

## Heidegger and His Jewish Reception

In this book, Daniel M. Herskowitz examines the rich, intense, and persistent Jewish engagement with one of the most important and controversial modern philosophers, Martin Heidegger. Contextualizing this encounter within wider intellectual, cultural, and political contexts, he outlines the main patterns and the diverse Jewish responses to Heidegger. Herskowitz shows that through a dialectic of attraction and repulsion, Jewish thinkers developed a version of Jewishness that sought to offer the way out of the overall crisis plaguing their world, a crisis which was embodied, as they saw it, in Heidegger's life and thought. Neither turning a blind eye to Heidegger's antisemitism nor using it as an excuse for ignoring his philosophy, they wrestled with his existential analytic and what they took to be its religious, ethical, and political failings. Ironically, Heidegger's thought proved itself to be fertile ground for reconceptualizing what it means to be Jewish in the modern world.

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DANIEL M. HERSKOWITZ

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*To Smadar and David*

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## Preface

The philosopher wants to be everything at once: prophet, healer, savior, scholar, politician.<sup>1</sup>

Heidegger is a static thinker, I am a more dynamic one. He feels closer to the Greeks, I feel closer to the Jewish prophets.<sup>2</sup>

Martin Heidegger is one of the most important modern philosophers and certainly the most controversial. Indeed, the polarized reception of his work can be matched by none. Karl Popper, for example, proclaimed: “I appeal to the philosophers of all countries to unite and never again mention Heidegger or talk to another philosopher who defends Heidegger. This man was a devil.”<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, on the other hand, noted: “for me, Heidegger is the greatest philosopher of the century, perhaps one of the very great philosophers of the millennium.”<sup>4</sup> Heidegger has garnered a long list of enthusiasts and skeptics, admirers and detractors. But the mixture of admiration and disdain is particularly blatant in one of the most intriguing, fraught, and complex strands of his reception: his Jewish reception.

Of course, “Heidegger and the Jews” is hardly an overlooked theme. To date, an overwhelming number of studies has been dedicated to this broad topic. The majority of these studies, however, take on a similar perspective: they examine Heidegger’s view of Jews and deal with the question of his antisemitism and relation to the Nazi party. The recent

<sup>1</sup> Lehmann, *Die Deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart*, 111. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German and Hebrew are my own.

<sup>2</sup> “Ihm liegen die Griechen näher, mir die jüdischen Propheten.” A quote by Max Scheler, as recorded in Berl, “Begegnung mit Jüdischer Zeitgenosse,” 333.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Yue-Ching Ho, “At 90, and Still Dynamic.”

<sup>4</sup> Levinas, “Philosophy, Justice, and Love,” 116.

publication of his so-called *Black Notebooks* brought about another wave of critical scholarship that reinforced the urgency of this perspective. Yet the dominance of this narrow scholarly angle should not come at a price of losing sight of the intense conceptual engagement of Jewish thinkers with Heidegger, an engagement that began immediately after the publication of his masterpiece *Being and Time* in 1927, continued throughout the entirety of the twentieth century, and was wider and richer than is often acknowledged. Describing the early excitement around Heidegger among his fellow students, Hans Jonas writes: “Many of these young Heidegger worshippers were . . . young Jews . . . what emerged in that time in Marburg was, in any case, not a healthy atmosphere, but rather something like the relationship of the believers to the Lubavitcher [Rebbe], such as if Heidegger was a *tsadik*, a miracle-working rabbi, or a guru.”<sup>5</sup> Heidegger’s appeal was not limited to his students alone. Though far from being the bewitchment Jonas describes, the persistent and momentous engagement of many twentieth-century Jewish thinkers with Heidegger’s ideas is an undeniable fact. This study thus aims to center the critical glance on the topic of Heidegger and the Jews from the opposite perspective, reconstructing and critically appraising responses to Heidegger from a self-consciously Jewish standpoint.<sup>6</sup>

To avoid false expectations on the part of the reader, I wish to be clear from the very beginning as to what is meant by “Jewish” in the title. In order to preserve a focused research theme and definite argumentative line, this book concentrates primarily on thinkers who used

