



HAL
open science

Heidegger's Teshuva?

Elad Lapidot

► **To cite this version:**

Elad Lapidot. Heidegger's Teshuva?. Heidegger Studies, 2016, 32, pp.33-52. 10.5840/heidegger-stud2016323 . hal-04151794

HAL Id: hal-04151794

<https://hal.science/hal-04151794>

Submitted on 5 Jul 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Heidegger's *Teshuva*?

Elad Lapidot, Freie Universität Berlin/Zentrum Jüdische Studien Berlin-Brandenburg

published in *Heidegger Studies*, 32(2016), pp. 33-52

Questionable “and”

This article addresses the question of Judaism and Heidegger. It addresses the question of this conjunction, this “and”, it doesn’t raise it. Indeed, it seems undisputed that there already *is* a conjunction here, between Judaism “and” Heidegger, which is not just hypothetical, but, even before being asked about, as if of itself “begs” the question, a question. For example: is this conjunction an encounter? This is far from obvious.

In addressing this question I feel I need to speak in first person. It is perhaps the *Not* from which thinking, for Heidegger, should arise – a need, a distress, a difficulty. If I find it difficult to address this question-begging, question-worthy, *fragwürdige* relation, it is, to use a Heideggerian turn of phrase, not because the question is far from me, but all too close. I’m still not sure, at least less sure than others, what exactly the question *is* and *how* to approach it. “The *Dasein* is indeed ontically not only close or even the closest – we ourselves *are*, each of us, it. Nonetheless or precisely therefore it is ontologically the farthest”.¹ There is for me here in fact a personal question, an *existential* question, concerning my *Dasein*, my being-there, being here.

Isn’t it Heidegger who re-earthed philosophy in existence? Who, for “all philosophical inquiry”, designated human existence, *Dasein*, as “the point where [all philosophical inquiry] *arises* and to which it *returns*”?² Who intimately re-wed *Sein* and *Dasein*, being and human

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. 19. Auflage. Niemeyer, Tübingen 2006 (1. Auflage 1927), p. 15. All translations here and below are mine.

² Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 38.

being. Who, on the other hand, seems to have so thoroughly – irreversibly? – divorced the existential from the personal, thought from life. As Hannah Arendt, who is perhaps a first figure of conjunction, encounter, in person, of Judaism “and” Heidegger, told in her speech for Heidegger’s 80th birthday, he had once opened a lecture on Aristotle’s philosophy by saying, “Aristotle was born, worked and died”.³ Currently there seems to be no thinker in history, whose biography could be more inappropriately summarized in relation to his thinking, than Heidegger himself. Rarely has philosophy been argued so *ad hominem*.

I will therefore start with a sort of autobiographical testimony, not to say confession. As a student of philosophy, I have been investing a significant amount of time in thinking and writing about Heidegger’s work as well as in translating it into Hebrew. My interest in the philosopher Heidegger was awakened by another philosopher, Levinas, who convinced me that Heidegger’s thinking was a crucial and influential event in 20th century philosophy. Reading Heidegger myself, I found much that made sense to me, much that didn’t. What I definitely learned from Heidegger was *reading*, more precisely how new thinking can emerge from new reading of old writing. It was this hermeneutical awareness, among other, that later led me *to* read and *in* the reading of rabbinic literature, which, despite its oldness, was seldom considered by the philosophical tradition as a source for critical, new thinking. It is in this sense that I can say that Heidegger was my Talmud teacher, my *rav*.

In itself, this is of course no recommendation: neither for my reading of the Talmud, nor for my reading of Heidegger, nor for any reading of both. I especially don’t feel I want to promote any agenda of “saving” Heidegger, much less of “defending” him. I’m certain there are better ways of getting to the Talmud, surely better Rabbis. Thinking however from, out of and on my own factual biography, my own “facticity” – as Heidegger called it –, I think that

³ Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger, Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse, ed. Ursula Ludz, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 2002, p. 184.

the connection I experience between Heidegger and the rabbinic tradition may generate at least one perspective on the relations between contemporary philosophy “and” Judaism. It suggests the silhouette of a bridge where many see nothing but abyss.

This silhouette of a bridge I chose to point at not through a statement, but through a question, which I formulated as “Heidegger’s *Teshuva* –?”. This title presented itself to me initially through Daniel Boyarin, who, upon hearing my itinerary from Heidegger to Talmud, suggested, with a smile, that I’m a *ba’al teshuva*. *Ba’al teshuva* is a person who did *teshuva*, namely who returned from sin, colloquially meaning a Jew returning to Judaism. The reply (also, literally, a *teshuva*) I’m trying to articulate is something like, “Yes, however a *teshuva* not exactly against Heidegger, but with or through Heidegger” – a Heidegger’s *teshuva*.

Or rather: Heidegger’s *teshuva*? The question mark designates the uncertain, searching nature of this response: it does not seek to conclude the conversation, but proposes a way to open it, to shape it. On the immediate conceptual level – concepts have their immediacy too –, it modifies the fundamental terms of the underlying conjunction. Heidegger is not juxtaposed to “Judaism” or “the Jews”, names that also function in his own discourse, be that German philosophical or Christian, and may even be said to have their primary locus in this discourse⁴; names in his language, by which he calls and means or represents (*vorstellt*) something, some things. Instead, the title question has Heidegger converse with, be interrogated by or examined through a word he never used, probably never heard, in a language, a tradition of thought, which he never considered his own. It opens a conversation with Heideggerian philosophy on the terms of rabbinic thought.

Less immediately, the rabbinic category of *teshuva*, tentatively, searchingly applied to the case of Heidegger, seems to open up to a rich complex of translations and meanings,

⁴ Elad Lapidot, „„Du, der du mit Buchstaben und Beschneidung ein Gesetzesübertreter bist“. Paulus und die Grundlegung des Judentums“, in: Täter und Opfer. Verbrechen und Stigma im europäischen-jüdischen Kontext, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2014, S.19-41.

providing a possible articulation and questioning of the Heideggerian work and life project, i.e. not just as thought but as performance, or as a performative thought, *inter alia* in its relation to the Jewish project. The fundamental concept of *teshuva* makes room for thought, delineating a horizon in which it ultimately would be possible to illuminate the very event of “thinking”, as it unfolds in Heidegger’s efforts.

All this demands much more careful treatment than I can reasonably hope to offer here. As a sort of very humble prolegomenon I will only indicate a few features of the potential bridge, a passage, junction or intersection, an *Übergang*, between Heidegger “and” Jewish thought. This indication will be undertaken from within the already existing discourse on the subject.

