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Variations on a Theme: Heidegger and Judaism

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Abstract

This essay surveys a number of prominent, recurring, and new directions in the growing scholarly discourse on the theme "Heidegger and Judaism" arranged under three headings. The first, the contrastive framing, encompasses cases in which the relationship between Heidegger and Judaism is perceived as antithetical. The second, the conjunctive framing, encompasses views claiming the existence of affinities and parallels between Heidegger and Judaism, grouped under three subheadings: "Heidegger and biblical thinking," "Heidegger and Kabbalah," and "Heidegger and the Jewish nation." The third, historical perspectives, uses the approach of intellectual history to explore visions of Judaism that are developed as part of engagements with Heidegger's philosophy.

Keywords

philosophy – Jewish thought – Kabbalah – biblical theology – nationalism

"Heidegger Quits Nazism" (*Heidegger poresh min haNazism*). This was the title of a column published in 1938 in Hebrew in the journal *Turim* by Dan Pines, a Poland-born Jewish writer, editor, and politician.[1] Pines, who signed

1 Kolmos (Dan Pines), "Heidegger Quits Nazism," *Turim*, no. 17, 1938, 2 [Hebrew]. Pines, a close friend of the journal's editor, the poet Abraham Shlonsky, was the author of history books, dictionaries, and thousands of articles on various topics in a number of languages. The translations from Hebrew are my own.

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his columns with the pseudonym "Kolmus," meaning "quill pen," commonly wrote about the European intellectual scene, but this appears to be his only piece on Heidegger. One of the striking features of totalitarian states and Germany in particular, he writes, is that they wish to have an army and a secret police as well as a philosophical doctrine. Germany, until recently the land of science, knowledge, and culture, but now a racist, Aryan state, seeks to control its people's body and spirit as well as the minds of its intellectuals. To be sure, tyrants have always sought the veneer of intellectual and scientific support. Customarily, they would find mediocre, "fake" intellectuals who would be happy to jump on the bandwagon and serve the powerful. In present-day Germany, he reports, most intellectuals and artists have fled the country because they could not "betray their vocation" and support the racist pseudo-science of the Nazi regime. Somehow, however, the Nazi Party managed to catch in its net some 'important' intellectuals who were willing to commit "spiritual and moral corruption" and idolatrous "worship of Baal." Most often, Pines determines, this was done for opportunistic reasons of career advancement. Pines lists a number of such intellectuals, among them Philipp Lenard in physics, Richard Strauss in music, Gottfried Benn in literature, and Heidegger in philosophy.

Turning his focus on Heidegger, Pines narrates his political involvement and makes a number of interesting historical claims. He states that Heidegger had already been declared the party's philosopher before its rise to power – not on the basis of anything he wrote, because he did not actually announce his support of the Third Reich in written form before 1933, but on the basis of his support for a totalitarian state and an all-powerful leader, which could be gleaned between the lines of his dense writings. At the same time, because Heidegger's support of the party was not sufficiently vocal, he was also not fully trusted. While Heidegger joined the "racists," Pines continues, he did not agree with their racist doctrine: "He must have felt very uneasy," Pines notes, "when the Nazis delegated his Jewish teachers – Hermann Cohen, Husserl, Bergson, and others – to the lowest rank of the racial world." Nevertheless, he was willing to look the other way because of the prospect of securing the prestigious chair in philosophy at the University of Berlin. In the end he was not offered this position because his fellow Nazi professors suspected he was not entirely loyal to the party. Pines claims that "everyone knows" that Heidegger's stated reason for not going to Berlin, namely, that he wanted to stay in provincial Freiburg, was nonsense, as "everyone knows" he deeply desired the Berlin position. But in truth, he never stood a chance because his philosophical style was too idiosyncratic and he had too many Jewish teachers. Following this experience, Heidegger understood that he had to become what Pines calls ironically

"a complete *tzadik*" and to be more vocal about his ideological support of the party. He began lecturing publicly both on philosophical matters and on the state and the leader. The problem was that he could not wholeheartedly endorse the Nazi ideology. Unlike Nicolai Hartmann, Pines explains, Heidegger could not claim that the Nazi state was the fulfilment of the Platonic ideal state, because he believed that the state was to be neutral with respect to values, and the idealization of the leader, while legitimate in and of itself, could not become a cult of personality. Subsequently, the opposition from the Nazi professors became stronger, claiming that Heidegger had become a liberal – Pines cynically adds here "God forbid" – and thus his status as the party's official philosopher was revoked.

Two options lay before Heidegger at this point, according to Pines: the submission and subservience of a "Canaanite slave" or repentance (*hazara bi'teshuva*). Heidegger chose the second option. Why? Because the scientific-intellectual conscience was awakened in him and this allowed him to respond to his demotion with dignity. Gradually, Heidegger distanced himself from the party. In a lecture series from 1937 on Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Pines writes, Heidegger openly attacked the idea of a totalitarian state, and it was clear to everyone that through his critique of Hobbes he was indirectly attacking the Nazi Party and its totalitarian politics. Four years after Hitler's rise to power and the official commencement of his Nazi career, Heidegger acknowledged that "subjugating science to the authority of the state would only serve immoral ends." Pines writes:

> This is the logical and necessary repentance (*hazara be'teshuva*) of people like Heidegger, who were swept away by the swampy ideological fads of the day which are alien to science and defile its spirit. While Heidegger has not been removed from his chair [in Freiburg] yet, it can only be hoped that he will finally recognize that real science cannot co-exist with fraudulent "science." Whoever wishes to sanctify (*lekadesh*) science and the arts cannot defile the human being within himself; and if he does, he will end up being defiled himself (*lehista'ev*), either in the eyes of the Nazis or in his own eyes and the eyes of the enlightened world. Heidegger chose to defile himself in the eyes of the Nazis.

Heidegger had thus repented. He had certainly sinned – his opportunism led him to support the immorality of the Nazis – but the scientific spirit within him, his integrity as an intellectual, gained the upper hand. He could not, if he was to be true to himself and to his vocation as an intellectual, remain a Nazi. Heidegger thus became a *ba'al teshuva*.

Pines's article is an unknown and peculiar source in Heidegger's Jewish reception. It is riddled with historical inaccuracies. To begin with, its title, "Heidegger Quits Nazism," is at the very least misleading. Heidegger did not "quit" (*poresh*) the Nazi Party in 1938. While he became a rather dissatisfied member around 1934, he remained a member until 1945. The details about Heidegger and the Berlin post are misinformed: Heidegger did, indeed, decline the call to the chair of philosophy in Berlin in 1933 – twice, in fact (as well as two calls from Munich), because he wished to remain in the provinces.[2] Some of Pines's claims about Heidegger's lectures cannot be corroborated. In 1937 Heidegger lectured on Nietzsche's metaphysics and on logic, not on Hobbes. The English philosopher is discussed, respectfully but critically, in an important 1927 lecture course, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, but here Heidegger says nothing about Hobbes's political philosophy or about *Leviathan* but focuses, characteristically, on his doctrine of being and truth. The statement about Heidegger's discomfort with the way his Jewish teachers were treated is difficult to defend, as is the claim that he believed that the state was to be neutral regarding values. It is hard to trace the sources of these historical errors. Heidegger's lectures had not yet been published, and it is unclear where Pines received this information from.[3] It should be noted, however, that some of the historical information in this article has been confirmed by more recent scholarship, for example, that Heidegger had distanced himself from party ideology already during the 1930s and that the party treated him with suspicion.[4]

On the face of it, Pines's piece deals with Heidegger's evolving relationship with the Nazi Party as one instance in a broader understanding of the nature of the life of spirit and the relation between intellectuals, philosophy, and politics. Pines's claim, based on the "ad hoc rescue" fallacy, is that the vast majority of scientist, intellectuals, and artists did not sell out to the immoral totalitarian state, and even those who supported the party, like Heidegger, did

2 Martin Heidegger, "Schöpferische Landschaft: Warum bleiben wir in der Provinz?," Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe 13 (Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 9–13.

