean Latham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 214–225.

133 Compare Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 186: “What cannot be directly spoken is also what is occluded from sight, absent from the visual field that organized melancholia. Melancholia is kept from view; it is an absorption by something that cannot be accommodated by vision, that resists being brought into the open, neither seen nor declared.”

the structure that grants the actuality of its being coming; indeed, it can never – so long as it, as coming, is referred to as coming – and at no time (namely, in no coming), *be* a coming. It is not we who wait; the coming itself waits for the coming. It is the already-there of the still-never-having-been-there and of the never-ever-being-there.¹³⁴

What hope we can muster springs precisely from this phantasmic deficiency, the inconsummate suspension of consummation, the resolute incursion that propagates the abundance of time, the futurity of the past recollected in the pastness of the future as the pastness of the future anticipated in the futurity of the past, a temporal displacement from every emplacement, the homecoming of exile, the voyage that returns indefatigably to the place whence one feels out of place. The melancholy of Jewish messianism procures this certitude of endless doubt, the questioning of the questioning that prompts no response but another question seeking a response.

¹³⁴ Werner Hamacher, "Messianic Not," in *Messianic Thought Outside Theology*, ed. Anna Glazova and Paul North (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 224–225 (emphasis in original).