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The Sum of All Fears: the Figure of the Anti/Metaphysical Jew in Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* (and beyond)

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Abstract

My essay positions Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* (*Schwarze Hefte*) in the light of the later transformation of his thought after *die Kehre*, which introduces a new motif: "the withdrawal of Being." And while the Jewish question disappears from his official discourse, the essay poses it nonetheless, despite and against Heidegger's silence: Does the diagnosis from the *Black Notebooks*, which perceives the Jew as the agent of metaphysical destruction, still stand? In my analysis, the figurative Jew emerges in a role which Heidegger refuses to recognize: as a positive agent of letting-be, acting in accordance with Being's rhythm of self-withdrawal.

Keywords

Martin Heidegger – *Black Notebooks* – Jacques Derrida – Marcionism – *tsimtsum* – withdrawal of Being – forgetfulness – Kabbalah

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The question of the role of world Jewry is not a racial question, but the metaphysical question about the kind of humanity that, without any restraints, can take over the uprooting of all beings from being as its world-historical "task." [...] The attack grounds a historical

moment of the highest decision between the preeminence of beings and the grounding of the truth of Being. [...] Through this “history,” the essence of history comes to the brink of a decision, for the first time, between *nothing and Being*.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Black Notebooks*¹



In my essay, I want to position the *Black Notebooks* (*Schwarze Hefte*), where Heidegger wages his own private war against Jews for the sake of Being, in the light of the later transformation of his thought in the 1950s. In the postwar period, Heidegger continues the process of the reversal, *die Kehre*, which began in the late thirties, by introducing a new motif: *der Entzug des Seins*, “the withdrawal of Being.” And while the Jewish question disappears from his official discourse, I would like to pose it nonetheless, despite and against Heidegger’s silence: Does the diagnosis from the *Black Notebooks*, which perceives the Jew as the agent of metaphysical destruction, still stand? Or has the Jew, implicitly and surreptitiously, become something else which Heidegger refrains from naming?

My essay can be regarded as a supplement to Derrida’s reading of Heidegger in *De l’esprit* – something he, perhaps, could have done himself if he had known the infamous *Black Notebook* entry from 1942: “Die Judenschaft ist im Zeitraum des christlichen Abendlandes, d. h. der Metaphysik, das Prinzip der Zerstörung” (Within the time-space of the Christian West, that is, metaphysics, Jewry is the principle of destruction).² Would he be lenient toward Heidegger, the way he always was after Vittorio Fariás’s revelations concerning Heidegger’s involvement in the Nazi Party shook the academic world in 1987? The essay written by Derrida that year, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, still offers a conciliatory gesture by inscribing Heidegger’s thought, especially in its postwar form,

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- 1 Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen XII–XV* (*Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941*), ed. Peter Trawny, Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe 96 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2014), 243, 46–47, 133 (henceforth cited as GA 96). Quotations follow the translation by Richard Polt in Zachary Siegel, “Seven New Translated Excerpts on Heidegger’s Anti-Semitism,” *Critical Theory*, February 23, 2015, <http://www.critical-theory.com/7-new-translated-excerpts-on-heideggers-anti-semitism/>.
 - 2 Martin Heidegger, *Anmerkungen I–V* (*Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948*), ed. Peter Trawny, Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe 97 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2015), 20 (henceforth cited as GA 97).

into the Hebrew “tradition of *ruah*”: that of spirit, fire, and the radical new beginning. Would he have continued to deconstruct Heidegger in this, as he himself called it, brotherly manner? Or would he have dismissed him for good, convinced that Heidegger formulates here nothing short of a philosophical justification for the Holocaust? For to define it as *Selbstvernichtung der Juden*, a “self-destruction of the Jews,” implies that the Shoah was indeed self-inflicted: since the Jews represent the principle of metaphysical violence, this violence inevitably had to turn against itself and end in the “ontological massacre.”³

Derrida could not have known that, in his private notes, Heidegger had already dismissed all his metaphysical commentaries a priori – purely on the basis that Derrida was a Jew (if not because of his racial belonging, then for the reason of him being shaped by the anti-metaphysical Judaic tradition). For Heidegger, Jews have *no* access whatsoever to Being; as the people of “no-essence,” constitutively barred from *any* destiny of Being, they simply *cannot* – are principally unable to – comment on his philosophy because they are no better than viruses in their metaphysical status: the worst kind of animals which are “poor in the world” and merely have a stake in the senseless reproduction of their life.⁴ From Heidegger’s point of view, therefore, anything I am going to say here – by daring to step into Derrida’s shoes – will be, by definition, a misunderstanding because Jewish reasoning cannot fathom the mystery of *Sein*. But, even granted that it cannot (I certainly do not aspire to that), it can, perhaps, fathom something else – an intimation of a new beginning of a metaphysics yet to come – which Heidegger’s writings make possible and, at the same time, immediately shut down. I will thus argue that there is a blind spot in Heidegger’s apparent *neuer Anfang* which, after the *Kehre*, could have accommodated the Jew as a rightful co-participant in the “history of Being,” but instead excluded him a priori on the grounds of Heidegger’s stubborn prejudice, which can only be called *cryptotheological*.⁵ Despite Heidegger’s explicit

3 See Donatella di Cesare, *Heidegger, die Juden, die Shoah* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2016), 9. Compare also Heidegger himself: “When what is ‘Jewish’ in the metaphysical sense [i.e., the principle of destruction: A. B.-R.] combats what is Jewish, the high point of self-annihilation in history has been attained – supposing that the ‘Jewish’ has everywhere completely seized mastery, so that even the fight against ‘the Jewish,’ and it above all, becomes subject to it” (GA 97, 20).

4 Compare GA 96, 56–57: “Through the concept of race, ‘life’ is brought into the form of what can be bred, which constitutes a kind of calculation. The Jews, with their marked gift for calculation, have already been ‘living’ for the longest time according to the principle of race, which is why they also defend themselves as vigorously as they can against its unrestricted application.”

5 On the concept of cryptotheology and cryptotheologems – the traces of theological systems, which survived the official “death of God” and persist in the secular philosophical

rejection of theology, it is precisely this persistent *cryptotheologem* which determines his rejection of the Jewish *seinsgeschichtlich* contribution to the idea of “the other inception.”⁶

1 War against the Preeminence of Beings

Heidegger’s anti-Judaism is directed against the figure of the Jew, which represents an enemy of all possible – past and future – metaphysics. The Jew carries and personifies an attitude which overestimates beings at the expense of Being; by investing in the “preeminence of beings,” it occludes “the truth of Being” and, by “uprooting all beings from Being,” it takes the side of “nothing against Being.”⁷ What underlies this hostility is the conviction that the phrase “Jewish spirituality” is a contradiction in terms: Jews are the least spiritually minded race in the sacred history of the world despite the fact – or rather, precisely for this reason – that they invented the monotheistic religion which, according to the widely accepted diagnosis of Max Weber, inaugurated the Western disenchantment.⁸ Judaism would thus be anti-spiritual by nature, if by spirituality we understand a search after intense experiences of what Rudolf Otto called *das ganz Andere*, which break through the confines of the quotidian phenomenal world and offer glimpses of the supranatural: the Jews, says Heidegger, “remain excluded from what is other.”⁹

But where does this conviction come from? The most probable answer is to search for its roots in the modern revival of the teachings of the second-century Christian Gnostic, Marcion, who – always strongly present implicitly in the Lutheran version of Reformed Christianity – became openly influential thanks to Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth, the two most prominent theologians of

discourse – see my *Jewish Cryptotheologies of Late Modernity: Philosophical Marranos* (London: Routledge, 2014).