<sup>5</sup> Wiese, *The Life and Thought of Hans Jonas*, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Methodologically, this work differs from other studies that explore various comparisons, intersections, and other exchanges between Jewish traditions and Heidegger. For example, Elad Lapidot explores connections between Heidegger and the rabbinic tradition in “Heidegger’s *Teshuva*?”; and see also his “Das Fremde im Denken” and his “People of Knowers: On Heideggerian and Jewish Epistemico-Politics.” See also Sergey Dolgopolski’s “How Else Can One Think Earth? The Talmuds and Pre-Socratics.” Zohar Atkins engages with Jewish and biblical sources to reveal a resonance between Heidegger’s thought and Jewish existence in his *An Ethical and Theological Appropriation of Heidegger’s Critique of Modernity: Unframing Existence*. Allen Scult develops a Jewish theology exploring the “strange affinity” between Heidegger’s philosophy and the traditional hermeneutics of Torah in *Martin Heidegger and the Hermeneutics of Torah: A Strange Affinity* and *Being Jewish/Reading Heidegger: An Ontological Encounter*. See also Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*. Elliot Wolfson has found in Heidegger a hermeneutical key through which the philosophical dimensions of Kabbalah can be disclosed and discussed. See, among many, his *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musing on Time, Truth, and Death*; his *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination*; and his *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Posëis*.

their engagements with what they took to be the religious charge of Heidegger's thought as a foundation for offering a philosophical or theological reconstruction of Judaism or Jewishness. It is important to remember that the German word *Judentum*, which is often employed in this context, does not directly and seamlessly translate to the English "Judaism," and that the term "religion" is ambiguous, particularly as it applies to Judaism. It would thus be most accurate to say that I am dealing with receptions of Heidegger that perceive themselves as drawing on or speaking in the name of Jewish heritage. As is fairly well known, Heidegger had a remarkable cohort of gifted students who were Jews by descent and later became distinguished figures in their respective fields. These former students will only be explored here insofar as they fulfill the above criteria, that is, only insofar as they present an encounter between a construction of Judaism or Jewishness and Heidegger's philosophy. To make clear the scope of figures that will be included in this study, Hannah Arendt can serve as an example. Surely one of Heidegger's most brilliant students, Arendt's political thought is rightfully read, at least in part, as a response to her former teacher. Her reflections are clearly grounded in her experiences as a Jew, and at times she directs our attention to theologically inflected moments in Heidegger's thought. While Arendt will by no means be absent from the present study, to the extent that she does not bring to bear a construction of Judaism through her engagement with the religious charge of his philosophy, she does not fall under the category of "Jewish receptions" in the sense that I intend and thus will not be subjected to a thorough analysis.

This book aims to go beyond the common perspective on the theme of "Heidegger and religion," which usually focuses on Heidegger's roots in, or impact on, Christianity, and bring to the fore the Jewish perspective. It is true, no doubt, that to someone with theological commitments, everything seems redolent of such commitments. But this is not just a case in which for a person with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.<sup>7</sup> For, as we shall see, Heidegger invites these kinds of readings – Heidegger's language, as Theodor Adorno proclaimed, "created a theological aura" – and the long list of people who read him so testifies to this. Indeed, the Jewish reception that will be examined in this book is part of a broader story of Heidegger's reception among various groups – Catholics, Protestants, atheists, Marxists, and others – and parallels

<sup>7</sup> I thank Babette Babich for this formulation.

and similarities between these readings certainly exist.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, no other philosopher has had more impact on twentieth-century Jewish European thought than Martin Heidegger. To be sure, such a claim may seem odd, even offensive, given the notoriety of his biography, particularly as it intersected with Jews. His maltreatment of his (formerly Jewish) mentor Edmund Husserl, his political and philosophical support of Hitler, and his silence after the Holocaust, among other things, generated a deeply dubious personal and philosophical reputation and turned him, quite justifiably, into the ultimate “bad guy” of the philosophical world, the philosopher everyone loves to hate. Given the ominous historical and political setting within which the encounter with his thought took place, it is understandable that Heidegger’s Jewish reception is fraught from the very outset. Nevertheless, one of the aims of this book is to substantiate the above claim: more than any other thinker, Heidegger’s philosophical innovations and challenges marked and fomented twentieth-century European Jewish thought in a profound, indelible way.<sup>9</sup> This means, notably, that many of those who found Heidegger’s philosophy meriting serious consideration did not suffer, as it has been suggested, from “false consciousness,” nor were they “unJewish Jews” attempting to “deny their own Jewishness,” and none deserve the somewhat dismissive title “Heidegger’s Children.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, we shall see that Heidegger’s thought – with its non-rationalistic bent, its secularized Christian categories, its obscure references to “gods,” and its possible links to nationalistic fascism – served as a key reference point in the various attempts to negotiate the boundaries between Judaism, Christianity, and secularism in twentieth-century Jewish thought. For this reason, particular attention will be given throughout this study to the thematic of secularization and to the employment of the paradigm of Athens and Jerusalem, the convenient structure often put to use in the context of Jewish thought to delineate its