Before outlining a bridge, I must point at the abyss.

The Black Books

The dark shadow that for decades now has been inseparable from the name Heidegger is his involvement with German National-Socialism, a movement that was directly responsible, among others, to the great modern destruction of Jewish existence in Europe and beyond. It is a fact that in 1933, under Nazi administration, Heidegger was appointed and for one year served as the Rector of the Freiburg University, before resigning. During this period and to a lesser extent also after he actively participated in Nazi gatherings, rallies, meetings and various institutions, programs and initiatives. He remained a member of the Nazi party until 1945. There are other facts.⁵ The precise nature and duration of Heidegger’s affinity with

⁵ See Victor Farias, *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, the book that triggered the last great Heidegger controversy, arguing Heidegger’s thought may be only understood with a view to “several doctrines of National-Socialism” (p. 44); Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger et l’introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie*, Paris, 2005, represents the most convicting position, describing Heidegger’s work as the “deliberate introduction of the foundations of Nazism and Hitlerism in philosophy” (p. 9), and even going as far as suggesting Heidegger himself had written Hitler’s speeches (p. 243-4) and participated in formulating the

Nazism has been a matter of great debate. The account he himself provided after the war was scant. His writings, gradually published over the years, contain few direct references to concrete historical events. So how Nazi Heidegger's philosophy is depends to a very large extent on one's definition of National-Socialism and interpretation of Heidegger, both of which vary.⁶

One of the less certain questions has long been Heidegger's attitude towards Jews and Judaism. Several anti-Semitic expressions have been found in his personal and professional correspondence from as early as 1916.⁷ But virtually no explicit mention of the Jews was to be found in Heidegger's past known work. Not so the recently published *Schwarze Hefte*, the 'Black Notebooks', which are at the center of the current Heidegger debate. The notebooks have been written over a period of 40 years, from 1930 to 1970. They contain fragments of Heidegger's thought during those years. So far have been published, since March 2014, the notebooks written in 1931-1948.⁸ Covering the entire Nazi, WWII and immediate postwar era, their publication aroused much interest and was awaited. Indeed, the notebooks provide, among others, an unprecedented view on the development of Heidegger's intellectual engagement with and on National Socialism – his initial fascination and then growing disenchantment and critique, all in the most intimate context of his philosophy. The heated reception of the notebooks however did not focus on Heidegger's Nazism *per se*, in fact largely ignored it. The terms of the debate were set in advance, a few months before their actual publication, through a chain of interactions triggered by the editor of the Black

Nuremberg race laws (p. 339), thus demanding philosophy should “free itself from the work of Heidegger” (p. 509).

⁶ For a summary of the debate and literature references, see Dieter Thomä, Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus. In *der Dunkelkammer der Seinsgeschichte*, in Dieter Thomä (Hrsg.): Heidegger-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung. Metzler Verlag, Stuttgart 2003, pp. 108-133.

⁷ For a recent survey, see Donatelle Di Cesare, Heidegger, die Juden, die Shoah, Klostermann, 2015, pp. 116-125.

⁸ GA 94-97.

Notebooks, Peter Trawny. It is not for Nazism but for *anti-Semitism* that Heidegger is now on trial.

Trawny's essay on the Black Notebooks was published simultaneously with the Black Notebooks themselves, but pre-circulated as a draft a few months earlier, and is – as are his editor's notes in the *Gesamtausgabe* volumes themselves – the most often explicitly and inexplicitly quoted authority and source on the matter.⁹ The essay collected several statements in the Black Notebooks that speak of Jews, all in negative terms, within the conceptual framework of Heidegger's discourse of "Being". One of the most quoted statements, for example, says: "The question of the role of world Judaism [*Weltjudentum*] is not a racial question, but the metaphysical question concerning the kind of humanity, which, free from all attachments, can assume the 'world-historical' task of uprooting all beings [*Seiende*] from Being [*Sein*]"¹⁰.

These statements are very few, a handful in around 1,800 pages of notes, which Heidegger kept private during the war and in the 1970's instructed should be published as the last part of his Collected Works. However, the use of standard anti-Semitic language – *Weltjudentum* – at these time and place, within philosophical reflection, for many commentators, such as Peter Trawny, irrevocably "contaminated" Heidegger's thought with anti-Semitism: "philosophical", "metaphysical"¹¹ or – as Trawny calls it, borrowing Heidegger's own designation for his thought at those years – "*seinsgeschichtliche*" anti-Semitism. The earlier strategy of separating Heidegger's questionable political biography from his philosophy is no longer tenable. The abyss separating the philosopher and his philosophy from Judaism appears to be, in any case, absolute.

⁹ Peter Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung*, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 2014.

¹⁰ GA 96, 243.

¹¹ Donatelle Di Cesare, *Heidegger, die Juden, die Shoah*, p. 9.

Anti-

There could be different motivations to question this conception, different levels of doing it. The present deliberation I wish to set in motion by pointing at the distinctive role that “the Jews” seem to gradually acquire in the current debate as it unfolds. The accusation of “contagious” anti-Semitism, not just of the philosopher but of his philosophy, threatens of course to delegitimize Heidegger’s thought as well as any other intellectual projects significantly affected by it. Now Heidegger has produced and inspired, especially within the so-called “continental”, in particular French, philosophy, some of the strongest efforts to engage in critique of modern and contemporary thought, politics and human condition. “Anti-Semitism” thus becomes a convenient weapon for discarding critical thinking, which would be condemned and banned in the name of the Jews. This has the potential of positioning Jews and Judaism – for their own good? – as the limit of thought, i.e. as that which may not be legitimately, reasonably put in question, much less objected to, a kind of a *ding an sich*. This is an ambiguous position, which calls for careful consideration.

Within the current discourse – again, without any motivation of “saving” Heidegger, and with full awareness of the not only intellectual but also emotional complexity of the issue – I wish to indicate the equivocal nature of the category *philosophical* or *metaphysical anti-Semitism*. On the immediate level, of course, it is used to designate anti-Semitic elements in philosophical discourse and argumentation. But what exactly does this special category of anti-Semitism mean? Can anti-Semitism really be philosophical, metaphysical? Anti-Semitism is by definition directed against Semites, which, in particular with respect to Nazi anti-Semitism, seems to be a category of race, i.e. belong to biology, to the physical. Wouldn’t then both Semitism and anti-Semitism be by definition non-metaphysical? Wouldn’t “metaphysical anti-Semitism” be a mere oxymoron? Would this expression then

simply designate the methodically illegitimate procedure of supporting biological racism with *pseudo*-metaphysical arguments?¹²

There is, however, a great lack of clarity regarding the concepts of race, biology, the physical and the metaphysical. Seriously asking about the concept “metaphysical anti-Semitism” necessarily leads to the question of metaphysics itself, which is one of the fundamental questions animating Heidegger’s thought. In the Black Notebooks, for instance, he indicates how metaphysics, in establishing the dichotomy between the physical and the meta-physical, is, via a certain conceptual genealogy, the very principle at work in modern biologism and racism, which would accordingly be metaphysical categories.¹³ In such Heideggerian terms, “metaphysical anti-Semitism” would not constitute pseudo-metaphysics, but the genuine and perfected figure of metaphysics itself.