6 Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen VII–XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/39)*, ed. Peter Trawny, Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe 95 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2014), 96 (henceforth cited as GA 95).

7 See again the epigraph.

8 See Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. Hans. H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: Free Press, 1952), especially the chapter “Magic and Ethics,” 219–224, where Weber describes the Judaic “rejection of magic” (222) as the beginning of the process of Western rationalization. According to Weber, Judaism gives up on the “innerworldly sacrum” and, in consequence, paves the way toward a disenchanted view of the world as run by fixed and reliable laws, not miracles.

9 GA 96, 133.

the Weimar era.¹⁰ According to Marcion, Christianity was not an heir, but an adversary of Judaism; while the latter is a false religion of the lesser Archon called Jehovah who created this world in order to trap our souls in the prison of matter, the former is a true religion of the Spirit offering supranatural redemption from the archontic illusion which keeps us within the walls of the phenomenal. The Jews, Jehovah's chosen people, are thus the innerworldly agents of deception, appearance, and surface machination – and, as such, the enemies of truth, supranatural reality, and metaphysical depth. By spreading the lie of the Creation, which presents mere appearances as a real thing, the Jews exempt themselves from the history of the Spirit which attempts to denounce this lie. If Jews are singled out as the only anti-spiritual race, it is because they agreed to serve the Prince of this World instead of the Alien God whose coming will announce the apocalyptic destruction of the false creaturely order. Their fake deity offers no redemption and no prospect of *unio mystica*, but merely a legal code of justice for the reality he created.

The Jews are, therefore, simultaneously both the great negationists who deny and ridicule any spiritual effort to rise above the finite conditions of this world, and the proto-materialists who accept the world as it is in its finite empirical form, which gained them the derogative name of “carnal Israel.” By saying Yes to the Flesh, they stubbornly say No to the Spirit. The Jews are thus accused of radical skepticism, which critically disenchants all quests for the *mysterium tremens*. Immersed in their legal code, they are separated from the cryptic manifestations of Being, to which they are not spiritually attuned. They never say Yes to anything greater than themselves, and because of that they are radically impious – incapable of *Andacht*, and thus of *An-Denken*, *Danken*, and *Denken*: thinking/reflecting gratefully on the true sacred, which remains inaccessible to their blinded eyes.¹¹ Having no access to Being, the Jews are only at home in the world of mere appearances – in the “preeminence of beings” – which they approach with shallow calculation, unable to penetrate to the hidden depth of things. Faithfully following their fake God, they can only imitate creation, but never really create: all Jewish critical “brilliance” is merely a *Schein* foaming on the surface, an idle *Machenschaft* which can only masquerade as a creative effort. The Jews cannot create, but they nonetheless can destroy: just as Jehovah's world is the destruction of the original spiritual

10 See above all Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott. Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche* (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1924).

11 In the so-called *Ecclesia et Synagoga* motif of medieval art, which personifies the Church and Judaism as female figures, the Synagogue is always presented as blindfolded. The best example is the famous portal of the Strasbourg cathedral.

pleroma, so is Jewish “science” a destruction of Western metaphysics. Ergo: The Jews, the virulent agents of nothing masquerading as something, do not belong to the history of Being from which everything truly existing emerges. Just as their God is cut from the spring of Being and merely pretends to create, the Jews, the “chosen ones,” perpetuate this poor marionette theater, barring their access to the mystery which they cannot comprehend.

My claim is that despite his contempt for theology,¹² Heidegger remains both heir and hostage to the Marcionite prejudice against Jews as the worldly agents of the Fake God. Indeed, around 1947/48, Heidegger writes a note, *On the doctrine of gods*, which quite precisely mirrors the Marcionite refutation of the Jewish “god” (deliberately written with the small ‘g’) as a false, impure, principally non-divine form of deity opposed to a true Godhead whose essence lies in the pleromatic “great calm”:

Jehovah is the god who presumed to make himself the chosen god, and not to tolerate any other gods beside himself. Only the fewest people can guess that this god, even so, and necessarily so, must count himself among the gods; how else could he set himself apart? That is how he could become the one, only god, apart from whom (*praeter quem*) there was no other. What is a god who raises himself up against the others to become the chosen one? In any case, he is never “the” God pure and simple, if what this means could ever be divine. What if the divinity of a god lay in the great calm from which he recognizes the other gods?¹³

Seemingly paradoxically, it is the implicit presence of Marcion in the background of Heidegger’s anti-Judaic tirades that allows him to distance himself from a racial type of anti-Semitism. Marcion, the original inventor of the Anti/Metaphysical Jew, was not anti-Semitic either: he did not hate Jewish people for the fact of being born Jewish, but merely for their delusional form of religiosity. Similarly for Heidegger, the Jew is a *figure of thinking against the truth of Being*, made possible by the Judaic investment in the “preeminence of beings.” Hence Heidegger’s wink toward the future reader of his *Black Notebooks*: “Note for jackasses: this comment has nothing to do with ‘anti-Semitism,’ which is

12 Including his dismissal of the chief representative of the Weimar *Krise Theologie*, Karl Barth: “The Phariseism of Karl Barth and his associates exceeds even the ancient Jewish Phariseism, by the degree that is necessarily posited by the modern history of being. The adherents of this position believe that screaming as loud as possible about the long-dead God could lead into a realm of the decision about the godhood of the gods” (GA 95, 395–396).