<sup>8</sup> It seems that the “theological turn” in French phenomenological circles that Dominique Janicaud decried was not confined to France and not necessarily a “turn.” See Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn.”*

<sup>9</sup> This point has already been made, albeit formulated differently, by Fleischacker, who rightly likens Heidegger’s mark on twentieth-century Jewish thought to Plato’s mark on Philo, Aristotle’s on Maimonides and his followers, and Kant’s on Cohen, Leibowitz, and Breuer (and one can add to this list also Nietzsche’s on early Zionist thinkers). Fleischacker, “Heidegger’s Affinities with Judaism,” 1. Fleischacker’s piece offers insights into moments of correspondence between Judaism and Heidegger.

<sup>10</sup> Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas and Herbert Marcuse*. See also Fleischacker, “Heidegger’s Affinities with Judaism,” 3.

boundaries vis-à-vis Christian thought and culture.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of intellectual history, therefore, this book seeks to contribute to our understanding of Heidegger's general reception, and from the perspective of Jewish studies, it seeks to expand, and perhaps even retell, the narrative of developments in twentieth-century Jewish philosophy.

It should be emphasized that my aim is not merely to outline Heidegger's "influences" on some of his Jewish readers (although these certainly exist and will be duly noted). Rather, I seek to account for a wider range of intellectual exchanges, including identification, incorporation, negotiation, critique, and rejection. One of the features that will crystallize throughout the chapters of this book is that, in a comparable manner to Spinoza in the infamous *Pantheismusstreit* in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, Heidegger's philosophy is often misrepresented, and the views he is claimed to hold do not necessarily accord with his actual position. His philosophy came to mean different things to different people, and the variety of distinct and often contradictory portraits of Heidegger indicate not only the richness, intensity, and even density of his philosophy, but also, and perhaps more interestingly, the concerns and ideological tendencies of his Jewish readers, specifically as they relate to their perception of the modern, and modern Jewish, predicament.<sup>12</sup> Another, related feature that will emerge in our forthcoming discussion is the way in which twentieth-century Jewish thinkers read Heidegger's philosophy as an implicit or explicit religiously charged framework – and as a response, they posited Judaism as the ultimate alternative to it. Indeed, because Heidegger's life and thought were often seen as symbolizing and encapsulating the philosophical, theological, ethical, and political pathologies of modernity, the accounts of Jewishness sketched in response served not only as alternative theoretical schemes but as alternative modernities, with appropriate philosophical, religious, and political implications that are said to be immune, or at least more resistant, to the pathologies he was seen as manifesting.

<sup>11</sup> The theoretical context is, of course, the famous debate between Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg over the efficacy of the term "secularization" for modern times. Löwith, *Meaning in History*; Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. The secondary literature on this debate is abundant.

<sup>12</sup> Not to mention the relatively limited number of his works available at the time – certainly in comparison to what is available to us now, including the recent publication of Heidegger's controversial *Überlegungen* notebooks, as well as the ever-increasing philosophical works, academic lecture courses, and correspondences that have been published over the years.