3 Reflected here, perhaps, are the many unsubstantiated rumors that circulated about Heidegger at the time. One such rumor was that Heidegger had banned Edmund Husserl from the university library. See: Daniel M. Herskowitz, "The Husserl-Heidegger Relationship in the Jewish Imagination," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 110, no. 3 (2020): 491–522.

4 In fact, in a 1968 letter to Shlomo Zemach, the translator of Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* into Hebrew, Heidegger himself claimed that there were Nazi informers sitting in his lectures and reporting back to the party about the content of his classes. See Daniel M. Herskowitz, "Heidegger in Hebrew: Translation, Politics, Reconciliation," *New German Critique* 135, vol. 45, no. 3 (2018): 97–128.

so because of opportunism.[5] At the end, Heidegger could not withstand the yawning gap between his scientific, spiritual, moral vocation and his actions, and this led him to recognize his wrongdoing and backtrack. A key assumption at play in this understanding is the inseparable connection between the world of spirit and morality: intellectuals partake in a broad humanistic and moral project, and those who join totalitarian regimes are either not truly intellectuals or are betraying their moral vocation. Heidegger, as a philosopher, as a lover of truth, knowledge, and the good, could not be on the side of vulgarity and anti-science. From this perspective, the notion of a Nazi philosopher is a contradiction in terms. No real philosopher could be a Nazi, and if it appears that this is the case, it is an anomaly, the result of a betrayal. A Nazi intellectual was either not truly an *intellectual* – a second-rate, a fraud – or not truly a *Nazi*, but a mere opportunist.

It appears, then, that the report on Heidegger's *teshuva* makes a general statement about the inherently moral charge of intellectual life. However, when this piece is read alongside other essays by Pines from this period, what becomes clear is that it partakes in a broader theme that occupied Pines, namely, the relation between science, intellectual life, and Judaism.[6] According to Pines's view on the matter, there is an intimate bond between the ethos of *Wissenschaft*, *Kultur*, and *Bildung* – and the biblically rooted Judaism. The values of the Enlightenment and liberalism converged with the spirit of Judaism, the religion of morality, humanism, and reason. Judaism was inherently connected to the broad moral spirit and vocation in which intellectuals, scientists, and artists participated. When read in this context, what emerges is that it is this conceptualization of the relation between Judaism and the spirit of *Wissenschaft* – prevalent at that time – that stands at the foundation of Pines's report on Heidegger's gradual self-distancing from the Nazi Party, and it is what allowed him to accept as true whatever reports he was receiving about Heidegger's change of heart, as these reports matched and reaffirmed his worldview. In this regard, Pines's narrative, while discussing Nazism, relates an optimistic story about order that has been restored, an anomaly that has been corrected: the philosopher who had digressed has returned to the right

5 This fallacy is a particular attempt to defend universal generalizations by improperly falsifying counterexamples by formulating a new ad hoc generalization that is designed to immediately exclude any counterexample. It is sometimes called the "No True Scotsman fallacy," because the example that is commonly brought to demonstrate it is this: Person A: "No Scotsman puts sugar on his porridge." Person B challenges: "But X is a Scotsman and he puts sugar on his porridge" – to which Person A responds: "No *true* Scotsman puts sugar on his porridge."

6 See, for example, Kolmus, "The Jews and German Culture," *Turim*, August 31, 1938, 2 [Hebrew].

path and embraced his moral and humanistic vocation as an intellectual. But also implied here is that as a *ba'al teshuva*, Heidegger has effectively aligned himself with the spirit of Judaism. The striking fact that in 1938 the intellectually inclined Hebrew-speaking public in Mandatory Palestine was informed that Heidegger, the great philosopher of the day, had left the Nazi Party for moral reasons that were inherently linked to Judaism, brings us to the topic of the present study: the theme "Heidegger and Judaism."

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In what follows I offer a survey and some reflections on a number of prominent, recurring, or new directions in the growing scholarly discourse on the theme "Heidegger and Judaism." The survey is expositional, clarificatory, inevitably selective, and by no means exhaustive.[7] I focus on three key headings. The first, the contrastive framing, encompassing cases in which the relationship between Heidegger and Judaism is perceived as antithetical. The second, the conjunctive framing, encompasses views claiming the existence of affinities, similarities, and parallels between Heidegger and Judaism.[8] The third comprises historical perspectives on the theme of Heidegger and Judaism. There are overlaps, intersections, and affiliations between the three categories adopted here; I discuss them separately for the sake of clarity, but they should not be taken as mutually exclusive or strictly distinct from one another. It is fair to say that between the contrastive and conjunctive framings, the contrastive is by far the most prevalent. A minority of cases offer some version of conjunction between Heidegger and Judaism. This relatively small but intriguing direction is explored here under three subheadings, "Heidegger and biblical thinking," "Heidegger and Kabbalah," and "Heidegger and the Jewish nation."

Given Heidegger's morally compromised biography and philosophy, the contrastive framing might seem more intuitive, yet the conjunctive framing should not be all that surprising. All thinkers develop their ideas as part of their social, cultural, political, and historical context and conceptual horizons, and it is hardly uncommon for Jewish thinkers to approach their tradition through the lens of prominent philosophical systems. Examples are plentiful: Philo

7 Cf. Elad Lapidot, "Heidegger's *Teshuva*?," *Heidegger Studies* 32 (2016): 33–52. It should be stressed that the topic at hand is not Heidegger and the Jews, and I will mention but not discuss in detail the question of his Nazism, antisemitism, or the recent "controversy" surrounding the publication of the *Black Notebooks*. These are important but also much-digested topics on which there is a vast scholarly literature.

8 I think "conjunctive" is a more accurate description than "harmonizing," as Michael Chighel calls it. See n. 17 below.

thought Moses through Plato, Maimonides found in Aristotle and al-Farabi a key to unlock the secrets of the Torah, Nachman Krochmal utilized Hegel and German Idealism to develop a philosophy of Jewish history, Hermann Cohen spoke of affinities between Kant and Judaism, Isaac Breuer stated "Blessed be God, who has given of His wisdom to Kant," and Scholem announced "Kierkegaard *is* a Jew!" and so forth.[9] In principle, at least, it should not be different with Heidegger.[10] At the same time, it is difficult to ignore the thought that Heidegger is not like any other thinker in this regard. While declarations about Kierkegaard's Jewishness might seem clumsy to the contemporary ear, "Heidegger is a Jew!" sounds distasteful, even preposterous. Although he was not the first philosopher to express anti-Jewish sentiments – the list is longer than some might like to admit – there is a sense in which his unrepentant support of Nazism puts him in a category of his own. The publication of his philosophical diaries, the *Black Notebooks*, in which explicit negative evocations of *Weltjudentum* are found, appears to bolster this conclusion. In a number of much discussed paragraphs, Heidegger refers to *Judentum* and *Weltjudentum* as embodying the uprooting technological machination (*Machenschaft*) and the oblivion of being. He also voices an antisemitic trope when he speaks of the Jewish "empty rationality and calculative efficiency."[11] Also worth noting is the link he draws between Judaism or the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition and efficient causality. For him, the conception of the creator God of the Bible who serves as the manufacturing cause of the world is a technological conception of the divine that lacks the mysteriousness and exaltation of the holy. The explicit invocations of Judaism in the context of the *Seinsfrage* and *Seinsgeschichte* in the *Black Notebooks* led to the insertion of the theme "Heidegger and Judaism" into mainline Heidegger studies and generated an abundance of literature.[12]

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9 Isaac Breuer, *Mein Weg* (Jerusalem: Morascha Verlag, 1988), 54. This is a citation of the benediction recited upon seeing a non-Jewish sage. See Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot 58a. Scholem would later retract this enthusiastic statement and admit, "I erred grievously when I believed that Kierkegaard had been a Jew." See *Lamentations of Youth: The Diaries of Gershom Scholem, 1913–1919*, ed. and trans. Anthony David Skinner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 53, 146.

10 See Samuel Fleischacker, "Heidegger's Affinities with Judaism," in *Heidegger's Jewish Followers: Essays on Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas and Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Samuel Fleischacker (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2008), 1–10.