13 GA 97, 369.

as foolish and abominable as Christianity's bloody and, above all, non-bloody attacks on 'heathens.'¹⁴

2 Being-in-Withdrawal: "the Other Inception" of Western Metaphysics?

Yet, this quasi-Marcionite diagnosis gets somewhat complicated once Heidegger begins to talk about the abandonment by Being (*Seinsverlassenheit*) and its retreat (*Entzug des Seins*) in the 1950s. In *The Principle of Reason*, he defines *Sein als das Sichentziehende*, "Being as that which withdraws": "Zum Geschick des Seins gehört der Entzug" ("Withdrawal belongs to the *Geschick* of being").¹⁵ Whereas previously Being was continually present as the other of beings and accessible to those spiritually properly attuned and resisting the fall into "forgetfulness of Being" (*Seinsvergessenheit*), now it shows a more capricious face:

That individual beings are what is more overt and being what is less overt – this can only be rooted in the essence of being, not in us [...] So it is not some characteristic of humans as conceived anthropologically that causes being to be less overt for us than individual beings. Rather, the essence of being is such that, as a self-revealing, being reveals itself in a way such that a self-concealing – that means, a withdrawal – belongs to this revealing [...] As a proffering that clears and lights, being is simultaneously withdrawal. Withdrawal belongs to the *Geschick* of being [...] Self-withdrawing is the manner that being essentially comes to be, that is, proffers itself as presencing [...] Self-concealing, the withdrawal, is a manner in which being *qua* being lasts, proffers itself, that is, vouchsafes itself.¹⁶

According to Hannah Arendt, the definition of Being as self-retreating seals the transformation of Heidegger's thinking, which began in the thirties with his critical remarks on Nietzsche and which Heidegger himself dubbed "the reversal," *die Kehre*. The Being in withdrawal is the crowning image of this

14 GA 97, 159.

15 Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1957), 122; Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Regina Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 70 (henceforth cited as PR).

16 PR, 70.

inversion, which Arendt associates with the military loss of Germany after the Second World War:

the turn from the “Will-to-Power” as Will-to-Will to the new *Gelassenheit*, the serenity of “letting be” and the paradoxical “will-not-to-will,” this changed mood reflected Germany’s defeat, the “point zero” (as Ernst Jünger called it) that for a few years seemed to promise a new beginning.¹⁷

While commenting on the *Anaximander Fragment*, in which Being itself abdicates from its power and glory – “The unconcealment of beings, the brightness granted them [by Being], obscures the light of Being” for “as it reveals itself in beings, Being withdraws” (*Das Sein entzieht sich indem es sich in das Seiende entbirgt*) – Arendt concludes that “this leads to the seemingly paradoxical statement: ‘As Being provides the unconcealment of beings, it establishes the concealment of Being.’”¹⁸ We shall yet see that, for Arendt (as well as for Derrida), the emphasis lies on the *seemingly*: the paradox of Being which establishes its own concealment will eventually solve itself as merely apparent. For Heidegger, however, the accent falls on the *paradoxical*: the self-retreat of Being will remain an aporia and a challenge for his new *Seinsdenken*, with which he will never reconcile.

Der Satz vom Grund tests this novelty gradually and cautiously. On the one hand, it continues the critique of modernity, the age of *Gestell* or the world-picture, in which everything that exists becomes exhaustibly reduced to perceptible objects, thus revealing the ultimate self-concealment of Being: “The most radical withdrawal of being [*Entzug des Seins*] begins with the proffering of being as objectness insofar as the essential provenance of being can never come into view as a question and as worth questioning.”¹⁹ In consequence, the metaphysical sense of *Sein* is “pushed back into a still deeper sleep, into a still more decisive withdrawal of Being as such. Today it seems that the withdrawal of the essence of Being is complete.”²⁰ Yet, while previously Heidegger would have been most eager to jump into the critique of “today” as the very nadir of *Seinsvergessenheit*, the “forgetfulness of being” on which the modern *Machenschaft* is to be blamed, now he changes the tune:

17 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking & Willing*, one-volume ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1977), 188.

18 *Ibid.*, 191.

19 *PR*, 88.

20 *PR*, 56.

Both – proffering and withdrawing are one and the same, not two different things. In both there reigns, in a different manner, what [...] was called vouchsafing; in both – that is, *even in the withdrawal, and there even still more essentially*.²¹

“Even in the withdrawal, and there even still more essentially”: following Hannah Arendt, who in this astounding declaration locates the gist of Heidegger’s reversal, I want to claim that it has a potential to *subvert* and *invert* everything Heidegger said before, including his scathing critique of the Anti/Metaphysical Jew as the agent of metaphysical destruction. The negation, which formerly characterized the Jewish spiritual denial, preventing the Jews from participating in the history of Being, now turns out to be an integral – in fact, most essential – moment of that very *Seinsgeschichte*, in which Being constantly contracts, withdraws and thus negates itself. And, together with this maneuver of negation – before external, now internalized – moving inside the tides of Being, what happens to the Jew? Could he be also moving *inside*, finally granted an honorary place in the history of Being as no longer the agent of anti-metaphysical worldliness, but a possible agent of Being’s self-withdrawal and thus *another metaphysics* entailed by this crucial new motif? This is precisely the latest version of “*the question*” which, I believe, Arendt and Derrida would have asked if they had known the *Black Notebooks*.

Some would most surely say that this question is merely rhetorical, and that there already exists an answer, obviously in the negative: *no*, the Jew still does not belong to *Seinsgeschichte*, because he is not fit to remember about Being at all, and *especially* when it conceals itself. But is this really so? I rather tend to believe that “*the question*” points to a serious aporia in Heidegger’s reasoning, which prevented him from embracing fully all the consequences of his *Kehre*. It is quite possible to see Heidegger’s insistence on recollecting and recovering the truth of Being in self-withdrawal as constituting a paradox deriving from the interference of his earlier and later positions. Perhaps, Heidegger himself could not think to the end the idea of *Entzug des Seins*, for if he did, he would have to rethink the figure of the Anti/Metaphysical Jew, on which he kept silent after the war, and – horror of horrors! – let him *in*.

This paradoxical insistence on remembering Being, even when Being itself chooses self-erasure, becomes particularly visible in the essay entitled “The Turning” where Heidegger, simultaneously willing and unwilling to turn, engages in an excruciating acrobacy to prove that we simply cannot let Being quietly withdraw. But why not? If Being *itself* withdraws and turns into

21 PR, 62; emphasis added.

oblivion, why insist on (1) calling it a danger or entrapment; and (2) demanding that remembrance become the new task of man? Heidegger writes:

But where is the danger? What is the place for it? *Inasmuch as the danger is Being itself it is both nowhere and everywhere.* It has no place as something other than itself. It is itself the placeless dwelling place of all presencing. The danger is the epoch of Being coming to presence as Enframing.²²

This fragment is a particularly dense locus in which the two different perspectives – the critique of *Seinsvergessenheit* from before the reversal and the new vision of *Seinsverlassenheit* from after *die Kehre* – interfere to the point of absolute confusion. The concept of the danger, appearing suddenly as if from nowhere, is a backflash of the earlier critique: Heidegger announces the Age of Enframing as a danger, presumably mostly to Being, whereas the previous sentence states firmly that this danger not only is not an external threat to Being, but *is* Being itself which “dismisses and puts away its truth into oblivion in such a way that Being denies its own coming to presence.”²³ Before the turning, it was possible to describe the role of the thinker in a quite straightforward manner as the *defender of Being*: the one speaking in the name of Being, falsely forgotten by the spiritually perverse agents of *Gestell* (most of all the Jews), as *Sein’s* poetic mouthpiece who gives it a voice of truth among the superficial chatter of *clamor entis*. Now, however, this position is no longer so unambiguous: the right to represent Being in its absence begins to founder when Being itself does not “wish” to be re-presented, that is, made present-again in the world of beings. On the contrary, it clearly “wants” – or, if the intentional metaphor is too strong, *tends* – to withdraw from presence, cover its traces, plunge into *letheic* oblivion, and *not* be remembered. Suddenly, Heidegger’s self-profession as a “shepherd of Being” comes under sharp scrutiny: What if Being does not need any protective sheltering? What if it gets by perfectly well by “dismissing its own truth” for the sake of ontic appearances? If so, then Heidegger is in no position to usurp the truth, by denouncing the ontic triumph of *Gestell* in terms of threat and danger, because such denouncement goes against the ruling tendency of Being itself, which is nothing else but *this* very danger.