A central challenge facing a project of this kind is navigating between “too little” and “too much.” Heidegger’s presence in twentieth-century European Jewish thought is prevalent and multifaceted; there is no denying that more can be said of the thinkers who are discussed, and others, who are either only alluded to or not discussed at all, could have been considered as well.<sup>13</sup> It should therefore go without saying that I have no pretension to exhaust the subject matter. However, in bringing together those who are without doubt among the leading Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century alongside many less known figures, from a number of different geographical locations and over an extended period of time, this study seeks to outline the main patterns and provide a rich and diverse tapestry of Jewish responses to Heidegger. While not comprehensive, this book aims to offer a breadth that is unmatched by any other study to date, and by introducing new materials and addressing new questions, it hopes to provide a historical and conceptual foundation for further scholarly explorations of the topic.<sup>14</sup>

I must admit that when I embarked on this project, I was hoping to deal with the issue of Heidegger’s Nazism as little as possible. The importance of this issue is undisputable, yet given the astounding amount of scholarship already written on it, I thought that little more could be said that would be of interest. But not only were Heidegger’s private philosophical notebooks from the time of the war, the *Black Notebooks*, published soon after, unleashing a tidal wave of renewed interest in, and research on, this theme, but I also quickly came to see that it would simply be impossible to write a study of the Jewish reception of Heidegger without addressing his political involvement. His Nazism and the question of its ties to his thought are stitched into the intellectual moment that occupies this book, and rightly so, for Heidegger’s support of the party and his anti-semitism, “being-historical” (as Peter Trawny termed it), “metaphysical” (as Derrida or Di Cesare termed it), or otherwise, are well documented and can no longer be seriously questioned.<sup>15</sup> Nor is there any point in trying to absolve Heidegger of any of his political or philosophical offenses – though there is no sense in exaggerating them, as is sometimes

<sup>13</sup> Among these are Michael Wyschogrod, Emil Fackenheim, Jacob Taubes, Susan Taubes, and Margarete Susman, to name only a few. I hope to address at least some of these omissions in future studies.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout this book we shall see that the examination of Jewish approaches to Heidegger intersects frequently with the receptions of existentialism more generally, *Lebensphilosophie*, Nietzsche, Karl Barth, Kierkegaard, Carl Schmitt, and even Hegel. Fleshing these out constitutes strands for further scholarly exploration.

<sup>15</sup> Di Cesare, *Heidegger, die Juden, die Shoah*.

the case, either. But while his shameful politics constantly looms in the background – and in the foreground – of our theme, depicting the Jewish encounters with Heidegger as simply a confrontation with a Nazi thinker amounts to a grave misconstrual of the seriousness with which his philosophy was approached, and obscures the fact that these thinkers did not only share many of his theoretical assumptions and agendas, but also actively drew on his thought as a fertile source for their own purposes.

It is at this point that a methodological obstacle to which a study like this is susceptible ought to be flagged: given Heidegger's notorious ties to the National Socialist Party, there is an almost inevitable impetus toward examining the Jewish encounter with Heidegger through the structured symbolic paradigms of "German" versus "Jew," "Nazi" versus "Jew," or even "perpetrator" versus "victim." Understandably, these structures are an operative optic through which this episode can be, and has been, grasped. Throughout this book it will become clear, I hope, that these typologies are overly schematic and ultimately oversimplify the complexity and gravity of the intellectual encounter at hand. Indeed, these very contrastive paradigms constitute a crucial facet of the subject matter itself, and thus they themselves – how they are perceived, the content inserted into them, the analytical means by which they are sustained, and their implicit normative charge – are part of what is under examination here.

## MISE EN SCÈNE

It is best to perceive the twentieth-century Jewish reception of Heidegger's philosophy dealt with in this book as bearing a centrifugal dynamic. While it ultimately occurs in a variety of different places and contexts, mirroring the diffusion and displacement of much of European Jewry, it is rooted in a common historical and conceptual frame of reference. All the thinkers addressed here, including Heidegger himself, bear the marks of the turbulent era of interwar Germany, and it is the conceptuality and historical experiences of this period which laid the foundations for the diverse developments that constitute these receptions. A brief sketch of this context would do well to set the stage for the discussion that follows.