11 See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen XII–XV* (*Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941*), ed. Peter Trawny, Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe 96 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2014), 46, 56–57, 243.

12 Among many others, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Banality of Heidegger*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas, eds., *Reading*

With this in mind, we might ask: What stands behind the motivation to draw ties between Judaism and Heidegger? Is it an intellectualist penchant for sensation? A desire to link Judaism to the best of western philosophy? A secret wish to posthumously redeem Heidegger? Or do the ideas themselves point in the direction of affiliation? It is difficult to deny that connecting a Nazi thinker with Jewish tradition has a dramatic, shocking effect, and "Heidegger the Jew" can very well be the other side of the sensationalist reduction of Heidegger's philosophy to his politics.[13] Does Heidegger's Nazism not loom, concealed, behind the conjunctive approach as a whole? These are fair questions that should be kept in mind, but the conjunctive approach should nevertheless not be dismissed out of hand. It was expressed from the very beginning of Heidegger's public philosophical career, continued to be voiced relatively steadily throughout the twentieth century and after, and merits serious intellectual consideration.

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We begin with the contrastive framing of the theme "Heidegger and Judaism." As noted, it is common to understand Heidegger and Judaism as opposites. Throughout the twentieth and also twenty-first century, Heidegger's life and thought were repeatedly seen as encapsulating the philosophical, theological, ethical, and political pathologies of the day, and when considered vis-à-vis Judaism, he often represented the "negative" to many positive – and conflicting – constructions of Judaism. Martin Buber, Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas, Emmanuel Levinas, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Michael Wyschogrod, and many others all perceived Heidegger as standing in contrast to Judaism as they understood it.[14] As mentioned above, it is evident that Heidegger positions his philosophy in contrast to (his understanding of) Judaism, too.[15] The implied link between

Heidegger's Black Notebooks: 1931–1941 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016); Donatella Di Cesare, *Heidegger, die Juden, die Shoah* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2016); Peter Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2015); Marion Heinz and Sidonie Kellerer, eds., *Martin Heideggers 'Schwarze Hefte'* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016).

13 Cf., for example, the suggestion that "Heidegger's philosophy itself might somehow derive from Judaism." Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 313.

14 Cf. Daniel M. Herskowitz, *Heidegger and His Jewish Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

15 See also Christoph Schmidt, "Monotheism as a Metapolitical Problem: Heidegger's War against Jewish Christian Monotheism," in *Heidegger's Black Notebooks and the Future of Theology*, ed. Marten Björk and Jane Svenungsson (New York: Palgrave, 2017), 131–157.

Heidegger and Judaism suggested by Pines is noteworthy because it is based on a construction that is commonly at the foundation of an overarching contrastive positioning of the relation between Heidegger and Judaism. It framed, for example, how thinkers as different from one another as Ernst Cassirer and Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik understood the relation between the two. For both thinkers, Heidegger's non-rationalism and rebellion against scientific thinking is interlinked with his attraction to totalitarianism and places him in opposition to Judaism, the religion of reason and morality.[16] Pines holds a similar understanding of Judaism, but due to misinformation and inaccuracies, he finds Heidegger closely affiliated with it. A more recent instance of the contrastive approach is Michael Chighel's *Kabale: Das Geheimnis des Hebraischen Humanismus im Lichte von Heideggers Denken*.[17] Chighel posits a radical opposition between Heidegger's philosophy and Judaism. For him, Heidegger represents an attack against everything Judaism holds dear – transcendence, creation, humanism, ethics – and confronting his thought constitutes a unique opportunity for Judaism to illuminate its teachings and express its truths and vocation more accurately. Chighel's main intervention comes in the form of a confrontational analysis of important concepts in Heidegger's philosophy and parallel opposite Jewish concepts: "Welt" and "Od," "Boden" and "Eretz," "Erde" and "Adama," "Ethos" and "Tzelem," "Poiesis" and "Avoda," "emet" and "aletheia" – each side co-illuminating the other by exposing the radical opposition between what Chighel calls Heidegger's anti-Adamism and the humanism of Judaism. As is characteristic of the contrastive framing, Chighel approaches Heidegger's thought with utter seriousness. Positing Heidegger as the contrast to Judaism does not mean dismissing him. Indeed, part and parcel of the

16 See Soloveitchik on Heidegger, for example: Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence J. Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 141 n. 4; Soloveitchik, *The Halakhic Mind* (New York: Seth Press, 1986), 53. See also Elliot R. Wolfson, "Eternal Duration and Temporal Compresence: The Influence of Ḥabad on Joseph B. Soloveitchik," in *The Value of the Particular: Lessons from Judaism and the Modern Jewish Experience, Festschrift for Steven T. Katz on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Michael Zank and Ingrid Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 195–238; Daniel M. Herskowitz, "The Moment and the Future: Kierkegaard's *Øieblikket* and Soloveitchik's View of Repentance," *AJS Review* 40, no. 1 (2016): 87–99. On Cassirer on Heidegger, see, among many, Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000); Herskowitz, *Heidegger and His Jewish Reception*, 48–90. See also Ernst Cassirer, "Judaism and the Modern Political Myths," *Contemporary Jewish Record* 7 (1944) 115–126; Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946).

17 Michael Chighel, *Kabale: Das Geheimnis des Hebraischen Humanismus im Lichte von Heideggers Denken* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2020).

oppositional framing is the recognition that Heidegger's philosophy mounts a substantive challenge to Judaism that must be addressed head-on.

As is the case with most dichotomies, the relatively neat distinction between Heidegger and Judaism does not withstand critical scrutiny. For one, the contrast is often sustained through the de-contextualized or de-historicized presentation of both sides, whereby Heidegger and Judaism are presented as two a-historical and ossified Platonic ideas, lacking internal diversity, developments, or contradictions. It is hardly a consensus that Heidegger's philosophy is internally unified; much less so Judaism. The point here is not the polyphony and multivalence of Jewish tradition – the banal point that Jewish thinkers and texts do not all express the same position on all matters – but about the methodological presuppositions undergirding the contrastive framing. To be sure, granting different weight to different voices within a specific tradition is legitimate and necessary, but the claim that Judaism is diametrically opposed to Heidegger is easiest to defend when it is presupposed from the beginning. Such *petitio principii* predetermines what is considered a faithful representation of Judaism or the authentic view of Heidegger and obscures or explains away dissenting cases or counterexamples. Even if operating without any *petitio principii* is unfeasible and the self-same essence in the metaphysical sense is not an ideal, the important point is that the fervid rhetoric of clashes and contrasts is somewhat softened by the very need to obscure these counterexamples. It is also worth reflecting on the grandeur that is attributed to Heidegger as Judaism's archenemy according to this framing. The contrastive relation implies a certain form of intimacy and co-belonging in negation that does not characterize other philosophical systems. Through a dialectic of proximity in opposition, Heidegger's philosophy belongs "closer" to Judaism precisely because it is its arch-rival.

Another point is that some of the contrastive constructions are based on misrepresentations of Heidegger's position. One relatively well-known example of this is Levinas. Levinas portrays Heidegger as a paragon of western philosophy's totalitarian reduction of otherness to sameness. Over against Heidegger, he develops a philosophy of the Other that is intimately tied to his understanding of Judaism. Yet many have questioned his characterization of Heidegger, noting that there are Heideggerian categories that bear a close resemblance to Levinas's conception of otherness and that many of Levinas's philosophical views are decisively marked by Heidegger.[18] This leads to a

18 See, among many, Elad Lapidot, "Heidegger as Levinas's Guide to Judaism beyond Philosophy," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021); Michael Fagenblat, "Levinas, Judaism, Heidegger," in *Judaism in Contemporary Thought: Traces and Influences*, ed. Agata Bielik-Robson and Adam

related point, connected to the one about the decontextualized nature of the Judaism-Heidegger contrast. Occasionally the position representing the voice of Judaism is based on a shared intellectual nexus and conceptual horizon with Heidegger – sometimes even taking nourishment directly from him – which effectively dims the force and cogency of the contrast. The intellectual environment that fomented Heidegger's thought was shared by many European Jewish figures who left their mark on twentieth-century Jewish thought. And what is more, Heidegger himself was a major constructive source, stimulant, and foil to their own reflections. Thus, despite the framing of arch-rivalry and non-reconcilability, many twentieth-century contrastive constructions of Judaism and Heidegger are better understood as two branches on the same tree, that is, as divergent positions within a broad, multifaceted, albeit singular intellectual discourse. This does not mean that all Jewish critiques of Heidegger or oppositional constructions of Judaism are misguided or unsubstantive, but it does, once again, mellow the fiery rhetoric of contrasts.