In the above much quoted statement, however, Heidegger invokes metaphysics not to support but explicitly to reject the racial aspect of his critique against the Jews: “The question of the role of world Judaism is not a racial question, but the metaphysical question concerning the kind of humanity, which, free from all attachments, can assume the ‘world-historical’ task of uprooting all beings from Being”. The Jewish question is a metaphysical, namely a philosophical question. It is precisely their philosophical nature that makes the Black Notebooks significant: they speak against Jews as the bearers of a certain knowledge or know-how, a certain project of human existence or, as Heidegger calls it, a certain relation to being. I wonder whether this kind of critique is less racial anti-Semitism and more anti-

¹² This would seem to be Emmanuel Faye’s position, who argues, against the attempt to exonerate Heidegger from racism by pointing at his anti-biologism, that in fact standard Nazi racism did not understand itself as purely biological, but rather metaphysically (p. 38, 413), for example Hitler himself considered race to be “spirit” (p. 49).

¹³ In a passage from the mid-1940’s, for instance, he speaks about “the inner reversal of metaphysics itself, through which reversal the ‘sensuality’, in the full sense of *animalitas* and ‘the biological’, becomes true reality, to which the supersensual of rationality remains subservient” (GA 97, 41). For a similar argument, see also Derrida, *De l’esprit. Heidegger et la question, galilée*, 1987, indicating how the terminology of “spirit” dominates Heidegger’s own discourse precisely in the texts from his National-Socialist time, such as the *Rektoratsrede*.

Judaism, not different in essence from what we find in the basic script of Western thought, from Paul to Luther, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and Bultmann.¹⁴ Hard and unjustified as such opposition to Judaism may be, treating it from the outset as illegitimate is not without difficulty and may prove to be self-defeating.

In fact, it seems to me that the specific conceptual thrust of the term *metaphysical* or *philosophical* anti-Semitism is the implied condemnation not only or not mainly of the critique against Jews, but in the first place of the very perception of Jews *qua* Jews, i.e. of Jewishness or Jewish being, as a philosophically or metaphysically relevant category, as opposed to pure *bios* or *ethnos*. Significantly, to the basic definition of anti-Semitism as anti-Jewish violence “based on rumors, prejudices and pseudo-scientific (race-theoretical or racist) sources” (would there be more legitimate sources?), Peter Trawny, for instance, adds that “[t]oday should be also designated as anti-Semitic whatever is meant to characterize the Jews as ‘the Jews’”.¹⁵

This somewhat cryptic definition may perhaps be clarified by contemplating Trawny’s designation of the specific kind of anti-Semitism that he recognizes in Heidegger, namely not “metaphysical” but more precisely, as already mentioned, *seinsgeschichtlich*. *Seinsgeschichte* is one of Heidegger’s central titles for his thought during those years, in the Black Notebooks themselves. It can be provisionally, albeit inadequately (see below), translated as the “history of being”, and in fact names Heidegger’s attempt to articulate the question of being (*Seinsfrage*) no longer just in the sphere of individual existence, as he did in *Being and Time*, but on the level of world history. Trawny doesn’t provide any further elucidations of the exact meaning of the *Seinsgeschichte* within the Heideggerian conceptuality. His often use of the

¹⁴ For a survey of anti-Judaism in German thought and literature, see Donatelle Di Cesare, *Heidegger, die Juden, die Shoah*, pp. 47-111, who nonetheless draws a direct line from Luther to Hitler, thus in fact does delegitimizing in principle all Western anti-Judaism.

¹⁵ Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos*, p. 11.

adjective *seinsgeschichtlich* thus effects deep estrangement. In fact, the historical dimension to which Heidegger's *seinsgeschichtliche* thought opens up Trawny understands as a "narrative", a story. And wasn't it Heidegger himself that, quoting Plato, pronounced that the first principle of philosophy is "not to tell stories"?¹⁶ To philosophy, the story would be an alien speech, a myth or allegory.

For Trawny, reading world history as the unfolding of a philosophical intrigue is mythology. Equally mythological is ascribing philosophical values to historical collectives, such as the Greeks, the Germans – and the Jews. The Jews are not to be philosophically characterized – not to be characterized as "the Jews", which would constitute, according to Trawny's definition, anti-Semitism. Would there be any other way of characterizing the Jews? What sense would it make to speak at all about the Jews, about Judaism, without any concept of "the Jews"? Trawny is aware of the difficulty when he notes, in a different passage: "For us today the use of such collective concepts has become problematic".¹⁷ Heidegger's critical appreciation of the Jewish role in the history of being, at any event, his so called *seinsgeschichtliche* anti-Semitism, Trawny can only grasp as anti-Semitic mythology, hence the title of his essay, "Heidegger and the Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy".

I have no doubt that Trawny's and other efforts to expose and insist on the question of anti-Semitism in Heidegger and modern philosophy and culture in general are motivated by a genuine concern. Nevertheless and based on the same motivation, it is imperative to point at the potential implications of too quickly dismissing as "myth" the conceptualization of Jewishness. It is perhaps one of the great challenges after the destruction of the Jews in the Shoah to renew or return to thinking of Jewish being, namely not just as a historical fact, but as an intellectual, existential possibility. In other words, there's a challenge of thinking

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 6.

¹⁷ Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos*, 27.

Judaism as something that belongs to the sphere of thinking, which can therefore pose a genuine question for philosophy – and can be legitimately put in question by it. In fact, from within philosophy, critique against Judaism establishes a fundamental relation to it, which indifference to Judaism does not. This is one reason why I think the abyss of Heidegger’s philosophical anti-Judaism also suggests a bridge.

Before articulating this thought a bit further, I will briefly position it in relation to other bridges that have been suggested in the past.

Heidegger and the Jews, *Liaisons dangereuses*

It is a noteworthy observation that the attempts to link Heidegger and Judaism or the Jews have been multiple and diverse. The different models of bridges vary according to the various understandings of Heidegger – and of Judaism.