Heidegger's philosophy took shape in a Germany gripped by a sense of decadence and crisis.<sup>16</sup> The political and economic disaster ensuing the humiliating debacle in the Great War went hand in hand with a deep-

<sup>16</sup> See the collection edited by Gordon and McCormick, *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*; Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*.

seated cultural pessimism. The newly born and unstable Weimar Republic staged a conflict that was both generational and ideational. Dissatisfied with the dominant schools of thought taught in the academic lecture halls, such as historicism and neo-Kantianism, the younger generation voiced a desire for new and radical forms of thought. Reflecting an anxiety attached to the processes of rationalization and what Max Weber called the “disenchantment” of modernity, many protested the comprehensive and systematic philosophical structures that ignored the individual’s subjectivity and concreteness of its temporal existence.<sup>17</sup> The liberal bourgeois values of progress, reason, and universalism of the older generation were increasingly viewed as superficial, mechanistic, and soulless. A diminishing faith in the West corresponded with an increasing fascination with “oriental” non-Western cultures and an enhanced appeal to the irrational and archaic. The *Bildungsidealismus* that commanded the old order was gradually stripped of its prominence, and in its stead, matters of ontology, theology, and self-actuality came to the fore. A growing sense of breach between an inadequate world and divine transcendence gave rise to what was termed Gnostic or Marcionite attitudes. The thematics of *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* figured largely, and Pauline theology, with the dualisms associated with it, was intensely and creatively explored. This dualistic picture was complemented by the rise of a secular depiction of a radically immanent world. New questions concerning the meanings and relations between secularism and religion presented themselves as urgent. Are these two positions incongruent, or are they in fact two sides of the same coin? Is secularism solely a rejection of faith, or can it be construed theologically? What is the moral status of the world absent of God? Is salvation possible in an utterly fallen world? Can the individual achieve self-actuality when its existence is governed by the experience of alienation and not-at-homeness? Can transcendence be found in immanence? With a palpable eschatological tension, it was a time that experienced itself as “Zwischen den Zeiten.” The “world of yesterday” was crumbling, but a new order was not yet in sight.

Perhaps nothing manifested the temperament of the time better than the surge in popularity of Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>18</sup> In underscoring the

<sup>17</sup> Gadamer, “Existentialism and the Philosophy of Existence,” 11.

<sup>18</sup> Much has been written on Kierkegaard’s reception in the German-speaking world. See Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard*, especially 339–392; Schulz, “A Modest Head Start,” 307–419; Moyn, “Anxiety and Secularization,” 279–304. On Kierkegaard in the Jewish intellectual world, see Nowotny, “*Kierkegaard ist ein Jude!*”



“infinite qualitative difference” between God and humanity, in appropriating and redefining the scholastic concept of “Existenz” from its traditional meaning of substantiation of “essence” to the basic human situation of experience, decision, and life, and in leveling a decisive critique against the all-encompassing Hegelian idealism, the Danish thinker struck a resonant chord. And within this fraught atmosphere, it was the perspective of *Existenzphilosophie* and particularly Heidegger’s existential phenomenology in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) that sparked a fire in the young generation’s already kindled soul.<sup>19</sup> Leo Strauss, who will occupy us in Chapter 5, seems to capture Heidegger’s defining role in the development of many of his peers’ thought:

Nothing affected us as profoundly in the years in which our minds took their lasting directions as the thought of Heidegger . . . everyone else in the younger generation who had ears to hear was either completely overwhelmed by Heidegger, or else, having been almost completely overwhelmed by him, engaged in well-intentioned but ineffective rearguard actions against him.<sup>20</sup>

For the Jews, the unsteady times of Weimar bore both great promise and great peril. The liberal constitution granted the Jews unprecedented equality and freedom. As “outsiders” who became “insiders,” Jews were allowed participation in many cultural and professional spheres that had been previously closed off to them. An explosion of Jewish creativity and involvement in science, art, literature, religion, philosophy, and political activism ensued. Yet alongside an indisputable Jewish flourishing, the tumultuous Weimar period witnessed an aggravation of reactionary, neoconservative, and antisemitic forces. The perceived delusion of Jewish assimilation led many to Zionism and Socialism, and also spurred a process of dissimilation and revival of Jewish self-assertion.<sup>21</sup> Culturally and intellectually immersed as they were, the young generation of Jewish intellectuals heralded an equivalent revolt against the previous generation’s worldview, with its synthesis of Kantianism and Judaism and the more general conflation of Judaism with the values of the Enlightenment,

<sup>19</sup> As Dan Zahavi writes, “almost all subsequent theory formulations in continental philosophy can be understood as either extensions of or reactions to phenomenology.” Zahavi, “Phenomenology,” 102. As various scholars have shown, this is true with respect to twentieth-century Marxism, critical theory of the Frankfurt School, and Christian thought, Protestant and Catholic alike, among others. I argue that the same is the case with the European-rooted tradition of Jewish thought as well.