Turning to the conjunctive framing, we begin with the first subheading, "Heidegger and biblical thinking." This manner of drawing Heidegger and Judaism together is based on a common understanding of the difference between two theoretical constructs, Greek and biblical thought. The Greek tradition, so this understanding goes, has the abstract, the necessary, the static, the ahistorical, the eternal, and the other-worldly as its key features and ideals. The biblical tradition, on the other hand, deals with the concrete, the historical, the actual, the finite, the worldly, and the contingent. The former is intellectually inclined and puts human reason on a pedestal, the latter is practically inclined and emphasizes human receptivity to the external call of God. The one deals with metaphysical thought, the other deals with non-metaphysical, concrete existence. Within this oppositional mold, Heidegger's emphasis on temporality, historicity, receptivity, and this-worldliness, and his opposition to the ideal of a fully comprehensible world of timeless metaphysical thought, is located in striking proximity to biblical thinking. Heidegger's frequent usage of terminology from the biblical world of thought to denote existential phenomena and categories in his early and later writings appears to validate this reading. In his 1964 lecture "Heidegger and Theology," Hans Jonas offered a condensed articulation of this view.[19] Speaking of the apparent resemblance between Heidegger's philosophy and biblical thinking, he notes that "[t]he

Lipszyc (London: Routledge, 2014), 51–63; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 90–153.

19 Hans Jonas, "Heidegger and Theology," *Review of Metaphysics* 18, no. 2 (1964): 207–233.

Biblical or generally religious ring" of many elements of Heidegger's thought "is unmistakable."[20] Among the many examples he brings are the following:

> the moment of call over against that of form, of mission over against presence, of being grasped over against surveying, of event over against object, of response over against concept, even the humility of reception over against the pride of autonomous reason, and generally the stance of piety over against the self-assertion of the subject.[21]

Jonas also mentions the Heideggerian categories of "guilt and conscience and call and voice and hearing and response and mission and shepherd and revelation and thanksgiving," as well as the idea that originary *Denken* is *Danken*.[22] Plenty more examples can be added to this list, such as the depiction of the history of beyng as a narrative of salvation, and parallels between the Heideggerian poet and the biblical prophet, among others. These resemblances are not coincidental: the roots of key categories and structures in Heidegger's philosophy can be traced back to his early readings of theological sources and authors such as Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard. It should be noted that Jonas does not endorse the view that biblical thinking is embedded in Heidegger's philosophy; he evokes it for the purpose of debunking it. His aim is to convince his audience of Christian theologians that Heidegger's conceptuality has undergone such a thorough secularization that it is no longer biblical but has become fully pagan.[23] Indeed, suspicion of the hermeneutics of resemblance between Heidegger and biblical thought stands in the background of many polemical Jewish encounters with Heidegger, situated within the contrastive framing, as thinkers such as Jonas sought to affirm that while Heidegger *seems* to be channeling biblical thinking, *in fact* he is a pagan, a Gnostic, an atheist, a secularized Christian thinker, and so forth.

Nevertheless, the juxtaposition with biblical thought, especially prominent among Christian readers of Heidegger, finds its expression in Jewish contexts as well. Part of Heidegger's early Jewish appeal was the promise of a

20 Ibid., 212.

21 Ibid., 211.

22 Ibid., 214.

23 For a detailed analysis of this lecture's rich reception, see Daniel M. Herskowitz, "Hans Jonas's 'Heidegger and Theology' as Text and Event," in *Hans Jonas und die Marburger Hermeneutik*, ed. Andreas Grossmann and Malte Dominik Krüger (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2023), 83–109. See also, Daniel M. Herskowitz, "Secularization and De-legitimation: Hans Jonas and Karl Löwith on Martin Heidegger," *History of European Ideas*, forthcoming.

non-metaphysical, concretely historical and existential form of philosophizing that was associated with Jewish thinking. Already in 1935, the German rabbi Leo Baeck called attention to the effectively "Jewish" nature of the intellectual current of existential thinking and of Heidegger's philosophy in particular. For Baeck, Jewish or biblical thought, like "existentiellen Denken," grants precedence to factual existence over abstract thought and treats the latter as dependent on the former. And insofar as "Jewish thinking is precisely the thinking in which the human being is enclosed, which concerns him, him, in his definite, concrete reality, in the definite, concrete hour in which he is now," then "[t]he philosopher Heidegger has – intentionally or unintentionally – expressed a biblical thought." Baeck also paraphrases a passage from *Sein und Zeit* to declare, "This is Jewish thinking."[24] Shlomo Zemach, the translator of Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* into Hebrew, identified similarities between specific Heideggerian ideas and biblical themes from the Psalms, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. He drew parallels between Heidegger's *aletheia* and *das Unverborgene* and the biblical idea of God's revelation from hiddenness in Isaiah 45:15, and between Heidegger's *Lichtung* and the clearing of swaths of forest by the divine voice in Psalm 29:9.[25] A comparable interpretive strategy has been taken up and developed with more sophistication by others, such as Allen Scult and Zohar Atkins.[26] An interesting case in this regard is Michael Wyschogrod. In *The Body of Faith*, Wyschogrod utilizes the construction of the differences between biblical and Greek thinking sketched out above and characterizes the former according to undeniably Heideggerian terms, only to then place Heidegger on the side of Greek thinking and contrast it with the authentic biblical thought he saw himself developing.[27] Emil Fackenheim, in an otherwise rather critical assessment, sees in Heidegger's later philosophy, and particularly in the idea that original thinking that is accessible to the unconcealment of the presence of being is a "hearing" rather than "seeing," a startling convergence with biblical Jewish thought, because "ever since Plato philosophers 'see,' ever since Moses

24 Leo Baeck, "Die Existenz des Juden," in *Briefe, Reden, Aufsätze*, ed. Michael A. Meyer, Leo Baeck Werke 6 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), 245–253.

25 Cf. Herskowitz, *Heidegger in Hebrew*, 120.

26 See Allen Scult, *Being Jewish / Reading Heidegger: An Ontological Encounter* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004); Scult, *Martin Heidegger and the Hermeneutics of Torah: A Strange Affinity* (New York: Hunter College of the University of New York, 2007); Zohar Atkins, *An Ethical and Theological Appropriation of Heidegger's Critique of Modernity: Unframing Existence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

27 Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996); Daniel M. Herskowitz, "Between Barth and Heidegger: Michael Wyschogrod's *The Body of Faith*," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 30 (2023): 328–353.

Jews 'hear.'"[28] As this idea is the "sole, albeit many-sided, theme of Heidegger's entire later work," then Heidegger's later work is "engaged in no less startling an enterprise than the Judaization of the entire history of Western philosophy." This lends "prima facie evidence to the view that the later Heidegger Judaizes philosophy, and hence to the view that the Jewish thinker is justified in being attracted to his later thought."[29]

This "startling" understanding of Heidegger's Judaization of philosophy and the affiliation of his philosophical project to some version of ancient Judaism has been suggested recently in relation to Heidegger's earliest biblical interpretations as well. In the early 1920s Heidegger sought to comprehend the pristine religious experience of the early Christian community through close readings of Paul's letters. He centered on these sources because he believed they convey an authentic, dogma-free existential situation uncontaminated by Greek conceptualization and denuded of the metaphysically grounded Christology that would later be developed. While Heidegger could not have been aware of this, recent developments in scholarship have demonstrated Paul's enduring Jewishness, and his letters are now treated as first-century Jewish texts. As such, the religious-eschatological existential situation that Heidegger read out of Paul's letters can be said to describe something like a version of late Second Temple Jewish existence.[30]

For some, Heidegger's philosophy did not just "sound" biblical or Jewish – it was secretly indebted to it. The best-known and most detailed expression of this variant of the conjunction of Heidegger and biblical thought is Malène Zarader's *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*.[31] In this work, Zarader outlines a set of confluences between Heideggerian ideas and notions from the "Hebraic heritage" – identified primarily with the Hebrew Bible and its reception in certain kabbalistic traditions – and

28 Emil L. Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy: A Preface to Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 218.