The first model of suggested connection is Heidegger’s Jewish reception, namely the reception of Heidegger’s philosophy by Jewish thinkers. One form of this model focuses on Heidegger’s so-called “Jewish” students, for example those who Richard Wolin called “Heidegger’s Children”¹⁸: Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Herbert Marcuse and Karl Löwith, to whom can be added Günther Anders, Emmanuel Levinas and others. I say “*so-called* Jewish students”, since for many of them being Jewish had little, if anything, to do with being a student, and their intellectual work, in which they potentially “received” Heidegger, made hardly (Levinas is the exception) any explicit reference to the tradition of Jewish thought. They do present an interesting phenomenon, which has its place and significance in this context, perhaps on more developed levels, but they do not constitute a primary intellectual connection between Heidegger and Jewish thought, i.e. of thought *qua* Jewish.

¹⁸ Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans. Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2001.

A more cogent form of suggested Jewish reception of Heidegger's thought considers its direct or indirect influence on modern thinkers of Judaism. In the context of the Black Notebooks debate, Michael Fagenblat recently pointed at a certain "becoming-Heideggerian of orthodox Jewish theology".¹⁹ Similarly to Trawny, Fagenblat too establishes Heidegger's "philosophical", "metaphysical" or "ontological" anti-Semitism, which he focuses more specifically on the description of Jews as "uprooted", interpreted by Fagenblat as lacking "a land and language of their own".²⁰ This same critique of exilic Jewish existence Fagenblat then goes on to identify in Alexander Altmann's theology of "revelation and peoplehood"²¹, Joseph Soloveitchik's „existential-theological desire for the manifest destiny of the Jewish people in history"²², and Jewish orthodoxy's "reterritorialization on the sacred land, figured as an essential, constitutive element of dwelling in proximity to God"²³, as embodied for instance in the Gush Emunim movement. As Fagenblat's epigraph (borrowed from Elliot Wolfson's quoting Bob Dylan) indicates – "But the thing that scared me most was when my enemy came close; And I saw that his face looked like mine" –, it is a *scary* resemblance that his essay suggests between "Heidegger's Anti-Semitism and the Return to Zion".

Fagenblat's apprehension of Jewish peoplehood theology echoes Trawny's uneasiness with Heidegger's philosophical valuation of historical Judaism. Both touch the heart of the matter here in question. Meanwhile one could wonder whether Heidegger is the most plausible source of inspiration for Jewish national movements and Zionism, which may arguably be traced much further back to more obvious impulses in the history of modern nationalism. Equally uncertain is the identification of 20th century Zionism as the source of people, language and land, of Zion and the return to Zion, as central Jewish categories.

¹⁹ Michael Fagenblat, 'The Thing that Scares Me Most: Heidegger's Anti-Semitism and the Return to Zion', *Journal for Culture and Religious Theory*, 14.1 (2014), 8-24, pp. 22-23.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid*, 13-15.

²² *Ibid*, 16.

²³ *Ibid*, 22-23.

Moving away from a proper Jewish *reception* of Heidegger, one famous *comparison* is between Heidegger and Rosenzweig, a comparison already suggested by Rosenzweig himself in 1929 (pointing at the affinity between Heidegger, who then held Hermann Cohen's chair in Marburg, and the later Cohen himself: "a philosophical position that is precisely the position of our thinking, the new thinking"²⁴) and many others after him, like Karl Löwith and Leo Strauss.²⁵ Peter Gordon, who articulated the similarity between the two thinkers under such notions as "philosophical expressionism" or "archaic modernism", in the last paragraphs of his book points at a possible interpretation of the Heidegger-Rosenzweig affinity that departs both from the model of Heidegger's Jewish reception and from mere resemblance and suggests an opposite model of bridge. "If", Gordon carefully writes, "Rosenzweig's work drinks from ancient springs", i.e. Jewish, "then the strong resemblance between Rosenzweig and Heidegger [...] would prompt us to consider", he ventures, "the startling possibility that Heidegger's philosophy itself might somehow derive from Judaism".²⁶

This "startling" idea of Jewish tradition received by Heidegger was voiced already in 1933, by Erich Jaensch, another successor of Hermann Cohen's philosophy chair in Marburg and an avowed Nazi, who in his report to the Bavarian Culture Minister complained that "Heidegger's thinking is of the exact same nature as the talmudic-quibbling thinking".²⁷ Heidegger's Jewish-like hermeneutics was argued in detail by Marlène Zarader, in 1990.²⁸ She too pointed at significant similarities between Heidegger's thought and not modern but the *traditional* Jewish intellectual project. Jewish tradition for her was not Talmud, but the

²⁴ Franz Rosenzweig, *Vertauschte Fronten*, in: *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften. III. Zweistromland. Kleinere Schriften zu Glaube und Denken*, S. 235-237.

²⁵ See the long bibliography provided by Elliot Wolfson, "Rethinking Rosenzweig in Light of Heidegger's *Alētheia*", in: *Die Denkfigur des Systems im Ausgang von Franz Rosenzweigs 'Stern der Erlösung'*, hg. v. Hartwig Wiedebach, Berlin 2013, pp. 146-147.

²⁶ Peter Eli Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, p. 313

²⁷ Quoted in Farias, *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus*, p. 232.

²⁸ Marlène Zarader, *La Dette impensée. Heidegger et l'héritage hébraïque*, Paris, Seuil, 1990. See also Donatella Di Cesare, *Heidegger, die Juden, die Shoah*, pp. 153-155.

tradition of reading and interpreting, of “receiving” the Hebrew Bible in Hebrew – i.e. the non-Greek, non-Christian reception, rather what she designates as the “Hebraic heritage”. This heritage Heidegger inherited, she claimed, without acknowledging or wanting it – *malgrè lui*, while obliterating the inheritance, the very heritage. It remains a blind spot at the center of his thought: “The Unthought Debt”, Zarader called it.²⁹

Leaving aside the question of inheritance, various attempts have been made over the last decade to work out this hermeneutic resemblance. Sergey Dolgopolski, “working in the same space inhabited by Levinas, between the Heideggerian tradition and the Talmudic tradition”³⁰, advanced Heidegger’s hermeneutic-mnemonic approach as a model for understanding “memory in the form of the Mishnah and the Talmud”.³¹ In a vast and rich body of writings, Elliot Wolfson has turned to “certain themes in Heidegger’s oeuvre to elucidate aspects of kabbalistic esoterism and hermeneutics”³², applying, for instance, Heidegger’s poetics to “enhance the study of kabbalistic hermeneutics and poetic imagination”.³³

To return to politics, in view of the Black Notebooks, Wolfson “most provocatively” noted that “in both Heidegger and the kabbalists we find a privileging of a particular language as disclosive of the nature of being and the consequent affirmation of a unique cultural destiny of a particular ethnos, a position that harbors the potential for the disvaluing of others under

²⁹ Furthermore, “the return to the Greek” signifies *eo ipso* “the erasure of the Hebrew”, Zarader, *La Dette impensée*, p. 230.