<sup>20</sup> Strauss, “An Unspoken Prologue,” 450.

<sup>21</sup> Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*.

which was so carefully fashioned by nineteenth-century Jewish liberal thinkers, and above all, by Hermann Cohen.

The protest against the philosophical worldview typified by Cohen and its complementary liberal political-theological position is central to understanding the conceptual drive fueling the various Jewish engagements with Heidegger, and thus deserves some elaboration. Cohen, the founder of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism, was one of the leading philosophical voices of his generation. As a Jew, he was also occupied by the effort of depicting Judaism as compatible with and epitomizing German liberal values and sensitivities.<sup>22</sup> In his understanding, the German spirit was indebted to two sources: ancient Greece and Judaism. “Plato and the prophets,” he asserts, “constitute the two most important well-springs of modern [German] culture.”<sup>23</sup> For this reason, Judaism is not only compatible with the peak of European spirit, it is also indispensable to it. Using a Protestant conceptual framework and applying an optimizing idealistic hermeneutic to his sources, Cohen knitted the biblical prophets, Plato, Maimonides, and Kant into a narrative of a shared German-Jewish ethico-religious vocation. This theoretical construct supported Cohen’s political-theological worldview concerning the so-called – and widely disputed – “German-Jewish symbiosis.” According to this position, Jews are an essential part of German nationality, and hence for Germany to fulfill its historical destiny, the equal share of Jews in German culture must be admitted.

Cohen’s apologetic efforts came as a response to a common accusation of Judaism’s antiquarianism, irrelevance, and overall alien character, voiced by nineteenth-century *Religionswissenschaftlers*, with the effective theologico-political vision of de-Judaizing Christianity and Germany. In the nineteenth-century debates, for most Germans and particularly for liberal Protestant intellectuals, granting the Jews emancipation was a contract with provisions. Equality was the reward, and complete assimilation was the condition. Supersessionist theological positions merged with a desire for a unified national identity in which Germanism and Protestantism were conflated. Academic scholarship was harnessed to this end, and findings in the fields of biblical studies, archaeology, philology, and history validated present-day anti-Jewish positions and sentiments. At times, the recurring theme of Christianity’s emergence through the negation of Judaism was blended with racial theory which drew

<sup>22</sup> Myers, “Hermann Cohen and the Quest for Protestant Judaism.”

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, “Das soziale Ideal bei Platon und den Propheten,” 618.

a strict line between the Aryan-German and Semitic-Jewish race. The implicit political-theological statement of this general intellectual endeavor was clear: Judaism is at odds with the Christian-Protestant character of Germany, and the Jews have no place in the German *Volk*. By presenting Judaism as the root of the prevailing values of contemporary Germanism, Cohen strategically countered these adversary voices.

Cohen's account of the Jewish-German fellowship was founded upon faith in progress, reason, and universal morality, principles that were the cornerstone of the predominantly *Bildungsbürgertum* German Jews' identity. However, this was precisely the order that was under attack by the younger Jewish generation, for whom Cohen embodied the inauthentic liberal and bourgeois Judaism that willingly surrendered itself for the sake of acceptance and clothed its Judaism with a Christian-Protestant garment. Moreover, the unstable social and political reality of Weimar made his treasured political-theological dream passé. In a dynamic that began before the Great War but accelerated throughout the interwar period, the desire for an authentically Jewish framework generated a rethinking of Judaism in light of present sensitivities. As part of this effort, Martin Heidegger's philosophy was frequently engaged with.<sup>24</sup>

The famous renaissance of Judaism was underway, driven by a new generation of intellectuals seeking to reimagine and reformulate Jewishness along more existential, experiential, and post-liberal lines. Indeed, among the cadre of thinkers who rebelled against nineteenth-century philosophy and theology, it was the profundity and pathos of Heidegger's existential phenomenology, with its penetrating analysis of actual, concrete human existence and with what Adorno famously called the "jargon of authenticity" which was so appealing to many Weimar Jewish theorists in search for their authentic heritage. Of course, it is important to remember that Heidegger's thought appealed to many, Jews and non-Jews alike, holding diverse and often conflicting ideological and confessional commitments. But the fact that Heidegger was a main spokesperson for the denunciation of metaphysics, liberalism, and idealism and for the superiority of the perspective focusing on historical existence, made him an attractive and readily available source for Jewish thinkers who envisioned their Jewishness according to similar lines.