22 Martin Heidegger, “The Turning,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 43; emphasis added (henceforth cited as T).

23 T, 44.

Once we understand that “the danger is Being itself [and] it is both nowhere and everywhere,” Heidegger’s insistence on continuing in the role of the defender of Being – against the dangers of *Seinsvergessenheit*, brought by the agents external to *Seinsgeschichte* – becomes somewhat absurd. Yet, he insists: this is his only destiny, the only legitimacy of him as a *Seinsdenker*. This is why the last apodictic sentence – “The danger is the epoch of Being coming to presence as Enframing” – is nothing but a self-assertive decoy which only thinly disguises anxiety ranging on panic: Danger from what/whom and to what/whom? Danger produced by beings who rebelled against the remembrance of Being? Or, danger deriving from Being, which endangers itself by self-retreating? But, then, why call it a “danger”? Could it be that this withdrawal of Being is not dangerous at all, just absolutely normal, belonging to the tidal flows of Being itself, and as such to be accepted? Unthinkable, *undenkbar* ... For, what would happen to Heidegger as a *Seinsverberger*, the protector of Being, if he had to give up on the very idea of the enemies of Being and recognize that Being turned out to be its own greatest enemy and, in that manner, not an enemy at all?

It is precisely this decision – to maintain the concept of *Gefahr* and with it the legitimacy of the defense of Being – which prevents Heidegger from accepting the full consequence of his own “reversal.” Once the presence of danger in the modern epoch of Enframing becomes dogmatically established, the shepherd once again knows what to do to *help* Being which is, simultaneously, danger *itself* and *in* danger:

In the entrapping, what comes to presence is this, that Being dismisses and puts away its truth into oblivion in such a way that Being denies its own coming to presence. When, accordingly, *the danger is as the danger*, then the entrapping that is the way Being itself entraps its truth with oblivion comes expressly to pass. When this entrapping-with-oblivion does come expressly to pass, then oblivion as such turns in and abides. *Thus rescued through this abiding from falling away out of remembrance, it is no longer oblivion.*²⁴

Again, a telling rhetoric: Being needs to be *rescued* from oblivion and brought back to remembrance even if it dismisses its truth *itself*. Now this remembrance, *Andacht*, is a bit more aporetic than before – it is an effort to re-collect Being which dismisses itself or to re-gather Being which disseminates itself – but it is still regarded by Heidegger as the principal imperative. Yet, on what grounds? The above fragment indeed reads as a religious *credo* which persists

24 T, 44; emphasis added.

in a stubborn piety even if the target of this piety turns against it: while Being hides itself, the pious priest expressly wishes this hiding to pass and “turn in” the self-erasure of Being on its head. Heidegger thus repeats again and again, “It is toward the great essence of man that we are thinking, inasmuch as man’s essence belongs to the essence of Being and is *needed by Being* to keep safe the coming to presence of Being into its truth”²⁵ – and in this manner he single-handedly dismisses Being’s own dismissal, its own withdrawing from the truth. He knows better: Being needs him.

But why is the other “need” of Being – the one to hide – neglected by Heidegger? Why doesn’t he acknowledge it as a “need” which also has to be catered to? Whence this *eigensinnig* perseverance to “keep safe the coming to presence of Being into its truth” which does not shelter or protect Being’s “need” to hide? The only possible answer is that Heidegger perceives the self-denying tendency on Being’s part as an *error* which leads to its own “entrapment”: self-alienation in the world of ontic appearances, from which Being must be liberated. Or, putting things in a more Schellingian manner (and the Schelling of the *Weltalter* period is clearly an inspiration for late Heidegger), Being erroneously falls into the worldly finite existence from which it can only rescue itself by the help of man, who will recognize the “favor” of election and “turn about” the whole process of Being’s falling into self-oblivion:

The self-denying of the truth of Being, which entraps itself with oblivion, harbors the favor as yet ungranted, that this self-entrapping will turn about; that, in such turning, oblivion will turn and become the safekeeping belonging to the coming to presence of Being, instead of allowing that coming to presence to fall into disguise. In the coming to presence of the danger there comes to presence and dwells a favor, namely, the favor of the turning about of the oblivion of Being into the truth of Being. In the coming to presence of the danger, *where it is as the danger*, is the *turning about into the safekeeping*, is this safekeeping itself, is the saving power of Being.²⁶

This diagnosis sounds very Schellingian indeed: Being itself errs and Being itself heals its wounds – a “Tragic Absolute” in the world-historical process of self-therapy.²⁷ Yet, this image is once again self-defeating. For this

25 T, 40; emphasis added.

26 T, 43–44; emphasis added.

27 See David Farrell Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). Also, in a later book, Krell inscribes

monopower – of first self-falling and then self-healing – is so absolute that even the “favor,” yet ungranted, but potentially to be granted to the elect happy few (Heidegger obviously included) to execute the “turn about,” is in the end a favor which Being does to itself, without any “mediation” that would involve any other agency:

When the turning comes to pass in the danger, this can happen only without mediation. *For Being has no equal whatever.* It is not brought about by anything else nor does it itself bring anything about. Being never at any time runs its course within a cause-effect coherence. Nothing that effects, as Being, precedes the mode in which it – Being itself – takes place so as to adapt itself; and no effect, as Being, follows after. Sheerly, out of its own essence of concealedness, Being brings itself to pass into its epoch.²⁸

All is Being: no caesura emerges to effect a separation, difference, and thus mediation. Being is absolute in its *purity*: nothing else – no metaphysical Other – contaminates its ontological monopoly. Where *Being has no equal whatever*, there is no room for the emancipation of ontic entities which ultimately belong to the Same. One of Franz Kafka’s aphorisms states that “to be means to be His”²⁹ – and, even if Heidegger’s *Sein* is, unlike the Jewish God Kafka had in mind, impersonal, the sense of dispossession (*Ent-eignis* implied

Heidegger’s saga into the Schellingian pattern of the *absolute tragedy*, according to Heidegger’s own remark in the *Black Notebooks*, “Das Seyn selbst ist ‘tragisch.’” On which he comments: “Heidegger’s situation is worse than paranoia. The paranoid sufferer can blame this or that being (*Seiendes*) for menacing his or her life and making them miserable. For Heidegger, by contrast, no one and no thing is to blame, but only beyng. That is to say, when one surrenders the preoccupation with beings (again, *Seiendes*), and when one turns to beyng (*Seyn*) instead, one discovers that the sole menace derives from beyng itself. *It is not we human beings who have abandoned or forgotten beyng, but beyng has abandoned and forgotten us.* But, to repeat, because beyng is not some identifiable being or person out there in this world, *no one* is threatening Heidegger. Hence his Polyphemic rage. *Nothing* is plaguing him. Except that precisely the nothing *is* plaguing him.” Krell, *Ecstasy, Catastrophe: Heidegger from “Being and Time” to the “Black Notebooks”* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2016), 6–7; emphasis added. As I try to prove here, the only possible outlet for this Polyphemic rage is the figure of the Anti/Metaphysical Jew as the worldly agent of Being’s self-abandonment: the evil tendency within Being itself, affirmed and represented also on the ontic side of beings – something he can finally target and attack.

