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New Gods Swelling the Future Ocean

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REVIEW ESSAYS

NEW GODS SWELLING THE FUTURE OCEAN[1]

TÉMOINS DU FUTUR: PHILOSOPHIE ET MESSIANISME. By Pierre Bouretz. Paris: NRF essais Gallimard, 2003. Pp. 1249.

RESISTING HISTORY: HISTORICISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS IN GERMAN-JEWISH THOUGHT. By David N. Myers. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. Pp. 253.

> Nothing has replaced the coherence and meaning with which a powerful messianic faith once imbued both Jewish past and future. Perhaps nothing else can.
> —Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*

In his 1959 lecture, "The Science of Judaism—Then and Now," Gershom Scholem takes pains to illustrate the details of a conversation between the early Zionist, Gotthold Weil, and his aging teacher, Moritz Steinschneider, that took place "toward the end of a life devoted for seventy years to researching the details of Jewish bibliography, literature, and culture." The date was some time in the early 1900s (Steinschneider died in 1907) and the context is Scholem's discussion of two competing strains in the Science of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*). The young Weil bubbled with enthusiasm as he enunciated the possibilities of a "Jewish renaissance and the reconstruction of Judaism as a living entity." In response, Steinschneider pointed to his bookcases and stated "we have only one task left: to give the remains of Judaism a decent burial."[2] The tension and discord between Weil and Steinschneider is important to Scholem as it demonstrates both the possibilities and pitfalls that befell European Judaism at the dawn of the twentieth century. The study of the Science of Judaism was itself a nineteenth-century phenomenon announced by Immanuel Wolf in his 1822 essay *On the Concept of the Science of Judaism*, in which Wolf asserted that "the fundamental principle of Judaism is again in a state of inner ferment, striving to assume a shape in harmony with the spirit of the time. But in accordance with the age, this development can only take place through the medium of science. For the scientific attitude is the characteristic of our time." By the early twentieth century, it was clear that this "scientific attitude" was antagonistic toward categories such as faith that could not be demonstrated through objective data. As secular science divested religion

1. This review essay stems from my current research project on Emmanuel Levinas's Talmudic lectures. I would like to thank Peter Gordon, Samuel Moyn, and Eugene Sheppard for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.

2. Gershom Scholem, "The Science of Judaism—Then and Now," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 306.

of its previous authority, the practice of history took on increasing importance in the construction of Jewish identity. Certainly the Science of Judaism could usher the Jews into the modern age, but would it announce the birth of a new cultural era or the death of Judaism itself?

From a vantage point fifty years later, Scholem seemed to affirm both positions via a dialectical argument that traces the progression of Jewish thought and identity. Following Scholem's dialectic, one could plot a history of Judaism in which in the Middle Ages, Jewishness and Judaism were defined entirely by faith, belief, and the authority of the scriptures. In the eighteenth century, this dominant "thesis" was challenged by the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason. In the nineteenth century, the dialectical pendulum swing came full across as reason became the dominant paradigm relegating faith to the role of antiquated superstition. Here the power of secularism came to the fore as religious traditions were challenged and cultural assimilation encouraged. In the era of nationalism, what could it mean to be "Jewish" if religion is excluded from the equation? At first glance one might be tempted to agree with Steinschneider that the ascent of reason drained all that was spiritual, transcendent, and theological from Judaism, leaving only a desiccated historical shell, but the truth for Scholem is that each of these movements was necessary to move Judaism forward. Thus in the twentieth century, we see faith return to challenge reason, unhinged by relativism and perspectivism, in the creation of a modern synthesis that enlists the techniques and teachings of reason in the service of faith, but also conserves the fundamental tension of the two sides of this dialectic. To this end, Scholem himself set out upon the "path of historical reconstruction, employing the most rigorous tools of the philologist to peel away the debris of time and recapture the voices hidden in the texts he studied. Here he assumed a task he regarded as inherently ironic—using the historian's tools to overcome history and "the curse of relativism."[3]