³⁰ Sergey Dolgopolski, *What Is Talmud? The Art of Disagreement*, New York:, Fordham University Press, 2009, p. 63.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³² “What Does Heidegger’s Anti-Semitism Mean For Jewish Philosophy?”, an interview with Aubrey A. Glazer, of April 3, 2014, on the website Religious Dispatches: <http://religiondispatches.org/what-does-heideggers-anti-semitism-mean-for-jewish-philosophy>.

³³ Elliot Wolfson, *Language, Eros, and Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and the Poetic Imagination*, Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 25. See also *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death*, University of California Press, 2006; and more recently in *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania*, Fordham University Press, 2014.

the guise of racial inferiority”.³⁴ This resemblance was for Wolfson – inspired by Dylan to inspire Fagenblat – “the thing that scared me most”. In fact, Wolfson has in the past asserted more generally a “deep-rooted ethnocentrism that has sustained and nourished Jewish religious faith through the ages”, raising concerns of a rabbinic “ontological division between Jews and non-Jews” (what kind of ontology? What understanding of being? At least from a Heideggerian perspective, these would be the crucial questions) as well as of “the claim that the Jewish people have a special destiny in the history of human civilization that marks them as substantially different from all other ethnic group”.³⁵

A similar insight has led John Caputo, engaged like Trawny in “demythologizing” Heidegger, to hold, before the publication of the Black Notebooks, that Heidegger’s “narrative of being” was borrowed from “the narratives of the Jews and their God in the Tanach” about the divine call “that defines and identifies a sacred people: one God, one people, one place”.³⁶ Oblivious to its “Jewish *Urquel*”, in Heidegger’s National-Socialist version “[t]he call was addressed to a rival chosen people, not the Jews but the Greeks and their spiritual heirs, the Germans, in a rival new Jerusalem, not Israel but the Third Reich, with a rival prophet, not Hosea but – if truth be told and with all due modesty! – Heidegger.”³⁷ Caputo’s own final call illustrates how close denouncing Heidegger’s *Seinsgeschichte* can come to a harsh critique of Judaism: “We need to break with [...] the myth of the originary language, the originary people, the original land, by means of which Heidegger reproduces the myth of God’s chosen people, of God’s promised land, [...] the murderous twin myths of the people of God and of the people

³⁴ Wolfson, “What Does Heidegger’s Anti-Semitism Mean For Jewish Philosophy?”.

³⁵ Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 122-123.

³⁶ John Caputo, “People of God, People of Being: The Theological Presuppositions of Heidegger’s Path of Thought,” in *Appropriating Heidegger*, eds. James E. Falconer and Mark A. Wrathall, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 88, 96.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

of being, myths which license murder in the name of God or in the name of the question of being.”³⁸

The same ambiguity, in a milder, much more meditative form, is visible, finally, in Trawny’s exposure of Heideggerian anti-Semitism. Establishing that Heidegger’s occasional use of “race” doesn’t have a biological, but an ethnic meaning, Trawny still finds this is “coming close to the ideology of National Socialism”, since “[w]hat meaning has the belonging to a people, beyond the linguistic community?”³⁹ This leads him to raise – in a footnote – the question of a possible “Jewish kind of ‘racism’”: “It is a social-psychological question whether and how the ‘passive claim to exclusivity’ – to be the ‘chosen people’ – can be a trigger to react in a racist manner to the constant distinction between belonging and non-belonging”.⁴⁰ Another footnote at the end of the book thus explicitly suggests “another way to approach Heidegger’s *seinsgeschichtlichem* anti-Semitism”, namely of a “peculiar affinity”:

“The thought (which at times is no doubt to be designated as messianic) of the ‘last god’ as a non-universalistic god of a people reminds Judaism’s conception of god (an utterly provisional claim of course). Didn’t Heidegger consider the Germans as a ‘chosen people’? What is the relation of the ‘last god’ to this ‘chosenness’? Is there in Heidegger an unacknowledged closeness to Judaism?”⁴¹

Teshuva

Indeed, there’s much in Heidegger that makes you think of Judaism. It almost seems that even his particular kind of anti-Semitism is less “philosophical”, “metaphysical” or

³⁸ Ibid., 99.

³⁹ Trawny, Heidegger und der Mythos, p. 39-40.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 41, n. 15.

⁴¹ Ibid., 94, n. 21.

“seinsgeschichtlich” than – Jewish. As if just in his anti-Jewish moments he has never been closer to being a Jew. Untying this knot requires rethinking Heidegger, rethinking Judaism.

As a prelude, in contrast to all bridge models just discussed, I wish to contemplate not the actual, mostly hypothetical, reception, but the potential *receptability* of Jewish thought by the type of thinking generated by Heidegger from within philosophy. I’m looking for Judaism, so to speak, not in Heidegger’s past, but in his future. How the transition from antagonism to a positive relation could look like I’m not sure. It is perhaps still too recent for some aspects to unfold. One could imagine a dynamic like in Hegel’s dialectics or in Heidegger’s own Heraclitian *polemos*, strife, as the revealing process of truth.

I wish to offer instead a rabbinic *Denkfigur*. This figure appears in a narrative, a story (no history, is it myth?) about the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonian General Nevuzaradan or Nevuzaradar. Different sources transmit different versions.⁴² The story has become emblematic in rabbinic contemplation of destruction: it features in *Tisha Be’av* and was also invoked, for example by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, in relation to the Shoah.⁴³ The relevant motif, found already in earlier versions, such as the Yerushalmi Talmud, depicts how the Babylonian General’s acts of destruction – invading Jerusalem, burning the temple, slaughtering thousands – both break and restore the people of Israel’s relation to God, a relation called in modern parlance “Judaism”. The remarkable element added in the Babylonian version of the story is that this renewal of Judaism through destruction is epitomized by Nevuzaradan himself וַאֲתַגִּיר, namely becoming a Jew or as the Talmud calls it Yissrael. The transformation is effected in a moment of self-reflection, self-critique, when, estranged from his murderous self, the Babylonian General puts his own being in question: “this man, what will be of him?” (ההוא גברא מה תיהוי עליה). This moment of existential

⁴² bSan.96b, b.Git57b, y.Taan. 4:5 (25a), EichR P.23, KohR 3:16, 10:4, JalqS Ezek 364.