28 T, 44; emphasis added.

29 “Das Wort sein bedeutet im Deutschen beides: Dasein und Ihmgehören” (“The German word *sein* signifies both ‘to be there’ and ‘to belong to Him’”). Franz Kafka, *The Zürau Aphorisms*, trans. Michael Hoffman (London: Harvill Seeker, 2006), 46.

within *Er-eignis*) is analogical: “to be means to be *Its*.” “That which is” is thus denied any metaphysical autonomy:

That which is, is in no way that which is in being. For the “it is” and the “is” are accorded to what is in being only inasmuch as what is in being is appealed to in respect to its Being. In the “is,” “Being” is uttered: that which “is,” in the sense that it constitutes the Being of what is in being, is Being.³⁰

Hence the only possible attitude toward both “that which is” and that which makes it be is a quietistic *Gelassenheit*, expressing a sense of absolute dispossession and self-renunciation:

Only when man, in the disclosing coming-to-pass of the insight by which he himself is beheld, *renounces human self-will* and projects himself toward that insight, away from himself, does he correspond in his essence to the claim of that insight. In thus corresponding man is gathered into his own [*ge-eignet*] that he, within the safeguarded element of world, may, as the mortal, *look out toward the divine*.³¹

Being’s self-absencing is thus in no way making room for something else: for a difference that would truly make a difference in the monotony of its tidal cycle. The umbilical cord which forever ties beings with Being paradoxically only tightens when Being withdraws. Now it is even a greater and harder task to find a right way of *Seinsgehören*: being as belonging – and obediently listening – to *Sein im Entzug*. “Man is gathered into his own [*ge-eignet*]” only insofar as he, as mortal, lacks an autonomous essence, has *nothing* as his own: all that he is, is just “looking out toward the divine,” the ultimately dispossessing *Ent-Eignis* that makes him a pure uncontaminated *Lichtung*, a clearing in which the hidden Being can re-appear. This is the most extreme variant of the Kafkan “being-as-belonging-to-Being,” even if – or rather especially if – Being, becoming secretive, plays more difficult than ever. The withdrawal of Being does not establish an ontological autonomy of the world of beings; on the contrary, it makes ontological dependence even deeper and, at the same time, more mysterious and harder to grasp.

What, therefore, for Kafka is a terrifying possibility of *Ihmgehören* which virtually annihilates “that which is” and does not let it be, Heidegger

³⁰ T, 46; emphasis added.

³¹ T, 47; emphasis added.

wholeheartedly embraces, because, for him, the extreme dispossession/renunciation of one's beingness is the only way in which Being can re-emerge in the midst of the ontic impurity. But there is an immense hubris in this seeming self-humbling, which claims to respond to Being's "need" and thus rescue and safeguard Being against oblivion, dispersion, and dissemination. For, how does Heidegger know what Being wants if it wants anything: *che voi?* If it is everything and nothing – "It is not brought about by anything else nor does it itself bring anything about"³² – then it is also in, simultaneously, concealment and revealment. Unless we are back into the ancient fold of the Gnostic metaphysics of a cosmic error and the concept of redemption based on the idea of decreation, where "the universe is only a defect in the purity of Being,"³³ there is no indication whatsoever to take the side of Being's *a-letheia* instead of its letheic tendency. Why shouldn't it withdraw and simply let us live?

It is precisely this question which underlies Hannah Arendt's late critique of her teacher; while discussing Heidegger's reversal and its leading new thesis that "the oblivion of Being belongs to the self-veiling essence of Being," she finds it surprising that it should result in a counterintuitive conclusion according to which Being has to be rescued from self-obfuscation. She thus also detects a Gnostic moment in Heidegger's thought in which Being *errs* into history as a "realm (in the sense of a prince's realm) of error," where, as we have already indicated in the section on Marcion, the Prince of this World is one of the names of the Archon who falsely usurps the prerogatives of creation. Arendt's point is that Heidegger seems so fixated on the sublime destiny of the thinker that he *refuses to listen to Being* precisely at the moment he pretends to abandon his own will for the sake of the *gelassen* hearing/obeying (*ge-hören*) which enables it to

break into the continuum of error, when the "epochal essence of Being lays claim to the ecstatic nature of Dasein" [...] In this context, the "reversal" means that the Self no longer acts in itself (what has been abandoned is the *In-sich-handeln-lassen des eigensten Selbst*), but, obedient to Being, enacts by sheer thinking *the counter-current of Being* underlying the "foam" of being – the mere appearances whose current is steered by the will-to-power.³⁴

32 T, 44.

33 A paraphrase of Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1966), 316.

34 Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 187.

While for Heidegger, obedience to Being means that beings must be regarded as nothing but “mere appearances,” Arendt, in opposition to the Platonic-Gnostic denigration of the ontic realm, will always insist that “being and appearing coincide.”³⁵ That indeed would make her a member of the anti-metaphysical and anti-spiritual race which accepts the phenomenal world as the ultimate reality. The question, however, is: Who listens-to/obeys Being better? Is it Heidegger, who insists on dragging Being out of self-concealment – or Arendt, who herself, completely deprived of the Heideggerian form of piety, turns toward the secular world and affirms it as ultimately real?

3 *Seiendesvergessenheit*, or the Oblivion of Beings

This is precisely where Derrida enters the debate; by seconding Hannah Arendt (though never explicitly), he also wants to question Heidegger’s *piety* with its persistent “looking out toward the divine.”³⁶ This deconstruction coincides with the radical reinterpretation of the figure of the Anti/Metaphysical Jew who now emerges as an agent of the letting-be forgetting of Being: a new position which paves the way toward “the other inception” and the new metaphysics, simultaneously intimated and thwarted in the bud by Heidegger himself.

After the war, Heidegger keeps silence about the Jews, but we can safely assume that for him, the Jew would still locate himself on the side of the ontic *obliteration* of Being without a capability to “turn about”: even in the new conditions of *Seinsverlassenheit*, the abandonment by Being, he would still be accused of the most acute *Seinsvergessenheit*, i.e., the deliberate and *excessive forgetfulness of Being*. Essentially unable to “turn about,” the Jew would thus still remain the enemy of Being: a fixed adversarial position which Heidegger needs in order to maintain his own self-styled importance as the only proper *Seinsdenker* capable of defending Being against oblivion.