The tension inherent in this dialectical marriage, this burgeoning synthesis, is the motor that drives these two rich, provocative, and original studies, by Pierre Bouretz and David N. Myers. Both authors are acutely aware that by employing modern historical techniques in the service of theology they are always in danger of trivializing one or the other. Asserting the priority of faith, Søren Kierkegaard instructs us "however much one generation learns from another, it can never learn from its predecessor the genuinely human factor. In this respect every generation begins afresh, has no task other than that of any previous generation, and comes no further, provided the latter hasn't shirked its task and deceived itself. This authentically human factor is passion."[4] Thus the transcendent, theological authority is primary and our secular historical musings at best hold little weight in providing guidance and direction and at worst are outright deception. Conversely, Leopold von Ranke asserted that "history has assigned to it the office of judging the past and of instructing the present for the benefit of the future." To this end Ranke counseled the historian to provide a strict presentation of the facts, "unat-

3. Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Spiritual Quest of the Philologist," in *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 14.

4. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, transl. Alastair Hanney (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1985), 145.

tractive though they may be," culled from "memoirs, diaries, letters" and that these sources be cited on every page. Like science, history should be objective, impartial, and dispassionate, "to show how it actually was."[5] Thus for Ranke, and for the modern historian, the task of history is to construct knowledge of the past. But as Constantin Fasolt points out, this historical knowledge "is knowledge that conflicts in some important ways with claims made by the historical religions, for example, about the life of Jesus, about the origins of the Old Testament, about the authorship of Moses, and so on."[6] Here history will not cede authority to religious dogma or tradition in pursuit of historical truth. To adhere to one is seemingly to discredit the other.

To their credit, neither Bouretz nor Myers shies away from this difficult issue and both do admirable work, groundbreaking in Myers's case, in pursuit of a deeper understanding of these particular thinkers and our current relgious/historical situation in general. Bouretz's *Témoins du futur: philosophie et messianisme* and Myers's *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* are both studies of a critical moment in twentieth-century Jewish thought marked by the dominance of reason, secularism, and cultural assimilationism. For Myers, this is embodied in the rise of the historical profession and specifically of historicism. For Bouretz, the issue is cloudier as he points to the influence of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger as essential catalysts that provoked a crisis of faith, identity, and understanding precipitated by the dominance of secular reason as embodied in historicism and the project of *Bildung*. Both Bouretz and Myers focus on a series of Jewish intellectuals, though Bouretz's work is more ambitious in scope as he sets out to trace the trajectory of nine thinkers (Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch, Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas, and Emmanuel Levinas) who "were born between 1842 and 1905; died between 1918 and 1995; and whose lives traversed the 20th century. They are all representative of a time defined by the secularization of the world: God excluded from the universe by the order of science, kept outside the city walls, and relegated to the role of an inner conviction."[7] Given the weight and density of the thinkers Bouretz has chosen, it is no wonder that his book is over a thousand pages long. Myers is more circumspect in his scholarship, eschewing the temptation to "cover the entirety of anti-historicist expression in modern Jewish thought up to the present," to instead record "the diverse but concerted expressions of anti-historicism during a fateful period of German history extending from the last quarter of the nineteenth century through the first third of the twentieth." Myers restricts himself to four figures (Hermann Cohen, Franz

5. Leopold von Ranke, "Introduction to the *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations*," in *Leopold von Ranke: The Secret of World History*, ed. Roger Wines (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), 58. I have modified the translation of "*wie es eigentlich gewessen*" from "how it actually happened" to "how it actually was." It is worth noting that Ranke also realized the limitations of his project. He concludes his "Introduction" by stating: "One tries, one strives, but in the end it is not attained. Let none be impatient with this! The important thing, as Jacobi says, is always how we deal with humanity as it is, explicable or inexplicable; the life of the individual, of generations, of nations; and at times, with the hand of God above them" (59).

6. Constantin Fasolt, "History and Religion in the Modern Age," *History and Theory, Theme Issue* 45 (2006), 22.

7. Bouretz, *Témoins du Futur*, 10. Hereafter cited as TF.

Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss, and Isaac Breuer) circumscribed by the context of Weimar Germany. This more "limited scale," Myers tells us, stems from his recognition that "anti-historicism—despite its own aspiration—does not operate in an historical vacuum."[8] Thus despite the fact that both Bouretz and Myers are driven by the same issue and investigate several of the same figures (Cohen, Rosenzweig, Strauss), the books are marked by different strategies. Bouretz looks to the future and his investigation is predicated on the varied but ultimately unified presentation of Jewish messianism that he claims the figures in his book share. Myers's book looks to the past both as a historical monograph but also via his assertion that the thinkers he investigates are linked together by a shared anti-historicism that is manifest in the confrontation with the role and place of history in their lives. The disparate approaches perhaps mark some discrepancies between the disciplinary aspirations of the philosopher, Bouretz, and the historian, Myers, or could be seen through the lens of the conflict between religion and history as enunciated by Kierkegaard and Ranke above.