<sup>24</sup> For an initial sketch of this, see the chapter entitled "Bemerkungen zur Ungeschriebenen Geschichte der Jüdischen Heidegger-Rezeption," in Meyer, *Zwischen Philosophie und Gesetz*, 273–308.

The new spiritual climate and fresh theoretical frameworks presented their own set of challenges, however. In its Christian manifestation, the rejection of nineteenth-century liberalism took the form of unstitching the synthesis of Christianity and culture. From the Jewish perspective, however, the rejection of liberalism was often framed as a denunciation of the foreign Protestant conceptuality that had been internalized by Jewish thinkers. Foreign, unauthentic, and ill-suited, the Protestant framework was to be discarded and replaced by an authentic form of Jewish expression. But were the philosophical and theological perspectives available to replace the deficient frameworks of the past themselves neutral? Do not the Christian undertones in *Existenzphilosophie* make it unsuitable for authentic Jewish thought? Moreover, the rise of Gnostic and Marcionite attitudes carried a reverberating anti-Jewish import of supersessionism and antisemitism. These complemented the rise of radical German nationalism and reactionary forces that perceived the Jews as the German “misfortune.” In this respect, despite the revolt against earlier patterns of reflections, key strands of German interwar philosophy and theology continued the nineteenth-century objective of severing the historical ties between Judaism and Christianity and between present-day Jews and Christians.<sup>25</sup>

The collapse of faith in reason and in the liberal world of the nineteenth century, and the possibilities, challenges, and impasses that emerged as a result of this collapse, is the backdrop of this study. While Hermann Cohen died almost a decade before the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, his philosophical worldview and vision of Judaism continued to reverberate throughout twentieth-century Jewish thought, and covertly looms over a century of the Jewish reception of Heidegger. This is because the disillusionment with, and rebellion against, the Cohenian picture was shared both by Heidegger and the majority of the Jewish thinkers that we will examine, but the inspection of the possibilities and pitfalls of Heidegger’s philosophy was part of the Jewish attempt to work out how it is best to proceed after the downfall of reason and liberalism. Thus, as we shall see, it is the political climate, the conceptual terms, and the pressing experiences of the interwar period that determine the ensuing twentieth-century receptions of the philosopher from Messkirch. That its determining terms were shaped in a period when an all-encompassing atmosphere of crisis took hold explains the sense of urgency, far exceeding the tensions of

<sup>25</sup> Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany*; Schwarzschild, “The Theological-Political Basis of Liberal Christian-Jewish Relations in Modernity,” 70–95.

common theoretical debates, that marked this intellectual encounter. For in the minds of many at the time, the stakes of philosophical disputes were almost apocalyptic, and what was debated was no less than the very nature and future of Western civilization. The coveted dream of one was the daunting nightmare of the other; where one saw hope, the other found nihilism. The urgency of this encounter is validated by Heidegger's public endorsement of the Nazi party only shortly after the publication of his magnum opus, and the general sense that in this case, philosophy and politics – and, as we shall see, also theology – were intimately intertwined. Engaging with his thought thus demanded coming to terms not only with the challenges it posed in the sphere of speculative reflection, but with its ethical and political ramifications as well – and with the shortcomings of the traditions of thought that made Heidegger's philosophy possible.

The layout of the study is as follows: Chapter 1 sets the stage for the following chapters by attending to the question of the relation between Heidegger's philosophy and Christianity. By focusing on his claim for neutrality toward theology and the theme of secularization, the chapter outlines the transitions of Heidegger's thought from his early theological endeavors to *Sein und Zeit* and to his later work. It also discusses the early Christian reception of *Sein und Zeit* by Protestant and Catholic theologians, framing the descriptive and evaluative examination of the analyses of the Jewish engagements with Heidegger that comes next.