⁴³ Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways: : Reflections on the Tish'ah Be-Av Kinot*, KTAV Publishing House, 2006, p. 274.

ontology, of self-change through raising the question of one own's being, as some manuscripts add, the Talmud calls הרהר תשובה בדעתיה – “contemplated or thought to himself in his mind *teshuva*”.

Teshuva, in this context, is usually translated to mean ‘repentance’⁴⁴, a critical self-reflection leading to change. Literally, *teshuva* is not just *metanoia*, a “change of mind”, not just a turn but a re-turn, a turning back. Back to what? The story of Nevuzaradan makes clear that this return is not a biographical reconnecting with one’s personal origin or identity. The *teshuva* of this Babylonian is not back to Babylonia but away from it. His crucial act is putting Babylonia in question. But this self-critique is not left hanging in *epoché*, outside of history; it does not crystallize a pure transcendental subject, a pure self-knowing *cogito*. Putting his historical, political, ontic position in question, the Babylonian is not suspended in indeterminacy, but is simultaneously putting himself somewhere else: the question is *eo ipso teshuva*, also a response, an answer. His new position, his new being, allows questioning his old: it is somehow better situated. This means that in the order of thinking his new state of being is *prior* to, precedes and conditions, i.e. ontologically *older* than his old self. Rejecting the destructive Babylonian existence, Nevuzaradan *returns* to an older principle of being, the very historical, political, social, concrete existence that Babylon sought to destroy – ואתגיייר, and he became Jewish.

Following this narrative, the Talmud brings another rabbinic tradition that lists other iconic foes of Israel – Sisera, Sanherib, Haman – whose descendants not only became Israel, but “taught Torah in public”, namely became the intellectual founders of Judaism, the first Rabbis. Yissrael is not the collective of present, ready-at-hand, *vorhandene* individual substances, to whom ontology would be purely metaphysical, but the people whose question

⁴⁴ Soncino translates: “Thoughts of repentance came into his mind”.

of being is literally existential, transforming their entire existence, their very identity. Yissrael would be the people of *baalei teshuva*.

Heidegger's *Teshuva* - ?

It is this existential-historical aspect of *teshuva* that is suggestive to me in thinking the possible conjunction, the potential “and”, between Judaism and Heidegger. I say this, bearing in mind the aspect of *teshuva* that seems to be missing in Heidegger's personal postwar public position with respect to the Shoah, to the role of National-Socialism in it, and to his own role in National-Socialism, namely a manifestation of remorse.

As a matter of fact, such manifestations are not absolutely lacking. Famous past statements have indeed been rather apologetic, expressing mainly Heidegger's 1934 “disappointment of all hopes” that he initially had for the burgeoning “movement that came to power”.⁴⁵ He did distance himself from a statement he made in 1933 about the *Führer* being “the only present and future German actuality and law” (“these sentences I would no longer write today”), but generally defended his actions as rector in 1933/34.⁴⁶ The Black Notebooks now reveal a less self-confident Heidegger, who in the years following his rectorate has repeatedly referred to it as his “great error”.⁴⁷ Heidegger also admitted to the “failure” (*Versagen*) of his absence from

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Das Rektorat 1933/34. Tatsachen und Gedanken*, first publication of notes from 1945, ed. Hermann Heidegger, Frankfurt am Main 1983, 35.

⁴⁶ “I would reiterate today, today even more decisively than ever before, the lecture on the ‘Self-affirmation of the German University’, of course without making reference to National-Socialism”, *Spiegel-Gespräch mit Martin Heidegger* (23. September 1966), in GA 16, 652-683, p. 657. In his letter to Marcuse of January 20, 1948, he refers to another statement as a “stumble” (*Entgleisung*), see GA 16, 430-431.

⁴⁷ GA 94, 162, 198, 286; GA 97, 98: “The actual error of the ‘rectorate 1933’ was not so much that I did not, like cleverer others, recognize the ‘nature’ of ‘Hitler’ and in the following period stand by resentfully with them, in the area of un-willingness – namely in the same area with the willing -, but that I believed this was the time to become inaugural (*anfänglich*), historical (*geschichtlich*), not with Hitler, but with an awakening of the people in its occidental fate (*Geschick*)”. Heidegger already refers to his “political error” in his 1948 letter to Marcuse.

Husserl's deathbed and funeral, for which in 1950 he expressed his regret to Husserl's widow.⁴⁸

More specifically concerning the Shoah, Heidegger, in his 1948 letter to Marcuse, concurred with the latter's "hard, justified accusations" of the Nazi persecution of the Jews (though adding that the same accusations should be made of the Soviets, just "instead of 'Jews' it should read 'East Germans'").⁴⁹ But Marcuse's explicit entreaty – "many of us have long waited for a word from you" – for "a word that would liberate you clearly and definitely from this identification [with the Nazi regime], a word that would express your real, current position to what happened", Heidegger declines, saying: "An avowal [Bekenntnis, also 'confession'] after 1945 was impossible for me, because the Nazi supporters pronounced their change of heart [Gesinnungswechsel] in the most repulsive way, I, however, had nothing in common with them". 20 years later he apparently still disappointed Paul Celan's "hope, today, for a thinker's word to come" [*auf eines Denkenden kommendes Wort*].⁵⁰

Unlike actual Nazi supporters, Heidegger seems to say, he has no confession, no repentance to make. In other words, his opposition to the Nazi regime required no change of heart, no *metanoia*. In the Spiegel-interview of 1966 Heidegger maintained that his university lectures since 1934 have already constituted a controversy [*Auseinandersetzung*] with National-Socialism.⁵¹ In his 1962 letter to Father William J. Richardson, published as a forward to Richardson's book that introduced Heidegger to the American readership, he explicitly

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, Brief an Malvine Husserl zum 90. Geburtstag, GA 16, 445. See also in the Spiegel interview, p. 663.

⁴⁹ GA 16, 431.

⁵⁰ Margarete Sander, Textherstellungsverfahren bei Elfriede Jelinek: das Beispiel "Totenauberg", Würzburg 1996, p. 96-98.

⁵¹ GA 16, 664.

dismissed the opinion that his thought “had since 1947 gone through a ‘turnabout’ [*Umkehr*] or even since 1945 a ‘conversion’” [*Bekehrung*].⁵²

This he writes, however, in the same letter, by way of reaffirming and clarifying a conceptual figure that will increasingly become central less in Heidegger’s own thought than in its reception, namely the figure of the *Kehre*. How to translate, how to understand the *Kehre*, the ‘turn’? Could it mean a re-turn? Would this be a figure of Heidegger’s *teshuva* - ?