Indeed, if one were to accept Fasolt's assertion that the conflict "between history and religion suggests that they are vying with each other for control over the same terrain, and that terrain consists of religion," and that furthermore the need for the solace and stability that religion affords has not disappeared but has become the domain of history, that history is now "one of the most important forms religion has taken in the modern world" then the essential antipathy between religion and history is actually a byproduct of the end of the "historical religions."[9] This is to say that history has won the day and in this light these two books can both be seen as attempts to refashion religious thought to conform to our current "historical" paradigm. I suppose this model might apply to the work of Scholem too, even given his claims to irony. But neither Bouretz nor Myers is ready to sacrifice the spiritual authority of religion on the altar of history, as evidenced by Myers's statement in his introduction that the "conflict between history and faith is an ongoing one in the lives of twenty-first century Jews" (HR, 4), and Bouretz's confidence that these thinkers' transcendental testimonies of the future, which led them from "the arid desert of German Judaism" during "the most somber of times," are "still our own" (TF, 19; 22). Myers clearly points out that the crisis of historicism was also, and first, a Christian problem; this suggests that the tensions and conflicts of each book are indicative of a methodological issue that goes beyond any particular religion. The problem lies at the heart of any scholarly attempt to interrogate fundamentally religious issues in a historical framework.

Both Bouretz and Myers employ historical information in service of their arguments—although, as stated above, Myers is explicit in his role as historian and his emphasis on the past, whereas Bouretz utilizes historical information via intellectual biography—to navigate the intellectual waters of their times and arrive at their various presentations of Jewish messianism. But as we have seen in our brief discussion of Scholem, the sacral and the secular often merge in these sorts of works. Thus while Scholem's project adhered to the strictest rules of objective scientific inquiry, its goal was the genuine renewal of Judaism as a living culture

8. Myers, *Resisting History*, 7. Hereafter cited as RH.
9. Fasolt, "History and Religion in the Modern Age," 22.

based on a transcendent God.[10] In this sense, Scholem's historical investigation into Judaism was oriented toward the future though grounded in the past. Myers's historical account is predicated on a belief in transcendence shared by the thinkers he investigates, which is the basis for their revolt against historicism. Bouretz begins each of his chapters by plotting out the biography and milieu of each thinker before moving into exegeses of their texts in his attempt to draw out the messianic or utopian threads. In this way, Bouretz connects the thinkers he explores to an idealized Jewish past, and then to each other, in a grand narrative of Jewish heritage and thought that is essentially future-oriented in its messianism. So while Myers looks backward via history and Bouretz looks forward via messianism, the concept of transcendence is what allows both arguments to work and what draws these books together. Both are attempts to understand and present the construction of a "higher meaning" in the modern world. By this I would like to suggest that these books point to our current moment and frustrations with the limited power of secular humanism and proceduralism.

If we return to Scholem's "dialectic," the essential moment for both authors is the dawn of the twentieth century and the rising discontent with the rule of reason and its implications for Jewish thought. The revolt against positivism, as it was termed by H. Stuart Hughes in *Consciousness and Society*, is not a purely Jewish phenomenon nor is it necessarily predicated on a return to religion.[11] Nonetheless both books depart from the late nineteenth century by defining the terms of science and secular scholarship as the dominant mode of discourse. For Myers, the crisis of the modern age is the crisis of historicism, and he dedicates his introduction and the first chapter of his work to chronicling the rise and impact of the phenomenon on the world of Jewish thought. Myers's description of the origins and rise of historicism roughly follows the dialectic provided by Scholem. Myers locates a major shift in Jewish historical consciousness in the 1500s, when Jewish scholars began to privilege their own acts over the divine plan of God. In 1592 David Gans's *Tsemah David* marks the first Jewish work that also acknowledged Gentile history. To be sure, the work still treated Jewish history as distinct from Gentile history, but "Gans's clear recognition of the two spheres of history—despite their segregation—is a novelty over and against the usual neglect or denigration of the Gentile realm in medieval Jewish chronicling." Thus Gans told the "story of kings, wars, and earthquakes without recourse to the role of God" (RH, 14; 15). Myers tells us that this "historiographical border-crossing" prefigures historicism and marshals the work of Amos Funkenstein[12] to counter Salo Baron's claim that "sixteenth century Jewish historians like Gans 'found no successors' until the first generation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*—that a vast gulf separated the historical sense of the sixteenth century from the historicism of the nineteenth"