Chapter 2 portrays how the intellectual and generational split in interwar German culture between “old,” rational, and idealistic thinking, and “new,” experiential, and existential thinking, is manifested in the early Jewish receptions of Heidegger. It does this by focusing on the battle over the legacy of Kant typified in the famous Davos encounter and by fleshing out the political and theological resonances of this encounter in terms of its bearings on the debate over the ties between *Judentum* and *Deutschtum*. As I show, Ernst Cassirer and Franz Rosenzweig can be seen as representing something like “typical” reactions to Heidegger from the perspective of “old thinking” and “new thinking,” respectively. As part of this examination, I situate the common association of Rosenzweig and Heidegger within the larger context of Heidegger's Jewish reception.

Chapter 3 shows that the secularized Christian terminology and the presumption of *Dasein*'s godless existence in *Sein und Zeit* led a variety of Jewish thinkers in interwar Germany and Palestine to conclude that Heidegger's existential analysis of *Dasein* is caught up in Christian assumptions, outlines a Christian conception of human existence, and is

thus ill-suited for Jewish expression. This reading of Heidegger is contextualized within the wider debate at the time regarding the theological inflection of the perspective of *Existenzphilosophie*, the juxtaposition of Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth, and the anti-Jewish political-theological reverberations of the “Gnostic” and “Marcionite” perspectives with which Heidegger was associated.

Chapter 4 is a critical examination of Martin Buber’s decades-long fascination and confrontation with Heidegger’s philosophy. This chapter expands previous scholarship’s prime focus on Buber’s conception of I-Thou in relation to Heidegger’s notion of being-with (*mit-Sein*) and exposes Buber’s far more extensive engagement with – and assault on – Heidegger’s earlier and later works, including a latent quarrel over the appropriation of the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin. I show that Buber shadowboxed Heidegger for his entire mature life and sought to construct a Jewish-dialogical alternative, which I term “dwelling prophetically,” to what he called Heidegger’s monological thought and its ideal of “dwelling poetically.”

In Chapter 5 I argue that one cannot fully grasp Leo Strauss’s critique of Heidegger’s philosophy, which he perceived as the greatest challenge to both philosophy and authentic Judaism, without understanding Strauss’s critical attitude toward the Christian horizon and connotations he identified in Heidegger. Examining Strauss’s early and later writings, I concentrate on Strauss’s depiction of Heidegger as a historicist and a nihilist and analyze how Strauss both utilizes Heidegger to extend his critique of what he took to be the modern Jewish crisis and at the same time draws on his work to signal toward the overcoming of this crisis. The chapter also traces the hesitant shift in Strauss’s critical approach toward Heidegger’s later writings.

Chapter 6 aims to organize Abraham Joshua Heschel’s otherwise unsystematic critique of and rejoinder to Heidegger, and present it as a coherent, unified theological argument. By reviewing Heschel’s writings from his early years as a philosophy student in Weimar-era Berlin to his mature works in the 1960s, I demonstrate that for him, Heidegger puts forth a paganist framework of radical immanence that dehumanizes *Dasein* and deifies being. In contrast to this, Heschel advances his account of the biblical God of pathos, who is transcendent to the world but is also the concerned Lord of being.

Chapter 7 traces Emmanuel Levinas’s lifelong struggle with Heidegger’s philosophy, from the 1930s to the 1980s. It approaches the matter through the prism of the confrontation Levinas posits between

what he considers to be Heidegger's paganism and his own account of Judaism and ethics. I argue that Levinas mimics Heidegger and develops an existential hermeneutic of being-Jewish in his early writings, as an alternative to Heidegger's "pagan" analytic, which then serves as the basis for the contrast between "ethics" and "ontology" in his mature writings. As I show, in both method and content, Levinas's philosophy is more dependent on Heidegger's scheme than he is willing to admit, as is his account of Judaism.

The Jewish engagement with Heidegger in the twentieth century is rich and varied. Through a dialectic of attraction and repulsion, Jewish thinkers developed a version of Jewishness that sought to offer the way out of the overall crisis plaguing their world, which was embodied, as they saw it, in Heidegger's life and thought. Neither turning a blind eye to Heidegger's antisemitism nor using it as an excuse for ignoring his philosophy, they came to grapple with Heidegger's existential analytic and diagnose where it had gone wrong in order to correct its philosophical and political errors, and while doing so, also to think through the place of Judaism and Jewish existence in the modern world. Perhaps ironically, then, Heidegger's thought proved itself to be fertile ground for reconceptualizing what it means to be Jewish.

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