Jewish *Kehre*?

I’m reflecting on *teshuva* as a return to where one has not yet been, which requires not reaffirming but questioning one’s own identity, own tradition: Babylonia questioned by a Babylonian general – or Europe by a German philosopher. In fact, much more than any critique of Judaism, Heidegger’s intellectual itinerary traces one of the most comprehensive modern self-critiques of modernity itself and its defining traditions and conditions: Europe, the West, Theology, Humanism, Christianity, Ontology, Logic – and Philosophy. “Metaphysics” is how Heidegger often jointly names them. After 1934, in his 1939 Black Notebook for instance, he points at how one of the contemporary outcomes of these traditions, next to Bolshevism, is National-Socialism: “the *authoritarian* ‘*Socialism*’ (in the variants of Fascism and National-Socialism) is a [...] form of the completion of modernity”.⁵³

In the 1945 aftermath he therefore dismisses the German wish to repent by reconnecting to German philosophy: “There are still ‘philosophers’ who consider it good to go back 200 years and *reconnect* [*anzuknüpfen*] to the ‘enlightenment’, yes in general to ‘reconnect’ to

⁵² GA 11, 149. First published in William Richardson, Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought. Preface by Martin Heidegger, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1963.

⁵³ GA 96, 109.

somewhere and to ‘renew’ and ‘convert’ something – instead of ‘seeing’: what is”.⁵⁴ Putting the tradition of metaphysics and philosophy itself into question is not a method of reconfirmation, such as the Kantian critique. On the other hand, the required reposition of thought with respect to metaphysics cannot just pretend to simply “overcome” [*überwinden*] it by leaving it behind. Naively going back and naively moving on both lead to an “eternal return of the same”. Heidegger thus invests thinking in contemplating the meaning of the necessary “step back”⁵⁵: “Go back to what is backward, where the beginning held back – back to the future of what is coming. But never go back to what has been until now” [*Zurück in das Zurück, worin der Anfang sich verweigerte – zurück in die Zukunft aus dem Kommenden. Aber nie rückwärts in das Bisherige*].⁵⁶ The return from the present should not re-start it but re-open a future for what it left behind. Is this not the fundamental drama of *teshuva*?

How this could be read as a basic plot of Heidegger’s project can be only shown here with what Heidegger calls a *Wink*, a ‘hint’. The Heideggerian performance is observable already on the first page of his early published *magnum opus*, *Sein und Zeit*. The work begins with the primal act of reception, of tradition: a quote. The quote is Plato’s original Greek. What it receives is the tradition to which Plato is an origin. This tradition, as said before, Heidegger will call by many names. Here, at the beginning of *Being and Time* he identifies the collective subject of this tradition indexically as “we, in our time”, which can mean, for instance, German philosophy, 1927. Approaching philosophy as a tradition grounded on *urtext* is not

⁵⁴ GA 97, 127; “Karl Jaspers want to delete the last 200 years of German intellectual history”, GA 97, 62.

⁵⁵ GA 97, 163-164, 292-294, 318-319. In 1948 Heidegger even includes “*Schritt zurück*” in the keyword index [*Stichwortverzeichnis*] that he prepares for *Anmerkungen V*, see GA 97, 518.

⁵⁶ GA 97, 365.

trivial⁵⁷, considering the philosophical tradition, especially in modernity, *as* modernity, can almost be characterized by its objection to reception as a legitimate form of knowledge.

The textual tradition of philosophy is received here in the form of a question, what Heidegger takes to be its original question: the quote is Plato's question about "what we mean when we say that something is", namely the question of being, the *Seinsfrage*. As *Sein und Zeit* and Heidegger's later work will argue, being in a relation to what the Greek called *einai*, "being" or "to be", is the defining feature not just of the philosophical existence or Greek lifestyle but more generally of the human being. With the beginning of relating to being, such as the explicit question about being, begins human history, human time. In a similar way, perhaps, the book of Beginning, *bereshit*, identifies the time of *Adam*'s (translatable as "man's") descendant *Enosh* (translatable as "human being") as "when one began to call the name of *JHWH* (which names, as Ex. 3:14 attests, something like 'to be')" (Gen. 4:26).

What makes Heidegger's act of reception so remarkable, so *receptive*, is his basic observation, not that the question of being has been in fact the basic question of the tradition of thought, the tradition of human being that refers itself back to Plato – philosophy, metaphysics, humanism, Europe, the West, modernity –, but, on the contrary, that to "us, in our time", Plato's question actually no longer makes any sense – and has been making no sense for quite a long time, perhaps since Plato himself. The ensuing Heideggerian project can be thus read as a sustained interrogation of the Western tradition as a tradition of obliterating its own constitutive question, of repressing its own beginning. This interrogation attempts to return to the question, to regain the relation to being: to "go back to what is backward, where the beginning held back".

⁵⁷ A similar approach to philosophy Heidegger presents in his preface-letter to Richardson, biographically describing his own discovery of the question of being by means of reading Brentano reading Aristotle, see GA 11, 145.

The initial step made in *Being and Time* famously focused on retrieving the meaning (*Sinn*) of the question of being as underlying the entire structure of human existence, which is therefore defined by its relation to being, *Sein*, namely as *Da-sein*, ‘being-there’. This existential analysis interrogates human being, which tends to obliterate its constitutive concern for being, in search for the way leading back to being.

It is after *Being and Time* that enters the *Kehre*. In the aforementioned 1962 letter to Richardson Heidegger confirmed that “the thinking of the *Kehre* is a turn in my thought”.⁵⁸ However, he clarified, this turn is not a change of mind or any “process in the interrogating thought”, namely no subjective development in Heidegger’s insights. The turn rather belongs to the *Sachverhalt selbst*, the matter in question itself. As Heidegger indicated in the 1947 *Humanismus-Brief*, it was already in the third, never published section of *Being and Time*, titled *Time and Being*, that “everything turns around” [*hier kehrt sich das Ganze um*].⁵⁹

To explain this, Heidegger refers Richardson to a draft of his 1937/38 lectures on “Basic Questions of Philosophy”, where he articulates the meaning of the turn from *Sein und Zeit* to *Zeit und Sein* as turning from “man in his relation to being (*Sein*)” to “being (*Seyn*) and its truth in relation to man”.⁶⁰ In other words, the turn turns from grounding being in human existence to grounding the human in being itself (*Seyn*, ‘to-be’, as distinguished from the being of beings, *Sein des Seienden*). The *Kehre* is nothing short of a “transformation of human being itself” [*Verwandlung des Menschenseins selbst*].