10. See David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

11. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890–1930* (New York: Knopf, 1958).

12. See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), but also Robert Bonfil, "How Golden was the Golden Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?" in *History and Theory*, *Beiheft* 27, (1988), 78-102.

(RH, 16). This leads Myers to a discussion of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and then Moses Mendelsohn (1729–1786) to draw the line between the historical shift of David Gans and the dominance of historicism in the nineteenth century. The argument is plausible and promising (and dovetails into Scholem's dialectic), but it is also problematic as it affords a primacy to the nineteenth-century variant of historicism that is disproportionate to the ideas proffered by Spinoza or Mendelsohn. This is not to say that neither Spinoza nor Mendelsohn was influential on the historicist project but rather that there was more going on. Spinoza's assault on "the foundations of Judaism, first by casting Sinaitic Revelation as little more than a set of time-bound laws whose validity has lapsed, and then by challenging Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch" (RH, 16); and Mendelsohn's turn to history as "an ontological category increasingly relevant as a source of authority to confirm events of great religious import" (RH, 17) can both be seen as part of the rationalist project that came to prominence during the Scientific Revolution and dominance during the Enlightenment. In this sense, it is the emphasis on facts derived by rational investigation and objective observation that marks the epistemological shift. A new understanding of history is part of this, but the greater shift is based on an understanding of human beings as the bearers of rational thought and the confidence that reason leads to progress, a confidence that allowed humanity to grant itself the agency and authority previously granted by God.

This is important because, as it turns out, the figures that embody historicism for Myers are the German historians Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) and Friedrich Meinecke (1862–1954), whereas the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* originated as an attempt to understand Judaism in terms commensurate with the "scientific attitude characteristic of our time." In the words of Leon Wieseltier, "modern Jewish historiography was thus born not as *Geschichte* but as *Wissenschaft*; under the aegis of philology, not history" (RH, 23). Myers goes on to show that *Wissenschaft* came to represent not merely a method but also a new quasi-religious faith in scientific validation. "For [Leopold] Zunz and other young Jewish scholars, *Wissenschaft* forged a path toward the illumination of the Jewish past. But it also served as an anchor of stability in the midst of a turbulent social environment" (RH, 23). I think it is important to note that *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and historicism are not coterminous, though it is certainly true that faith in scientific method and validation is essential to the historical enterprise and Myers does an excellent job of tracing the ways that the project of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* leads to the "historicization of German-Jewish culture."[13] But I would argue that it is the legacy

13. There is a separate problem in Myers's monograph with his reliance on "historicism" as the prime mover that has to do with the notoriously slippery nature of the term itself. The conflicting understandings and presentations of the term can be seen in Georg Iggers, "Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56:1 (January, 1995), 129-152; Charles Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Robert D'Amico, *Historicism and Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961); Frank Ankersmit, "An Appeal From the New to the Old Historicists," *History and Theory* 42 (May 2003), 253-270. Myers acknowledges the problem on several occasions but ultimately his argument is less about historicism per se and "whether its obsessive demand to situate every historical datum in a discrete local context precludes the prospect of enduring meaning," and more about the way that the modern production of knowledge mirrors science by stockpiling facts and re-inventing its paradigms as new information is revealed.

of the Jewish Enlightenment, *Haskalah*, as embodied in *Wissenschaft* that is the more important topic and catalyst for Myers, his own rhetoric notwithstanding, and that what Myers terms "anti-historicism" is a symptom of a larger rejection or rethinking of the Haskalah, *Bildung*, and the subsequent rise of assimilationism and secularism. One of the values of reading Bouretz and Myers together is that Bouretz expands upon the category of historicism provided by Myers to present a fuller, though at times muddled, picture.