Yet, as I tried to prove, such a view can hold only on the grounds of Heidegger’s belief in Being’s asymmetrical – deeper, more authentic – “need” to be uncovered, that acts against its other “essential” tendency to withdraw. But what if the Jew actually catered to this other “need” which is equally strong, that of Being’s *lethic* concealment? We would have dealt here with a truly curious reversal: the Jew, the perfidious agent of *Seinsvergessenheit*, would no longer operate from the outside of the history of Being. On the contrary, he would become a true insider to the process of Being’s self-withdrawal – while

35 Ibid., 20.

36 T, 47.

Heidegger, the self-declared defender of the faith, would suddenly fall outside of the spontaneity of the ontico-ontological flow, by willfully counteracting Being's tendency to plunge into oblivion. Before it was the Jew who served as the figure of the destruction of metaphysics inaugurated by the fake and illegitimate Archon/Jehovah; now, however, negation being inscribed into the vicissitudes of Being itself, the Jew is *in* – while the stubborn denier of this negation, longing for the remembrance and presence of Being in the world of beings, is *out*. What an ironic change of fate of which Heidegger does not seem to be in the least aware!

But, isn't he? He will never mention the Jew again, at least not in the writings that we know by now, but perhaps his silence is far from accidental. In *Of Spirit: Heidegger and The Question*, where Derrida carefully reads Heidegger's works from the 1950s, he attempts to insinuate Heidegger, against his will, into the "Hebrew tradition of fire": *das Frühste*, the earliest radical beginning, which Heidegger analyzes on the basis of Georg Trakl's poetry, reminds Derrida of the Jewish *ruah*, the fiery element of creative initiation which is heterogeneous from the start and thus, while always retreating from itself, gives rise to the being of the other. In the conclusion of the essay, Derrida stages a confrontation between the two imaginary figures: a Radical Theologian on the one hand, and Heidegger, if he ever cared to break his silence and respond to *the (Jewish)* question, on the other. The former says:

What is most matutinal in the *Frühe*, in its best promise, would in truth be of another birth and another essence, origin-heterogeneous [*heterogene a l'origine*] to all the testaments, all the promises, all the events, all the laws and assignments which are our very memory [...] You say the most radical things that can be said when one is a Christian today. At this point, especially when you speak of God, of *retrait*, of flame and fire-writing in the promise, in accord with the promise of return towards the land of pre-archi-originary, it is not certain that you would not receive a comparable reply and similar echo from my friend and coreligionary, the Messianic Jew. I'm not certain that the Moslem and some others wouldn't join in the concert or the hymn. At least all those who in religions and philosophies have spoken of *ruah*, *pneuma*, *spiritus* and, why not, *Geist*.³⁷

37 Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 107, 111.

This is said in the conclusion of Derrida's essay, merely left as a suggestion, but nothing stops us from developing it further. For, when Heidegger begins to talk about *der Entzug* – retreat or *le retrait* – he not only echoes the fiery tradition of the divine *ruah*, which is too restless to stay in itself, but also the later Jewish motif of *tsimsum*, the divine self-withdrawal, in which the Jewish-kabbalistic Godhead clears away in order to make room for the world: “the placeless dwelling place of all presencing,” called *makom*.³⁸ Although Heidegger himself was reluctant to discuss this process of *othering* – Being passing into the otherness of beings – in theological terms (since, as he believed, theology, being a part of the onto-theological complex, always favors the ontic realm at the expense of Being), the comparison with the Lurianic motif of the “God in Retreat” seems unavoidable. Especially given that almost exactly at the same time, Gershom Scholem, in his studies on the Kabbalah, introduces the concept of the “nothingness of revelation” – the ultimate “revelation in concealment” – the meaning of which derives from the Lurianic idea of *tsimsum* or God's contraction:

Creation out of nothing, from the void, could be nothing other than creation of the void, that is, of the possibility of thinking of anything that was not God. Without such an act of self-limitation, after all, there would be only God – and obviously nothing else. A being that is not God could only become possible and originate by virtue of such a contraction, such a paradoxical retreat of God into himself. By positing a negative factor in Himself, God liberates creation.³⁹

At the same time, however, Scholem admits that *tsimsum* can also be understood differently: as God's “angry” disappearance, retreat into *Verborgenheit*, and refusal to justify the course of the fallen world. Being/God, therefore, may be said to withdraw either in order to liberate the world – or to abandon the inhabitants of the world, from this time on faced with the terrifying “void of God, the abyss, the chasm or the crack which opens up in all that exists.”⁴⁰ While the former withdrawal may be seen as a gentle, kind, and altogether positive process, thanks to which the world acquires ontological autonomy, the latter withdrawal in anger suggests confusion and obfuscation leading to the negative *Seins/Gottes/Vergessenheit*.

38 T, 43.

39 Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken, 1976), 283.

40 Ibid.

Could the Jewish invention of *tsimtsum* be yet another “unthought debt” which Heidegger had drawn from the unmentionable silenced tradition (where Schelling, the great connoisseur of the kabbalistic writings, would be the most probable mediator)?⁴¹ The ambivalence which surrounds the concept of God’s contraction since Isaac Luria’s invention is exactly the same as in Heidegger’s account of *der Entzug des Seins*. And while he himself takes the negative side of Being’s withdrawal, Derrida takes the side of the affirmative interpretation as a new opening of the metaphysics of *Seinlassen* (letting-be as precisely the “liberation of creation”), which Heidegger, still caught in the conceptual net of his earlier doctrine of *Seinsvergessenheit*, never managed to think properly and thus to complete his *Kehre*. The ultimate irony of the Derridean version of “letting-be” as made possible by Being’s withdrawal – elaborated first in “Dissemination” and then developed in *Sauf le nom* and *Given Time* – is that the “Messianic Jew,” or the carrier of the self-disseminating element of *ruah*, also becomes the bearer of the most radical version of the modern univocity of being (*univocatio entis*) and, as such, becomes *equal to Being*: a possibility a priori ruled out by Heidegger. By saying No to the Kafkan *Ihmgehören* – or, translated into Heideggerese, *Seinsgehören* – the “Messianic Jew” breaks the chain of belonging/obedience and constitutes a novelty in the world of entities: finally something *other*, truly emergent in its difference, no longer reducible to the tidal process of pure Being itself.