What does it mean to ground human being in being itself? It means to think what for late Heidegger is the paradigmatic enactment of human being, namely thinking, *Denken*, not as being sovereign, autonomous, self-constituting and self-determining, but as called-for,

⁵⁸ GA 11, 149.

⁵⁹ GA 9, 328.

⁶⁰ M. Heidegger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte »Probleme« der »Logik«*. Freiburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1937/38. GA Bd. 45. Hrsg. v. F.-W. v. Herrmann. Frankfurt a. M. 1984, S. 214. Quoted in GA 11, 151.

invoked (by *Zu-spruch*) or required (*in Brauch genommen*) for and by the self-revelation event of being itself, i.e. “its truth”. Human being is required for the truth of being. In his 1962 lecture, *Time and Being*, a belated rendition of the *Kehre*, Heidegger describes man as the “receiver” [*Empfänger*], namely of something given, of a “gift” – *Gabe* or *Geschenk*.⁶¹ Human being as a given gift, i.e. as grounded and pre-conditioned by a prior provision, as *Geschenk*, manifests itself in *Geschick*, ‘providence’, destiny, fate. *Geschick* makes the essence of *Geschichte*, which is therefore not just an indifferent chain of occurrences (*Geschehen*) or story of the past, history or myth, but the unfolding of a meaningful event. The *Kehre* of Heidegger’s thought of being therefore means, among others, returning from the analysis of individual, a-historic human existence to the interrogation of the always already given revelation or event of being in history as *Geschick von Sein*, i.e. *Seinsgeschichte*.

Thinking the specific Western event of being, namely the “West” itself, *das Abendland*, as a specific event of being, a specific *Seinsgeschichte*, has in fact been at the center of the Heidegger’s project since the early 1930’s. The basic attempt of this *seinsgeschichtliche Denken* is to identify central figures of the West – the Greeks, Christianity, Rome, Humanism, Modernity, Technology, Science, the Germans – and unveil or interpret them as various moments articulating a specific mode of human being’s relation to being, or, *umgekehrt*, being’s requisition of the human. Such thinking, such *Denken*, Heidegger describes as *An-denken*, namely thinking that is essentially *of* something, dedicated *to* something, like memory, not as a distant report of things past, but as reenacting commemoration or observance.⁶² Concretely, what Heidegger thought of is what he considered to be the canonical texts or sayings of Western thought,⁶³ observed and interpreted

⁶¹ GA 14, 16.

⁶² See Martin Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?*, GA 8.

⁶³ In the 1938 Black Notebooks Heidegger provides a list of the “essential few”: “the saying of Anaximander, the sayings of Heraclitus, the ‘teaching’ of Parmenides, Plato’s Phaidros, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics Z-Θ*; Descartes’ *Meditations*, Leibniz’s ‘*Monadology*’, Kant’s ‘*Critique*’ (the

in readings that have made up the bulk of his university courses both before and after *Being and Time*.

Again, it is precisely Western intellectual tradition's oblivion of itself as a tradition, as a specific historical-textual configuration of relating to, revealing and actually enacting something like 'being' and human-being that Heidegger's readings bring to light. It is from this oblivion that his thought seeks to return, striving to go before and beyond its beginning; striving to a "second beginning"⁶⁴ or "another beginning"⁶⁵, to restart thinking that would be no longer Greek, no longer philosophy. In the 1966 Spiegel-interview he hypothesizes the potential awakening, "one day", of "age-old traditions of 'thought' in Russia or in China".⁶⁶ A Black Notebooks entry of 1939 expresses a surprising admiration to Lawrence of Arabia's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* as "overcoming the machination of being" [*die Überwindung der Machenschaft des Seyns*].⁶⁷ Turning away from Greece, however, Heidegger mostly turns to German poets: Trakl, George and above all Hölderlin – "alone stands there *the poet*"⁶⁸, who "alone founded this hint of being to the German".⁶⁹

What I suggest is that, to Heidegger's post-philosophical quest, the Jewish tradition may provide at least another, if not a better *teshuva*. To Jean-François Lyotard this affinity between *Heidegger et 'les juifs'* was so apparent, that he considered it a "scandal", "how this thought (Heidegger's), so keen on recalling the part of oblivion (of being) in all thinking, of all sorts, in any 'representation' of the world, how could it ignore the thought of 'the Jews', who in a certain sense thinks, tries to think, nothing but this".⁷⁰ Thinking with Lyotard, one

threefold); Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Schelling's Freedom treaty, Nietzsche's *Nachlass* of the *Hautwerk*", GA 94, 492-493.

⁶⁴ GA 94, 209.

⁶⁵ GA 94, 314.

⁶⁶ GA 16, 677.

⁶⁷ GA 95, 423.

⁶⁸ GA 94, 340.

⁶⁹ GA 95, 56.

⁷⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger et les juifs*, galilée, Paris, 1988, p. 15.

may perhaps suggest that Heidegger was ultimately too rooted in the historical representations of the metaphysical tradition, including its representation of the Jews, to see Jewish thought tradition for what it is. Just as Heidegger, Lyotard too still remains confined to the representation, to the “quotation marks” that he uses “in order to avoid the confusion between these ‘Jews’ and the real Jews”.⁷¹ Don’t the quotation marks conceal the crucial possibility not of *being*, but of *becoming* a real Jew?

Indeed, returning from ‘the Jews’ to the real Jews, from metaphysics to its Jewish other, if such exists, depends on the ability to think Jewishness, to think *of* historical Jewish being as a singular form of thinking. To conclude with a hint, this Jewish thinking I’m thinking of is a thought, which is explicitly aware and thoughtful of the conditions for its own historical, *geschichtliche* existence – its own revelation or being-in-the-world, its own being a world, a *Geschick*. This thought is thus also, essentially, knowledge. It therefore makes imaginable, thinkable, beyond or before Metaphysics and Christianity, the connection between something like ‘thinking’ and something like ‘a people’, *ethnos* or *Volk*. A people “that is not a nation (a nature)”, says Lyotard.⁷² I would suggest contemplating it as self-conscious tradition, namely as thought and knowledge that is essentially received and transmitted, essentially given. Such given knowledge, knowledge as gift, would be most proper to call not *philosophia*, nor *nomos*, nor *polis*, nor *logos*, but rather – תורה.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷² Ibid., 153.