For Bouretz the issue is the rule of reason that has its origins in the Enlightenment, but that comes to a head in the nineteenth century when thinkers such as Nietzsche challenged the dominance of rationalist thought. Thus Bouretz is able to couple the "death of God" to the rule of reason but also to decry the anti-rationalist tendencies of Nietzsche and later Heidegger. It is clear that Bouretz agrees with Myers that the place and influence of history plays a large role in fomenting the discontent of thinkers such as Rosenzweig, Scholem, Benjamin, and Strauss, but he also points to the role of secularization and assimilation and the notion of *Bildung* that "became a sort of substitute religion in the 19th century" (TF, 11). Thus Scholem's (or Benjamin's) story of his family celebrating Christmas beside a tree decorated with a picture of Theodore Herzl is indicative of the identity crisis. In Bouretz's account, it is the process of assimilation that leads to an increasing dependence on "Jewish history." As religion and ritual observance disappears from everyday Jewish life, Judaism is increasingly defined by who the Jews were and what they did, and thus the Jewish religion took on a "purely historical character" (TF, 11). Myers does an excellent job of tracing the ways that this historical character takes root in Jewish scholarship (RH, 26-32, especially 29), but Bouretz's interest is not historicism. It is the dialectic of Jewish thought. In this light the foil that provokes a response is secularism writ large, which leads to the loss of Jewish identity in the ontological sense. Bouretz's goal is to demonstrate the way that Jewish thinkers from Cohen to Levinas sought to restore this ontological sense of Jewishness as embodied in a uniquely Jewish response to the crisis of modernity.

Bouretz's chapter on Gershom Scholem serves as something of a template for the book; throughout the work, Bouretz relies on Scholem's historical scaffold and textual analysis in his discussion of the other thinkers. For Bouretz, Scholem "is without a doubt the most lucid in his awareness of a dialectic of utopia" that pits the dominant rationalist thesis of the nineteenth century, marked by the "historical science that became the only means to re-consecrate Jewish self-consciousness to the point that it became the 'faith of the lost Jews'" against "the following generation who sought to break with that spirit by reconstructing critical utopias. This generation turned to philosophy, not in the medieval manner that dreamed of constructing a synthesis, but through the form of a polemic against the contemporary current that proclaimed the end of all transcendence" (TF, 20-21; see also 460-465). Furthermore, it is significant that the figures Bourretz credits with leading the Jews from a Europe they considered a "new Egypt" and through the "arid desert of German Judaism" are not religious thinkers in the traditional sense (TF, 11;

Furthermore, historicism may be too narrow a category (when it is history in its broader sense and in all of its variants) that poses problems when investigating religion.

19). They are not rabbis or Talmudists, but philosophers. Throughout the course of the book, Bouretz establishes a post-rabbinic "chain of tradition" from Cohen to Levinas that relies on Scholem as the legitimating source. The Jewish "chain of tradition," or *shalshelet ha-qabalah*, usually refers to works that chronologically survey "the transmission of rabbinic law and doctrine by recording the sequence of luminaries who were its bearers through the ages. The purpose was to establish and demonstrate an unbroken succession of teaching and authority from the Bible, through the Talmud, and often up to the author himself."[14] In *Témoins du futur*, Bouretz deftly uses Scholem's dialectic to demonstrate that the traditional rabbinic authority was left powerless in response to the rise of reason, and that it was only through thinkers who could employ the tools of reason that the flame of Judaism in its true and transcendent essence could be kindled. Thus the final chapter on Levinas holds significant weight, as the work of Levinas marks a return to Talmud and the Jewish heritage that conserves the dialectical journey through rational thought and Western philosophy as embodied in the work of Cohen. Here Cohen's work affirms Scholem's assertion that the rise of reason to dominance was of dialectical necessity for the future of Judaism (TF, 464; 465). Furthermore, this dialectical progression allows these Jewish philosophers to assume the mantle of religious authority previously held by rabbis. Whether this assertion is justified is highly debatable, as only a quick glance at the rabbinic responses to Levinas's Talmudic interpretations will confirm.