While for Heidegger, therefore, *the universe is a defect in the purity of Being*, the Messianic Jew represents the opposite principle of Being’s self-inflicted contamination: the “invention of the difference,” which stands behind the Lurianic *tsimtsum*. The No of negation and separation, which previously

41 Compare Marlene Zarader, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). Zarader also mentions the kabbalistic heritage of *tsimtsum* as precursorial to Heidegger’s doctrine of Being in withdrawal. For her, it is absolutely clear that, after *die Kehre*, Heidegger is faced with a new task of rethinking his earlier concept of *Seinsvergessenheit*: “But it remained for him to account for this forgetting. If the latter was first attributed to thinking, it was subsequently recognized as proceeding from Being itself: *thinking is only characterized by forgetting because Being unfolds its essence as withdrawal*. [...] *Whence the forgetting*. The withdrawal underway, forgetting can be resituated within the essence of Being, to which the withdrawal gave us access. [...] The circle thus closes: Being was forgotten only because it slips away, and it slips away because in evasion lies its unique manner of ‘being.’ There is therefore no other being than that which withdraws for the benefit of beings. And there is no other God, in the Bible, than the *hidden God*. [...] [T]he theme of the hidden God nevertheless finds a wholly surprising incarnation, surpassing by far – *even inverting* – the classical idea of a God who hides himself in his creation. This was the doctrine of Tsim-tsum, developed by Isaac Luria, the kabbalist of Safed, around 1550.” *Ibid.*, 134.

excluded the Jew from the history of Being, now turns into a new positive principle of *Seinlassen*, an ontological model for all other finite entities to follow in their desire for emancipation, i.e., to *be-free* (where *lassen* must always be *frei-lassen*) – and not just *be-long*, *Seinsgehören*. And if, as Derrida implies in *On the Name*, the Jew “almost forgets about God” – then all the better, because it is in accordance with God’s own withdrawal. He is not a blasphemer who obliterates God/Being without a trace; he rather follows the complex dialectics of obedience in oblivion or listening-to without belonging, which breaks the integrity of Heidegger’s *Ge-Hören*. Derrida asks here the crucial question: “How can you remember about God who forgets himself?” – which eventually must also be posed in front of Heidegger’s *Sein im Entzug*.⁴²

4 The Jew: an “Incomplete Dis-esteemer of Being”?

What Derrida calls *presque-atheisme* or “almost-atheism,” in which “one cannot remember but in forgetting,”⁴³ has an equivalent in Heidegger’s prewar writings: *die Entwürdigung des Seins*, “the dis-esteeming of Being,” which can never become complete. The concept does not seem to resurface later, but it could indeed accommodate the position of the Derridean “Messianic Jew” who orients himself toward beings because he, “seemingly paradoxically,” remains

42 For Derrida, the true *Gelassenheit*, therefore, is the art to “abandon God who abandons himself”: not to cling to him, not even try to grasp him – just “not give anything to God, not even Adieu, not even to his name. [...] This is how I sometimes understand the tradition of *Gelaztheit*, the serenity that allows being without indifference, lets go without abandoning, unless it abandons without forgetting or *forgets without forgetting*.” Jacques Derrida, *On The Name*, trans. John P. Leavey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 84, 73; emphasis added. On the theological significance of atheism, see also Levinas, for whom it indicates a “separation so complete that the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated – eventually capable of adhering to it by belief.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1991), 52. Atheism is thus only “natural” and even a “great glory” (*ibid.*), because it reflects back on the greatness of the Creator himself, who managed to create something truly other than himself. Instead of *Ihmgehören*, therefore, Levinas proposes a belief based on separation and relation, which is conditioned by the necessary stage of the atheistic non-participation. Here too, pace Heidegger, the complex of obedience and belonging – *Ge-Hören* – becomes severed.

43 As Derrida says in “Shibboleth” regarding the paradox of the trace: “one can only recall it to oneself in forgetting it (*on ne peut se la rappeler qu’en l’oubliant*).” Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 49.

obedient to Being in withdrawal. In *The Beginning of Western Philosophy*, the course of lectures delivered in Freiburg in 1932, Heidegger probes the idea of the “complete dis-esteeming of Being,” and states that, as *complete*, it is simply unthinkable, since it would deprive us of any understanding of beings as such and make impossible our comportment toward them. To be *completely* outside the history of Being – a position attributed to the Jew in the *Black Notebooks* – would thus equal a *complete* dis-esteeming of Being, which he himself refutes as logically non-viable:

We will look to see whether the understanding of Being can bear a complete dis-esteeming; i.e., we will attempt to deprive it of any special dignity. But then must we not first explicitly carry out this dis-esteeming? Does that not happen constantly in our forgetting Being and the understanding of Being? To be sure. *Yet we esteem even when we forget, indeed, we often precisely then and in that way concede that what has been forgotten is such and such. By means of the forgetting, we precisely want – whether we know it or not – to get out of the way of the forgotten, have nothing more to do with it.* Even forgetting cannot deprive Being and the understanding of Being of all dignity. It is still there. Accordingly, this dignity as such must count for us, no matter what happens.⁴⁴

Thus, even if we make an attempt to “get out of the way of the forgotten,” i.e., to let Being withdraw and leave us in the realm of beings – precisely the way of the “Messianic Jew” who keeps himself in the state of “almost-atheism” – Being maintains its dignity. Thus, as if in anticipation of Scholem’s formula of the “nothingness of revelation” – the “void of God” who retreated, but still remains a distant origin – Heidegger says: “We could never ask whether beings are and what they are; for that, we must have already understood Being. We could never be able to experience the void of nothingness unless we understood Being.”⁴⁵ At this stage of his *Seinsdenken*, he is thus still capable of keeping the dialectical balance of the ontological difference between the right of Being to not be completely forgotten and the right of beings to come to presence in the “site of disconcealment”: “If, however, beings as such are to come to the light of day, if this day is to dawn for beings, then, as was shown by our attempt at a complete dis-esteeming of the understanding of Being, Being

44 Martin Heidegger, *The Beginning of Western Philosophy: Interpretation of Anaximander and Parmenides*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 61; emphasis added (henceforth cited as BWP).

45 Ibid., 62.

must come to be understood in advance.”⁴⁶ Or, in Lurianic terms: the retreating God must be forgotten, so the world can establish itself in its autonomy, but forgotten *not completely*, so the world can recognize itself as the other of God. While the complete dis-esteeming of Being indeed destroys metaphysics – the *incomplete* dis-esteeming of Being could go perfectly hand in hand with the new metaphysics of *Sein in Entzug*.