29 Ibid., 219.

30 For example, Michael Fagenblat writes: "After all, Heidegger strips Christian experience of its metaphysical-theological accretions and radically attenuates its Christological interests. It is unsurprising, then, that this Christianity devoid of metaphysics and Christology should resemble certain features of Judaic religious experience," and he immediately adds – "even if Heidegger completely disavows the Judaic elements of the phenomenology of primal Christianity." Fagenblat, "Levinas, Judaism, Heidegger," 59. See also Hans Ruin, "In the Spirit of Paul: Thinking the Hebraic Inheritance (Heidegger, Bultmann, Jonas)," in *Heidegger's Black Notebooks and the Future of Theology*, ed. Marten Björk and Jane Svenungsson (New York: Palgrave, 2017), 49–76.

31 Marlène Zarader, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

argues that even while, or precisely by virtue of the fact that, this non-Greek, non-Christian heritage is entirely occluded by Heidegger and placed outside the realm of thought, Heidegger's thought stands in debt to it. Indeed, the sense of being and experiences that feature his return to the pre-Socratics for a more original source of thinking mirrors senses of being and experiences found in the Hebraic tradition, which, by virtue of its repression, constitutes the "unthought" of his philosophy. In this backwards way, Zarader maintains, Heidegger can be described as the thinker who, more than other philosophers, "restored to Western thought the determinations central to the Hebraic universe" even while he has "effaced it from thought and more broadly, from the West itself."[32] Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and many others have pointed to the blind spot that Judaism constitutes in Heidegger's philosophy, but Zarader turns this blind spot into a centerpiece of his thinking and does so by utilizing his own notion of the "unthought."

One weakness of the conjunctive framing of "Heidegger and biblical thought" is its dependence on a schematic and almost caricature-like dichotomous construction of "Athens" and "Jerusalem." Featuring two ideal types, both sides of the dichotomy are simplistically posited as the mirror image of each other, representing no actual external body of knowledge, texts, or tradition but serving the sole internal purpose of maintaining the dichotomy.[33] This framing also falsifies Heidegger's complicated and shifting position toward metaphysics by depicting him as straightforwardly anti-metaphysical. More importantly, it is questionable whether the biblical resonances in his philosophy, once identified, should be linked to Judaism in any meaningful way. Since many of Heidegger's philosophical categories can be traced back to his engagements with Christian sources, it seems reasonable that whatever biblical echoes may be found in his thought are indebted to particularly Christian approaches toward the biblical tradition. Indeed, a long line of Christian and Jewish readers of *Sein und Zeit* (and later works) maintained precisely this – that the Dasein analytic bears a resemblance to Christian or post-Christian existence and is beholden to specifically Christian assumptions about human existence. Some interpreters of Heidegger who are keen of speaking of the mark that biblical-Jewish thinking

32 Ibid., 125.

33 This, in turn, reinforces the myth of the two sources of western thought – the west as a *Zweistromland* – which likewise reduces western thought to the Greek and biblical traditions, as it obfuscates other traditions and cultures that have historically influenced its development.

left on Heidegger have, in truth, a Christianized construction of Judaism or of the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition in mind.[34]

If this is so, then the apparent convergence of biblical thinking and Heidegger's philosophy would point to the true but still trivial claim that Heidegger is indebted to Christianity and Christianity grew out of Judaism. Or perhaps more accurately: the biblical, Hebraic, or Jewish stratum that has been identified in Heidegger – terminologically, conceptually, unthought, or otherwise – has not only entered into his thinking through Christian channels but is itself a Christian constellation.[35] The point here is not that the biblical legacies of Judaism and Christianity are mutually exclusive or that the transmission of ideas throughout history does not cross current understandings of confessional divides. It is, rather, that wishing to arrive at coherence and clarity regarding similarities between Heidegger and biblical thinking from a Jewish perspective leads to the daunting tasks of negotiating the complex relationship between Heidegger and Christianity and probing the projection of the Jewish-Christian difference on biblical hermeneutical traditions and on philosophy more broadly.

This hurdle contributed to the formation of a different path to address correspondences between the particular manner of thinking proposed by Heidegger and Jewish tradition. This path, recently explored by Elad Lapidot, Sergey Dolgopolski, and others, centers not on the Bible but on rabbinic thought and exegesis.[36] Inspired to no little extent by Levinas's talmudic readings, the main thrust of this venture is to treat the talmudic tradition, repressed and obscured in the annals of western philosophy, as an other, non-Greek originary source for thinking, paralleling and perhaps superior to the pre-Socratics

34 See, for example, John D. Caputo, "People of God, People of Being: The Theological Presuppositions of Heidegger's Path of Thinking," in *Appropriating Heidegger*, ed. James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 85–100.

35 Cf. how Lapidot responds to Zarader's thesis by claiming that "this biblical, Hebraic, Western Jewishness is the Christian Jewishness, the Judeo-Christian. It is the 'Jewish' as has been seen and constructed by the Christian and post-Christian West, traditionally as the *negative* origin, from which the West emerges by an act of supersession […]." Elad Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question: A Critique of Anti-Anti-Semitism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), 290.

36 See, for example, Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question*, 285–303; Elad Lapidot, "People of Knowers: On the Political Epistemology of Heidegger and R. Chaim of Volozhin," *Heidegger and Jewish Thought: Difficult Others*, ed. Elad Lapidot and Micha Brumlik (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 269–290; Sergey Dolgopolski, "How Else Can One Think Earth? The Talmuds and Pre-Socratics," ibid., 221–244; Dolgopolski, *Other Others: The Political after the Talmud* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018). See also Sarah Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

to whom Heidegger sought to return. Here, the Talmud is not simply a textual corpus but a system of thought and knowledge. This variant of the conjunctive approach follows Heidegger for the sake of constructive Jewish thinking. Lapidot explicitly states that Heidegger's philosophy – and specifically his critique, brought to light in the *Black Notebooks*, of what he considered the Judeo-Christian-metaphysical framework that resulted politically in National Socialism – can open a horizon for the emergence of "a different notion of the Jewish, a non-Judeo-Christian Jewishness, which in its turn [...] opens access to the non-biblical Jewish, perhaps even non-Jewish Jewish, namely the Talmud."[37] If Jewish thought wishes to venture beyond the philosophical reign of the logos of presence and beyond Christian determinations, then the Talmud can serve, potentially, as a more fruitful source than the Bible for this kind of critical thinking. Among the promises of this philosophical return to the Talmud is that it largely avoids the stumbling block represented by the Judaism-Christianity-Heidegger triangle that springs from juxtapositions of Heidegger and biblical thought, and it centers on a body of thought that is relatively unencumbered by undesired past baggage and has not been subjected to extensive conceptual degustation, thus providing a potential opportunity for original insight. This relative state of non-contamination presents its own set of challenges, of course. One challenge would be to put "meat on the bones" of talmudic thought and configure what exactly its knowledge might be. Another would be to explain in what way this knowledge can justifiably be said to represent the "other" to western thinking. It is also worth asking whether the preference for origins that characterizes Heidegger's return to the pre-Socratics and is implicit in the return to the Talmud should be emulated, and whether the anxiety to uphold the Jewish-Christian difference by building on the Talmud is grounded in an unspoken ideal of authenticity as purity.