Still, the dialectical scaffold allows Bouretz to forge links among these thinkers in order to present a coherent history of modern Jewish thought that establishes its legitimacy in relation to the unbroken tradition of teaching and authority from the Bible, through the Talmud, to these "luminaries" of Jewish philosophical thought. In this chain, "Herman Cohen's *Religion of Reason; Out of the Sources of Judaism* is a rediscovery of the sources of Judaism that were more or less forgotten along the line of history; it is a means of defending Judaism that is better than the attempts by Mendelsohn during the Enlightenment" (TF, 31); this leads to the work of Franz Rosenzweig, who "inaugurated the renewal of philosophy that became the bedrock for Jewish thought" (TF, 119); and then, "after Herman Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig, the entire work of Emmanuel Levinas protests against the interpretation of Judaism as separation [in the Hegelian sense]" (TF, 892). The argument allows Bouretz to conserve important aspects of historical and philosophical thought, such as Cohen's neo-Kantian idealism; Bloch's and Benjamin's dialectical materialism; and even the impact of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger on Rosenzweig, Strauss, Jonas, and Levinas. But Bouretz does so in a way that shows these influences to be secondary or in the service of a greater Jewish tradition. It is in this vein that Bouretz can tell us that these "Jewish thinkers saved German idealism" because, unlike the other thinkers of their time, they "preserved the presence of a past that conserved the representation of an incomplete future as Judaism has done throughout its history under the authority of a code. . ." (TF, 22). Although thinkers such as Rosenzweig, Jonas, Levinas, or Strauss were influenced by Hegel, Niertzsche, or Heidegger, Bouretz is quick

14. Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 31.

to inform us that "none remained a Hegelian, was a Nietzchean, or became a Heideggerian" (TF, 13). Bouretz instead emphasizes the discontinuities between the Jewish thinkers and their Gentile influences[15] or points to the heroic "elements of a Jewish heritage that survived programmatic destruction and envisioned a future where there seemed to be nothing but ruins" (TF, 15).

This tactic is explicit and strategic in Bouretz's chapter on Cohen. It is strategic because Bouretz needs Cohen to anchor his post-rabbinic chain of tradition; Cohen suits this purpose well as his work looks back to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and an era in which philosophical thought had recourse to reason but was not dominated by reason. Thus Cohen embodies the dialectical relationship between reason/rational thought and transcendence via his rethinking of Kantian philosophy. But the trick for Bouretz is to demonstrate that the essential and lasting components of Cohen's work have more to do with the Jewish tradition and messianism than with idealist philosophy. This is a crucial move because Bouretz needs to show how and why these Jewish thinkers were the "carriers of the flame" of Judaism rather than heretical philosophers (TF, 463-465).

For Bouretz, the key to understanding the oeuvre of Hermann Cohen, his use of Kant, and his take on messianism lies in understanding his refutation of Baruch Spinoza. In Bouretz's account, Cohen claims that Kant's understanding of Judaism was based entirely on Spinoza, but Spinoza's work was based on a misreading of Maimonides. Thus by providing a corrected reading of Maimonides, Cohen is able to provide a corrected reading of Kant and can rehabilitate Kant as an ally; the Kantian project, divested of its Spinozian misunderstanding of Judaism, becomes the basis for Cohen's own understanding of Judaism as the religion of reason. Here for Cohen the corrected reading of Maimonides leads to a corrected reading of Kant, but for Bouretz the insertion of Maimonides allows the influence of the Jewish heritage to establish itself as the key factor in Cohen's neo-Kantianism and philosophical thought (TF, 60-67).

This move has ramifications throughout the book because as Bouretz is well aware, Cohen's philosophical star waned with the rise of phenomenology. especially through the work of Heidegger. "Hans Jonas who participated in Heidegger's seminar with Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas who attended the conference at Davos a little later, Strauss who heard him [Heidegger] speak. In each you find a trace of amazement, fascination or even wonder at the quake of a philosophy that seemed to chase Hermann Cohen from the scene" (TF, 13). But Bouretz is able to rehabilitate Cohen by shifting the emphasis from Cohen's neo-Kantian idealism to his transcendental understanding of messianism. Thus as Maimonides became the basis for Cohen's philosophy via his corrected reading of Kant, Cohen becomes the key influence for Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch, Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas, and Emmanuel Levinas, based on Bouretz's corrected reading of Cohen and his emphasis on the Jewish tradition of messianism and transcendence.