This conclusion, however, does not arrive: instead, Heidegger falls back to his arche-prejudice against “mere appearances” and once again alludes to Judaism as a dry religion of the desert which, unlike the Greeks who stayed close to Being, moved “away from the spring” and suppressed the question of Being. The Jewish wanderer lost in the midst of his Exodus is a prototype of the modern man who exiled himself from the well of metaphysical life and, as a dis-esteemer of Being, withers in the waste land of fallen beings which, as in T. S. Eliot, “bring no relief”:

This dis-esteeming of what is most question-worthy does indeed mean leaving the question of Being unasked. Leaving it unasked does not eliminate it but, instead, suppresses it as held fast yet unasked. Suppressed in this way, the question of Being is still there. Then where? In our insistent existence. Our paying no heed to the suppressed question of Being is not a proof against its “being-there” but merely demonstrates that in suppressing it we mean that we could withdraw from it at any time. *We can withdraw from it only in the way the wanderer, distancing himself more and more from the spring, semblantly dissolves every relation to it and yet perishes precisely through and on this relation of distancing himself.*⁴⁷

Yet, when read from the later perspective of *die Kehre*, the above fragment reveals a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, the image of the dried up, withering Jew in the desert already forebodes Heidegger’s scathing remark from the *Black Notebooks* that the Jew represents the “principle of (self)destruction” – on the other hand, however, the idea of his withdrawal *from* Being, which the exodic journey symbolizes, can be seen as the missing part of the postwar puzzle where the withdrawal *of* Being is left without its ontic execution, bearer or agent. Before the *Kehre*, the Jews were mostly to be blamed for *Seinsvergessenheit* – now, however, they may be said to act as the ontic proxies for *Seinsverlassenheit*, the self-abandoning of Being, for which they no longer should be blamed. As *incomplete* dis-esteemers of Being, who

46 BWP, 71.

47 BWP, 73; emphasis added.

“forget without forgetting” and wander away from the spring in order to keep beings in their disconcealment, the Jews fulfill Being’s destiny of *Entzug*.

But this, for Heidegger, is precisely the sum of all fears, the worst metaphysical nightmare come true: the Jew, faithful to Being at precisely the moment when he “almost” – never “completely” – forgets Being, would be the proper agent of *Seinlassen*, “letting-be” – while Heidegger, Being’s most outspoken priest, would really betray it, by hindering Being in its gentle, *gelassen* and *seinlassend*, withdrawal or “bestowing refusal.”⁴⁸ Does this sound improbable? Perhaps, but we seem so lulled by Heidegger’s self-declared apology of the ontological difference, which became the trademark of his rhetoric, that we rarely, if ever, wake up to ask the question: Is he himself faithful to this *difference*? Doesn’t his thought suffer from the symmetrical forgetfulness of beings: *die Seiendesvergessenheit*? The more he moves away from his original project of the existential analytic of Dasein, laid out in *Being and Time*, the more he forgets about beings who can never become “equal” to Being: the readily assumed “coming into presence” of Being becomes an empty phrase. “Being has no equal” – this most anti-univocist statement possible indicates that there is no difference that would really make a difference: Being churns in itself, shaking off all heterogeneity as impurity or mere error. The Derridean “Messianic Jew,” therefore, could indeed have intervened against this falling into *Seiendesvergessenheit* and asymmetrical flattening out of the *ontologische Differenz*, by becoming an emblem of the real difference. If only Heidegger’s lingering piety allowed him to rethink Being’s play in a more complex and dialectical manner, he could have noticed such a position as legitimate and not simply erroneous within the history of Being. Instead, however, he constantly dismisses the Jew as the representative of the superficial worldliness leading merely to the “destruction of metaphysics,” or, even worse, as an anti/metaphysical “criminal.”⁴⁹ His stubborn Marcionite prejudice, which de-legitimizes

48 The beautiful concept of “bestowing refusal” was coined by Elliot Wolfson in his path-breaking comparative study on late Heidegger and the kabbalistic legacy. See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Poiesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019). The difference between his approach and mine is subtle, yet decisive: while Wolfson emphasizes a deep “elected affinity” between the Heideggerian and the kabbalistic forms of piety as always insisting on remembering Being/Godhead in Its withdrawal, I point to a difference in their spiritual sensibility, which leads the kabbalists to recognize the affirmative role of forgetting as more attuned to the logic of *tsimtsum*. For a more detailed discussion with Wolfson, see my *Derrida’s Marrano Passover: Exile, Survival, Betrayal, and the Metaphysics of Non-Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 129–131.

49 For Heidegger, this affirmative stance toward separation and dissemination, which characterizes the metaphysics of radical othering, lies at the grounds of Jewish “criminal

Jehovah as a fake “god,” prevents him from seeing the Jewish position – of remembering in forgetting or of incomplete dis-esteeming of Being in withdrawal – as fully justified within his own system.

Now, returning to *the* question with which I began my meditation: What would Derrida have done if he had been able to read Heidegger’s entries from 1942? Would he have abandoned Heidegger as the “brother in *ruah*,” deeming him a hopeless case? My conjecture is *no*: while expanding the motif of the *ruah* as the self-erasing origin with the Lurianic *tsimtsum* in the background, Derrida would have rather deconstructed the major aporia in Heidegger’s construct of the originary withdrawal, which made him detest his own system: the never questioned call to remember, recollect, be constantly reminded of the source that withdraws. For, why obsessively recollect what incessantly retreats? Why insist on the reversal of this retreat in a “pious remembrance”? Why not allow the self-erasing ground, that allows everything else, to be gently, though never completely, forgotten? This is a daring argument which should nonetheless have forced Heidegger to rethink his previous position on the metaphysical Jew as the hateful agent of *Seinsvergessenheit*, but instead spurred him toward even more hatred. For, perhaps, it is precisely this type of incomplete forgetfulness that not only does not destroy metaphysics but also goes along the “fiery” retreat/*Entzug* of the origin of all beings, which gently withdraws to let them be. On this reading, the metaphysical Jew would have emerged not as the obstinate destroyer of the metaphysical thinking of Being, but as a positive agent of *Seinlassen*, the letting-be proper, acting in accordance with Being’s ordinance: an obvious possibility which Heidegger absolutely refused to see.

We can thus imagine yet another monologue from the unwritten *Of Spirit: Part 2*, in which Heidegger, no longer blinded to this self-evidence, lets himself speak, with the voice of the thirteenth-century kabbalist, David ben Yehudah he-Hasid:

character” which subverts the metaphysical and spiritual “order” or *der Fug*: “Criminality [*Verbrechen*]: that is no mere breaking up [*Zerbrechen*], but the devastation of everything into what is broken. What is broken is broken off from the inception and dispersed into the realm of the fragmentary. Here, there remains only one possibility of Being – in the mode of order. Ordering is only the reverse of criminality, understood in terms of the history of Being” (GA 96, 266). The very association of the Jew with metaphysical criminality stems from Hegel, who compared Abraham to a violent trespasser or a criminal who, “clinging to alien Beings” (again, the echo of the Marcionite Fake God), “stepped out of nature itself [...] and [had to] slay everything holy in human nature.” G. W. F. Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 204.

Yes, I can see now, that “the cause of causes (*illat ha-illot*) is the place to which forgetfulness [*shikhehah*] and oblivion [*nishshayon*] pertain, as in the expression *God has made me forget* [*ki nashshani elohim*] in Genesis 41:51. [...] Concerning the cause of causes, *it is concealed and hidden in the secret of nothing and the naught*. Therefore, with respect to the matter of comprehension of this place, *forgetfulness pertains to it.*”⁵⁰

50 Quoted in Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 114; emphasis added.