The second subheading of the conjunctive framing to be discussed here is "Heidegger and Kabbalah," which lays out affinities or parallels between Heideggerian and kabbalistic conceptualities. Already in 1964 Gershom Scholem detected such affinities but immediately dismissed them. In a letter to Hans Jonas, responding to the latter's lecture "Heidegger and Theology,"

37 Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question*, 297. Lapidot grounds this move of refiguring Jewish thought via the Talmud in the postwar French reception of Heidegger, exemplified by Lacoue-Labarthe. Possibly the first to make the link between Heidegger and the Talmud was the Nazi philosopher Erich Jaensch, who stated that Heidegger's philosophy was "proper to the Jewish spirit" and was "exactly that kind of Talmudic chicanery," making it essentially "foreign to the German spirit." Quoted in Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Scholem wrote about Heidegger's philosophy: "I cannot keep up with it, it is as if my brain, which is used to Kabbalistic thinking, fails when I come across his sphere, which I discovered years ago under the keyword 'German-Kabbalah' (*dem Stichwort 'Kabbala-Teutsch'*) in the hermeneutic writings of this man, and I decided to ban myself [from it]."[38] Admittedly, Scholem's statement is opaque and undeveloped, but he is clearly distinguishing between the real kabbalistic thought in which he is immersed and the so-called "German Kabbalah" attested in Heidegger and toward which he claims to have developed a "strong allergy." He does not specify what he means by this "Stichwort" or what elements of Heidegger's philosophy led him to make this judgment.[39] Others, however, have done the work to fill in the blanks. The most elaborate and informed case for the Heidegger-Kabbalah juxtaposition has been made by Elliot Wolfson in a long line of works but above all in his monumental study *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Poiēsis*.[40] A demanding and rich work, *Heidegger and Kabbalah* draws out a line of parallels, similarities, and differences between these two bodies of thought. These include affinities between the metaontological visions of Heidegger's account of the nothingness of being and the kabbalistic account of the emanation of the infinite; and a comparative analysis of kabbalistic and Heideggerian understandings of historical experience and the role, status, and possibility of retrieval of tradition, and of their conception of authentic time as linear circularity and repetition of the different as the same. Wolfson also provides comparative examinations of Heidegger's understanding of the "mystery" and occurrence of being as a

38 I discuss this letter, which I discovered in Jonas's archive, in further detail in "Hans Jonas's 'Heidegger and Theology' as Text and Event," 99–101.

39 In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno attributes a similar statement to Scholem on Heidegger. He writes: "Heidegger's procedure [...] is a 'Teutonizing Kabbalism' [*deutschtümelnde Kabbalistik*] in Scholem's phrase." Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 112. See also Elliot R. Wolfson, *Suffering Time*: *Philosophical, Kabbalistic, and Ḥasidic Reflections on Temporality* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 635 n. 194.

40 Wolfson writes that *Heidegger and Kabbalah* is "the first serious attempt to lay out the comparison of the Heideggerian and kabbalistic corpora on the basis of textual-philological criteria," though it has "no intention of equating Heidegger and kabbalists on the basis of superficial comparisons that ignore the specificity of the respective historical, social, and cultural environments that informed each body of thinking." Elliot Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Poiēsis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 9–10. See also Wolfson, *The Duplicity of Philosophy's Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Wolfson, *Language, Eros, and Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and the Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); and Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), among many others.

simultaneity of concealment and unconcealment and the kabbalistic notion of *tsimtsum*, and of similar forms of binding-together of language and land as a theological-political-poetical crux in which the essence of a particularistic notion of peoplehood is rooted. Not only is Wolfson's study the most detailed and in-depth comparative work addressing Heidegger's thinking and any tradition extant within Judaism, he also avoids the trap of inferring homogeneity from similarity. Utilizing a distinction between the Identical (*das Gleiche*) and the Same (*das Selbe*), put to use by Heidegger too, Wolfson operates according to a meditational mode of thinking that "compels us to compound that which is heterogeneous."[41]

The present discussion cannot do justice to the complexity and nuance of this work, but a few points are worthy of note. Wolfson takes a diametrically different position than Scholem on the question of the Heidegger-Kabbalah juxtaposition. For him, not only is the comparison between Heideggerian and kabbalistic thinking legitimate from a philosophical and intellectual standpoint, it is also beneficial from a moral standpoint. For the similarities as well as the differences between Heidegger and Kabbalah invite a rethinking of the promises and pitfalls of both schemes and offer an opportunity for a co-corrective of their respective ethnocentric and exclusivist flaws. Given that Wolfson is not only a scholar of Judaism but a constructive thinker in his own right, *Heidegger and Kabbalah* is a significant milestone in the broader context of the Jewish reception of Heidegger. Not only is it arguably the Jewish engagement with Heidegger that is best versed in both Jewish tradition and Heidegger's *oeuvre*, it is also, to the best of my knowledge, the first case in which a Jewish thinker extends a critique of Heidegger *and* a critique of Judaism (or of a prominent tradition within it) as part of their examination. An engagement with Heidegger from an openly Jewish perspective that uses the philosopher as a mirror that reflects back flaws within Jewish tradition is, I believe, unprecedented. Time will tell whether this work will serve as a turning point, but future studies of the twenty-first century Jewish reception of Heidegger would be wise to take note of this novelty, reflect on its ramifications, and follow how it effects subsequent Jewish engagements with the philosopher.

The investigation into kabbalistic echoes in Heidegger is a most exciting and innovative intellectual endeavor, not least because it disrupts accepted dichotomies and inserts kabbalistic thought squarely into the western philosophical tradition. Yet scholars undertaking it are confronted with imposing challenges that can hamper its proper execution. Its prerequisites include competence and expertise in formidably vast and dense bodies of knowledge

41 Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 11.

as well as particular linguistic and philological skills, and few can claim to possess them. As a result, comparative studies of Heidegger and Kabbalah often base themselves on a knowledge of the kabbalistic sources acquired through the mediation and construction of Scholem. This leads to a number of inadequacies. For one, it is simply a mistake to take Scholem as the sole authority on kabbalistic thought, and he is most certainly not the final word on the matter.[42] When positioning Heidegger vis-à-vis the account of Kabbalah that is refracted through Scholem's lens, one also becomes susceptible to a certain circularity. The intellectual work of both Scholem and Heidegger sprang from a shared post-Nietzschean philosophical rebellion that swept the younger generation of intellectuals in early-twentieth century Germany, and the similarities that are claimed to exist between Heidegger and Kabbalah may potentially reflect analogous intellectual dispositions between Heidegger and Scholem.[43]

Readings associating Kabbalah and Heidegger are predicated on an underlying assumption, sometimes acknowledged openly, that the surprising parallels between them are not the result of a highly unlikely coincidence but have some historical-conceptual basis, namely, the existence of kabbalistic currents flowing within the German world of thought. Schelling is commonly mentioned as a key source for Heidegger's kabbalistic strands.[44] Yet we still lack a comprehensive study delineating the transmission of these concepts from their kabbalistic origins all the way to Heidegger via a variety of philosophical

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42 Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*; Johanna Junk, *Metapher und Sprachmagie, Heidegger und die Kabbala: Eine philosophische Untersuchung* (Bodenheim: Syndikat, 1998). See Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 2–3.

43 See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Phenomenology, Theosophic Topography and the Structures of Being: Unveiling the Seventh of Scholem's Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on the Kabbalah," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 55 (2023).