15. In contrast to Bouretz, see Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

But if one relied solely on Bouretz, one would end up with a skewed understanding of these thinkers in relation to their times; furthermore, in Bouretz's book it is hard to discern whether the issue of messianism had any purchase among Gentile scholars of the same era. It is in this regard that Myers's work really shines. Myers understands that anti-historicism was not a purely Jewish phenomenon and his book breaks new ground by detailing what Myers calls the "cultural interaction" among thinkers such as Cohen and Rosenzweig and Protestant crisis theologians such as Karl Barth, Martin Kähler, Franz Overbeck, Rudolf Bultmann, and Friederich Gogarten. These "theological anti-historicists lamented what Franz Rosenzweig called 'the curse of historicity' that cast a pall over modern Western culture. In diverse ways, each sought to lift this curse through a mix of recourse to traditional religious authority and more modern intellectual strategies" (RH, 8).

We learn from Myers that Cohen grew up in Coswig "as one of a handful of Jews" in an "environment dominated by the Protestant church" (RH, 42), and that Martin Luther was one of the "most storied heroes in Cohen's cultural pantheon" (RH, 41). We also learn that Cohen identified in Luther "a principle that resonated deeply with his own philosophical tenets—namely, that religion should be dictated by individual conscience, not ecclesiastical authority" (RH, 41). While Bouretz looks to Cohen's refutation of Spinoza in favor of Maimonides as the key to understanding Cohen's use of Kant, Myers claims it is his "affinity for an enlightened Protestant intellectual heritage" that "reaches its peak with his intense engagement with Immanuel Kant" (RH, 48).

Myers's work is insightful because he eschews the category of "influence," which he claims "implies the triumph of a dominant cultural group over a more passive recipient" and instead employs a model that emphasizes the "borrowing, lending, and negotiation between German Jews and non-Jews." It is likely that it is Bouretz's discomfort with the category of "influence" that led him to focus on strictly Jewish connections. By contrast, Myers embraces the give and take of German Jewish and non-Jewish culture to help us "appreciate the creative capacity of minority groups like the Jews not only to *adopt*, but to *adapt* cultural norms from the host society to their own needs" (RH, 10). This approach, with its emphasis on the multiplicity and bi-directionality of cultural vectors that shape the lives and thoughts of a minority culture in relation to its host society, is successful and productive for Myers. In contrast to Bouretz, Myers's historical investigation exposes the nexus between Protestant and Jewish culture and presents this Jewish adaptation as an example of the "process of give and take that continually redefines the malleable boundaries of Jewish history" (RH, 10).

But in addition to Myers's methodological achievement, he also provides new and significant historical information in his presentation of the role that German Protestant thought, and specifically "crisis theology," played in the formation of modern Jewish thought. The chapters on Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Strauss will force scholars of Jewish intellectual history to rethink the ways in which these figures are understood. This is especially so as Myers is not claiming that these thinkers were mere derivatives of the Protestant model, but that the Protestant confrontation with the problems of secular objectivity as embodied in historical

scholarship served as the catalyst for a uniquely Jewish response to the same problem. Thus Myers shows us the ways that Cohen was a Jewish Protestant (RH, 48), that Rosenzweig's work held affinities with that of Karl Barth (RH, 93-98), and the way that Barth and Rosenzweig "reawakened" an interest in theology for Leo Strauss (RH, 120-122). Moyn's scholarship on Levinas in *Origins of the Other* corroborates Myers's research and also serves to illustrate the ways that Myers's model of adaptation and cultural borrowing troubles the post-Rabbinic chain of tradition established by Bouretz in *Témoins du futur*.