44 Zarader names Schelling, "whom Heidegger read so assiduously," in this context. See Zarader, *Unthought Debt*, 168. Wolfson lists "Nicholas of Cusa and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling" as two who "may have incorporated elements of kabbalistic theosophy, which, in turn, influenced Heidegger in an ancillary way." Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 4. Wolfson also mentions Böhme as an additional figure in the transmission of kabbalistic ideas to Heidegger. Steven S. Schwarzschild hinted at indirect kabbalistic resonances in the thought of Heidegger and Rosenzweig in a letter to Edith Wyschogrod. He refers to "Rosenzweig's and Heidegger's deep kinship via Schelling, so much so that one sometimes thinks Rosenzweig was just cribbing from Schelling (not that this is a novel discovery); [...] if both of these men had known as much Kabbalah as even Schelling knew, via Eckhart, etc., they might have felt respectively differently about 'Jewishness.'" Letter to Edith Wyschogrod, July 31, 1989, item no. 0906-7, "Heidegger, Martin, 1980s File," box 20, folder 5, papers of Steven S. Schwarzschild, Center for Jewish History Archive, New York. Rosenzweig pointed to Schelling's proximity to Lurianic Kabbalah in his letter to Rudolph Ehrenberg, known as the "Urzelle" of his work *The Star of Redemption*.

and theological sources. Addressing the historical question of origins, developments, and direct and indirect trajectories of influence would substantiate the thesis regarding resemblances between Heidegger and Kabbalah considerably and corroborate, perhaps, the insinuated supposition of a Jewish influence on Heidegger.[45]

The third subheading of the conjunctive framing to be discussed here is "Heidegger and the Jewish people," in which correspondences between Heidegger's understanding of the *Volk* and conceptions of Jewish peoplehood are investigated. The idea of *Volk* is central to Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Dasein's historicity and authenticity is situated within the context of the struggle (*Kampf*), heritage, destiny, and fate of its *Volk* and *Gemeinschaft*. The philosophical significance and role of the *Volk* and the interrelated conceptions of land, language, vocation, destiny, and dwelling increased during the 1930s and onwards. Heidegger's volkism contributed to his attraction to National Socialism and stood at the basis of his disturbing statements about the subordinate rank of the uprooted "Semitic nomads" who lack a proper relation to the *Heimat*.[46] It was, in addition, central to his eventual disillusionment from the Party. The correlation between Heidegger's understanding of the *Volk* as a primordial and organic communal body based on a shared language, tradition, custom, religion, land, and blood, infused with a spiritual vocation and destiny, on the one hand, and traditional views concerning the chosenness and vocation of the Jewish people, on the other hand, has been picked up and reflected on by various commentators. Early on, Alexander Altmann drew a comparison between the ontological appropriation of the volkish notions of destiny,

45 As Wolfson writes: "It is feasible […] to assume an incidental influence of Jewish theosophical speculation on his path of inceptual thinking/enowning, an inspiration that remained unspoken and unthought. At the very least, the similarities are striking and call for interpretation." Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 9. This is not to say there are no studies of Christian Kabbalah and kabbalistic influences on Schelling or German idealism more broadly. See Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 18 n. 40. See also Paul Franks, "Rabbinic Idealism and Kabbalistic Realism: Jewish Dimensions of Idealism and Idealist Dimensions of Judaism," in *Religion*, vol. 4 of *The Impact of Idealism*, ed. Nicholas Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 232–241; Franks, "Inner Anti-Semitism or Kabbalistic Legacy? German Idealism's Relationship to Judaism," in *Glaube und Vernunft / Faith and Reason*, ed. Jürgen Stolzenberg, Fred Rush, and Karl P. Ameriks (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 254–282. The best-known statement on the matter was made by Habermas, who spoke of "the legacy of the Kabbalah" that had "flowed into and was absorbed by [German] Idealism." Jürgen Habermas, "The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers" (1961), in Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 21–40.

46 Martin Heidegger, *Nature, History, State, 1933–1934*, ed. and trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 56.

heritage, and *Volk* in *Being and Time* and the traditional self-understanding of Jewish peoplehood.[47] He wrote: "[I]t is characteristic of the Jewish people that they are conscious of their heritage, as well as of their destiny, believing that they are always being addressed anew by God in the course of history [...] it is the actuality of the 'Hear O Israel.'"[48] Fackenheim, too, credits Heidegger for acknowledging the essential role played by communal belonging in authentic historicity, though he takes issue with the fact that Heidegger specified the nature of this community as a *Volk*. "A 'community' geared to a common future and recovering a common heritage might take a variety of forms," he argues. It can take the form of "a Diaspora, without a common language or geography," as was the Jewish condition "between 70 CE and the rise of the State of Israel," or of "a resistance movement with a common geography only of concentration camp and the world outside Germany." A *Volk*, however, "lacks this capacity for variety." By insisting on its *völkisch* character, Heidegger ruled out "in principle the possibility that Jews constitute any sort of authentic community."[49] One may disagree with Fackenheim's specific interpretation of the evocation of *Volk* in *Sein und Zeit*, which leads him to conclude that Heidegger's conceptuality excludes Jewish existence, but his sensitivity to the communal foundation of Heidegger's vision of authentic historicity is rooted in his understanding of the correspondingly communal character of Jewish existence. Indeed, many noted the similarities between the collective Jewish self-perception of separation and election through particularistic-exclusivist notions of blood, language, and land and Heidegger's understanding of *Volk*. Among them are Zarader, Wolfson, Françoise Dastur, John Caputo, Jean-François Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas, and others. More recently, this analogy has been utilized to critique right-wing Zionist ideology for instantiating ethnic chauvinism and fundamentalism. It has also served as a departure point for constructive intra-Zionist theological-political reflections in which Heidegger serves both as a resource and a warning. In a recent piece, Michael Fagenblat states that instead of following Zarader and searching for Jewish or Hebraic elements in Heidegger, the task ahead is "to follow this Möbius strip in the reverse direction" and trace "the becoming-Heideggerian of prominent strands of modern

47 Cf. Daniel M. Herskowitz, "Between Exclusion and Intersection: Heidegger's Philosophy and Jewish Volkism," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 65 (2020): 127–144.

48 Alexander Altmann, "What is Jewish Theology?," in *The Meaning of Jewish Existence: Theological Essays 1930–1939*, ed. Alfred L. Ivry (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1991), 40–56.

49 Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, 216–217.

Jewish thought."[50] He lists a number of elements which he calls "the unthought 'Heideggerianism' of much Judaic thought," most of which relate to the communal/national nature of Jewish existence and its configuration of tradition, language, and revelation. Among them are

> the *ontological* priority of 'we' over 'me' and of pre-reflective practice over formalizable law; the co-historicizing of authentic destiny actualized by appropriating a heritage in a novel historical context; the non-instrumental and non-representative presence of words that bear traces of the sacred name; the prophetic character of poetic thinking and its power to gather a people toward its destiny; the interpretative tasks of thinking in relation to an originary truth that is still unfolding; a view of truth as a disclosive event that conceals itself in its historical re-inception; and a sacred history that works its way through, and the same time distinguishes itself from, philosophy and religion, Occidentalism and Orientalism. Above all, it must be acknowledged that these elective affinities, as it were, are one and all rooted in the fact or the contingency, in the contingency of the fact, that the originary, primordial ecstases of Time as Being and of Being as Time was first 'concretely manifest' or – to put it more traditionally and perhaps more honestly – *incarnately revealed* in the very Name of God, whose *YHWH* encodes the temporalities of past (*hyh*), present (*hwh*) and future (*yhyh*) in its Place.[51]

One may question whether it is appropriate to refer to these similarities as "unthought Heideggerianism." The mark of Heidegger on subsequent Jewish thought is explicit and well documented and hence not unthought, and many of these ideas are not peculiar to Heidegger but proliferated in the intellectual climate of early twentieth-century Germany and were taken up and developed in different directions by Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers alike. Heidegger's stamp on important strands in twentieth-century Jewish thought is great, but it would be a mistake to downplay or obscure shared sources of influence, common assumptions, and the role of other thinkers and ideological frameworks in these developments. Surely detailed studies of Jewish receptions of neo-Kantianism, Edmund Husserl, Wilhelm Dilthey, Søren Kierkegaard,

50 Michael Fagenblat, "'Heidegger' and the Jews," in *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks: 1931–1941*, ed. Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 145–168; Fagenblat, "The Thing that Scares Me Most: Heidegger's Anti-Semitism and the Return to Zion," *Journal for Culture and Religious Theory* 14, no. 1 (2014): 8–24.