In the end, the transcendental nature of Bouretz's post-rabbinic chain of tradition allows his book an optimism that would seem unwarranted given the historical horrors that characterize the twentieth century in general but that befell the Jews of Europe in particular. But if one believes Levinas's claim that "different periods of history can communicate around thinkable meanings, whatever the variations in the signifying material which suggests them" because "we assume the permanence and continuation of Israel and the unity of its self-consciousness throughout the ages,"[16] then even in the face of the most horrible disaster, the permanence and continuation of Israel is guaranteed and Bouretz's optimism is indeed warranted.[17] Yet if we dig deeper, using Myers's historical work on the relation of Jewish anti-historicism to Protestantism, we will come to see that Levinas's logic of transcendence is predicated on a Kierkegaardian model of personal revelation.[18] Levinas's comparison of the Torah to glowing coals and subsequent statement that "the coals light up by being blown on and the glow of the flames that thus comes alive depends on the interpreter's length of breath" assumes that no matter the historical circumstance, the eternal flame of the Torah can be rekindled as long as there is someone to blow on the coals.[19] Thus, as in Kierkegaard, anyone can rekindle the flame provided they are prepared to do the work and are willing to accept that there is meaning beyond his or her intellect or evolution.[20]

Here we arrive at the impasse with which we started this essay. If one adheres to a logic of transcendence that affords primacy to theology over history, then Bouretz's claims hold value and point the way to a new understanding of Judaism and messianism in the twenty-first century. If, however, we choose to follow Myers's systematic historical approach, then we are left with a more conflicted and pessimistic understanding of the role of religion in our modern lives.[21] Thus Myers concludes that his "story of anti-historicism has been told from an unmistakably historicist perspective" and that while he empathizes with those who "yearn for a belief system that defies historical gravity," he also recognizes "that

16. Emmanuel Levinas, *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1968).

17. Ethan Kleinberg, "The Myth of Emmanuel Levinas," in *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France*, ed. Julian Bourg (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 216.

18. See Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, 168-194.

19. Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, transl. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 109, 210 n.8.

20. Kleinberg, "The Myth of Emmanuel Levinas," in Bourg, ed., *After the Deluge*, 217.

21. See Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), especially "Between Apocalypse and Enlightenment: Benjamin, Bloch and Modern German-Jewish Messianism."

such an experience or belief is almost always refracted through an historicist lens—and will continue to be until a vast epistemological paradigm shift occurs" (RH, 172).

But perhaps this messianic appeal to a vast epistemological paradigm shift, made on the last page of Myers's book, can be refashioned to help us take stock of both of these works and the current climate in the relation between history and religion. Both books are ill at ease as they straddle the line between religious transcendence and secular historical scholarship, and both are quick to point to the limits of secular/historical scholarship, despite the fact that their protagonists are academics trained at universities rather than at religious academies (the lawyer, Isaac Breuer, is the exception, though Myers tells us that he was a voracious consumer of philosophy, history, and literature [RH, 130]). It is also of note that these two scholars of Jewish thought—one French, the other American—both attempt to provide an understanding of Jewish identity that is fundamentally diasporic in that Judaism and Jewish identity are predicated on transcendent qualities that are not bound to time or place. This is to say that neither adheres to an understanding of Jewish identity beholden to the place-bound model of the nation-state of Israel nor the time-bound mantra "never again" that ties Jewish identity to the event of the Shoah. Both books long for the possibility of an infinite and transcendent force, all the while straining to contain this force within the accessible and rational confines of Western scholarship.

In this light, these books address the ways in which we are grappling not with Nietzsche's "death of God" that is the departure point for many of the thinkers in both works, but with the "end of man," as in the work of Michel Foucault.

> In our day, it is not so much the absence or the death of God that is affirmed as the end of man (that narrow, imperceptible displacement, that recession in the form of identity, which are the reasons why man's finitude becomes his end) . . . since he has killed God, it is he himself who must answer for his own finitude; but since it is in the death of God that he speaks, thinks, and exists, his murder itself is doomed to die; new gods, the same gods are already swelling the future Ocean.[22]

As the rule of reason has come to an end and we grow less and less confident in humankind's ability to provide a moral or ethical scaffold to guide us, we are left searching for a new authority to validate that which humankind has surveyed and measured. Despite Fasolt's assertions, secular history cannot provide the solace and stability previously provided by religion, and thus our scholarly attempts to contain one inside the other leave us wanting. The tension is explicit in Bouretz and Myers: new gods, the same gods are already swelling the future ocean.

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22. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 385.