51 Ibid., 13.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Lebensphilosophie*, Oswald Spengler, Karl Jaspers, Georg Simmel, Max Scheler, Ernst Cassirer, Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Karl Barth, to name only a few – all still a desideratum – would complicate such a straightforward statement. Heidegger's bright light (or dark shadow) should not blind us from recognizing the broader intellectual environment in which these ideas developed and the existence of other theoretical sources.[52] Importantly, Fagenblat himself pursues this confluence of Jewish and Heideggerian communal/national elements constructively by developing a Heideggerian- and Levinasian-inspired Zionist political theology in a number of works.[53] This is, to be sure, a stimulating and bold undertaking in the spirit of the Habermasian call to think "mit Heidegger gegen Heidegger Denken." The fact that taking Heidegger as one's guide for the formulation of a Jewish doctrine of national identity may be counterintuitive does not mean that it would not be productive. It is, however, certainly a highly sensitive task, even when one is fully aware and vigilant of the dangers and pitfalls that such an endeavor entails. Dealing with a Pharmakon is a tricky business – the poison may just be too strong. As a whole, from a conceptual perspective, pointing to kinship between Heidegger's understanding of *Volk* and Zionism may do little more than highlight the fact that both were nourished, in different ways, by modern European ideologies of nationalism. Indeed, while the conceptuality of modern Jewish national movements clearly drew on Jewish tradition, one must also take into account the process of secularization that central Jewish categories underwent in their Zionist adaptation. The Möbius strip that seems to be present connects biblical conceptuality and modern nationalist notions of language, land, peoplehood, and election rather than Heideggerian philosophy and Jewish thought.

This point refers us back to the first variation of the conjunctive approach to Heidegger and biblical thinking. It also brings us to the final heading that will be discussed here, "historical perspectives on Heidegger and Judaism." This variation takes the approach of intellectual history and explores visions of

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52 For example, note Batnitzky's careful formulation: "The notion that language is the space in which Being is revealed remained central to his [Heidegger's] thought. It is this insight that twentieth-century Jewish philosophers interested in language would share with Heidegger, an insight however that […] Jewish philosophers would define as fundamentally 'Jewish.'" Leora Batnitzky, "Revelation, Language and Commentary: From Buber to Derrida," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Michael L. Morgan and Peter E. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 300–323.

53 See, for example, Michael Fagenblat, "Of Dwelling Prophetically: On Heidegger and Jewish Political Theology," in *Heidegger and Jewish Thought: Difficult Others*, ed. Micha Brumlik and Elad Lapidot (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018), 245–268.

Judaism that are developed as part of engagements with Heidegger's philosophy. It investigates different forms of intellectual exchanges between Jewish thinkers and Heidegger, including influences, shared sources, incorporation, critique, and rejection. Naturally, the prime focus is on the twentieth-century European intellectual scene and its various postwar geographical offshoots. Some noteworthy works in this regard are Richard Wolin's *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (2001), Samuel Fleischacker's edited collection *Heidegger's Jewish Followers: Essays on Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas, and Emmanuel Levinas* (2008), Daniel M. Herskowitz's *Heidegger and His Jewish Reception* (2021), and some of the essays in the volume *Heidegger and Jewish Thought: Difficult Others* (2018), edited by Micha Brumlik and Elad Lapidot, as well as a myriad of studies focusing on responses to Heidegger by figures such as Ernst Cassirer, Gershom Scholem, Margarete Susman, Martin Buber, Leo Strauss, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Paul Celan, Joseph Soloveitchik, Michael and Edith Wyschogrod, Emil Fackenheim, Jacob and Susan Taubes, and others.[54] The juxtaposition of Heidegger and Franz Rosenzweig, originally suggested by Margaret Susman and Else Freud and then by Karl Löwith, has generated an extensive body of scholarly work. Studies dedicated to Levinas and Heidegger are voluminous as well.

Works in this category tend to concentrate on the accepted "canon" of twentieth-century Jewish thought, consisting largely of the thinkers listed above. This is understandable and appropriate, but the example of Dan Pines with which we began this essay reminds us that figures who are not first-rate or even second-rate thinkers are worthy of scholarly attention as well. They, too, may have important insights and they, too, offer a glimpse into the general discourse of the time, reflecting a common – or uncommon – perspective that contributes to our understanding. Figures like Pines also remind us that works of philosophy are not exclusively read by philosophers but by whomever wishes to read them. Heidegger was not only discussed in academic journals and books but also in newspaper articles directed to the general public – as well as at cafés, in diaries, at the dinner table, and so forth.[55] In other words,

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54 Also noteworthy in this context is Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift*, passim; see also Elliot R. Wolfson, *The Philosophical Pathos of Susan Taubes: Between Nihilism and Hope* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023).

55 Cf. a letter from Scholem to Walter Benjamin, dated October 24, 1933, where he reports his plans for the upcoming Sabbath night dinner with friends "to declaim [*deklamieren*], as an attraction, Herr Heidegger's rectoral address from beginning to end." See *Walter Benjamin / Gershom Scholem: Briefwechsel 1933–1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 110.

Jewish engagements with Heidegger are much broader and richer than scholarship typically acknowledges, and they include what Peter Gay dubbed in the 1960s in a different context "a little flock of *philosophes*," as well as many lesser-known and even unknown figures.[56]

A recurring feature in many of these historical studies is the implicit or explicit framing of the relationship between Heidegger and a given Jewish thinker in oedipal terms (this is especially but not exclusively common in studies focusing on Heidegger's Jewish students). According to this depiction, Heidegger is the authoritative and domineering master, and the Jewish thinker under discussion takes part in "post-Heidegger Jewish thought," a complicated mix of patricide, recognition of debt, and a vain struggle to be liberated from the orbit of the master's thought. To be fair, the reason this framing is so widespread is because it is true. Many twentieth-century Jewish thinkers were occupied in precisely this form of intellectual endeavor, and some even described their project in precisely those terms. But while forceful and apt, the limitations of this framing should not be overlooked. First, the oedipal model nudges us toward determining the relationship between Heidegger and the thinker under examination from the outset and can obscure other, unexpected or unaccounted for ways of understanding their intellectual relationship.[57] Indeed, the dominance of the oedipal framing runs the risk of serving as a "one-size-fits-all" formula that produces a tiresome repetition of an "anxiety of influence" narrative. The result can be an impoverished and monotonic account of what is no doubt a much richer and untidy story. Dovetailing this point on the shortcomings of the oedipal model is a point on the trend, now waning, of speaking of "Heidegger's Children." It is somewhat diminishing to refer to a group of thinkers whose life's work was a genuine struggle with the most influential philosopher of their age as his "children." To be sure, the trope in which the teacher-student relation is conflated with the parent-child relation is age-old and hardly inherently dismissive. But in the context of Heidegger, it bears the connotations of diminution and sometimes even guilt by association. We do not call the group of philosophers struggling with the ramifications of Kant's philosophy "Kant's children" – we call them German

56 Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966–1969), 2:3–19.

57 One such case is Elizabeth Blochmann, a Jewish student of Heidegger and a scholar of education in her own right. Blochmann, who is generally ignored by critical scholarship, maintained an unproblematic and admiring relation with him also after the war. See *Martin Heidegger – Elisabeth Blochmann: Briefwechsel 1918–1969*, ed. Joachim W. Storck, 2nd ed. (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsches Literatur-Archiv, 1990).

Idealism. Surely there is a more dignifying way to refer to philosophers who were doing the same with Heidegger.

One potential pitfall that the historical perspective faces is obliviously operating according to a laden normative distinction embedded in the Heidegger-Judaism juxtaposition, whereby the encounter is staged as taking place between the "good" Jewish thinker and the "bad" Nazi. Painting this philosophical encounter in moralistic colors risks skewing our understanding and judgment of it. The fact that Heidegger is a morally compromised figure does not relieve the intellectual historian from conducting a critical examination of the coherence and cogency of the accusations made against his thought. There is a crucial difference between what may be termed "the idea of Heidegger" and Heidegger's actual philosophy, and it is the burden of the scholar to discern which one is the definite target of the critique.

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Almost a century has passed since Heidegger published *Sein und Zeit*, meaning almost a century has passed since the theme of Heidegger and Judaism emerged. What will the second century of Heidegger's reception look like? What variations of "Heidegger and Judaism" will be developed? What will the ands and ors between them look like? Time will tell. What is clear is that while there is no denying its thorniness, this theme has elicited a substantive body of work that steers away from sensationalism and *reductio ad Hitlerum* and treats it with the appropriate seriousness, intensity, and creativity. It can only be hoped that this will continue.