THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE HIDDEN FATHER AND THE PROBLEM OF GENERATIONS IN LUTHER, FREUD, AND KAFKA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although a dissertation may be attributed to one author, within and between the lines of its pages are the many benevolent spirits that informed its creation, buoyed its execution, and facilitated its completion. Some words of acknowledgment are necessarily in order.

Under the exacting yet nurturing supervision of my dissertation committee, I was blessed with not one but three Virgils who escorted me along an arduous adventure from confusion to clarity, and from doubt to assurance. In committing to advise my doctoral course of study at the University of Chicago Divinity School, Richard Rosengarten took a chance on a diffident and inexpert student—a faith to which I am forever obliged. I had the immense fortune to work with someone whose perspicacity of intellect is matched only by his charity of spirit: his ability to articulate what I could often only communicate inchoately was always in the service of helping me craft the most compelling version of the argument that I wanted to advance. During my years of graduate study Paul Mendes-Flohr was not only an incisive authority on German-Jewish culture and intellectual history; his steadfast encouragement for this project, believing in its value even and especially when I and others could not see it, was the caring fuel that propelled me forward. If Abigail Gillman only brought her commanding knowledge of German literature, particularly of Kafka and Freud, to the fore, it would have been enough. But her excitement and solicitousness for the story I found myself telling pushed me towards finer rhetorical sophistication as much as they ultimately carried me to the finish line.

Several generous grants and fellowships aided these challenging years of writing, providing welcome financial support and making possible undisturbed concentration on the task at hand: from the Divinity School, a Dissertation Completion Fellowship, the Nathan Scott

Dissertation Fellowship, the Anthony Yu Dissertation Fellowship, and a summer grant to conduct archival research at the National Library of Israel. At a critical moment I received a doctoral scholarship from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

At different junctures I benefitted tremendously from thoughtful comments and feedback made by participants at various forums. Selections from chapters were presented at the following colloquia: the British Association for Jewish Studies; the Association for Jewish Studies; the Max and Hilde Kochmann Summer School for PhD Students in Modern European-Jewish History and Culture at the University of Sussex (organized by David Jünger); the Shatzmiller Seminar at the Duke Center for Jewish Studies (organized by Julie Mell); the Jewish Studies Faculty Summer Seminar at Dartmouth College; and the Religion and Literature Club at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Special thanks is due to the following individuals who graciously lent their time and intellectual energy to assist me in formulating and refining the dissertation's animating claims, who provided sagacious advice regarding avenues both to pursue and to avoid, and who directed me to important sources with which I have engaged: Zachary Braiterman, Christopher Boyd Brown, Lawrence Edwards, Gordon Fellman, Georgia Frank, Udi Greenberg, Sarah Hammerschlag, Susannah Heschel, Christhard Hoffmann, Bernard Mehlman, Michael McGillen, Eric Santner, Susan Schreiner, and Liliane Weissberg.

Most of this project was composed under the shadow of a global pandemic that not only irreversibly altered the fates of many individuals and families, but which also struck a formidable blow to the pursuit of scholarship within institutions of higher education. In its dedication to the advancement of knowledge the University of Chicago made cultural treasures such as HathiTrust

Emergency Temporary Access Service available, enabling students to continue their research conveniently and uninterrupted. Without access to this remarkable digital archive, progress on my work would have appreciably stalled. When this document was ready for official submission, Colleen Mullarkey and Joel Casavant at the Library's Dissertation Office extended a diligent and caring eye to ensure that it complied with all formatting standards.

Also deserving of recognition are certain people who acted less as interlocutors for my research than who throughout the years have furthered my capacities for critical thinking, supported my academic endeavors, and gave me the precious gift of friendship. Educators and mentors include Ariela Almog, Dan Laor, Kathleen Martin, Deborah Onie, Paul Parker, Geoff Rees, and Allen Speight; compadres and colleagues include Patrick Derdall, Eli Dubrovin, Ben Ginsburg, Gabriel Godwin, Sam Israel, Christoph Kasten, Maureen Kelly, Tim Kim, and Elijah Zehyoue.

From the time that this project was but a meager proposal, my dear and patient partner, Stephanie Stern, was steadfastly by my side and in my corner. Her enthusiasm and optimism continually kept my spirits high, and her confidence in my efforts was an indispensable emotional anchor. What is more, under great pressure and time constraints she meticulously proofread the manuscript—an exacting labor of love for which I can only hope to express the proper gratitude.

My parents, Paul and Miriam, made all of this possible; in their superabundant love and affirmation unwaveringly they gave their blessing to me to carry out the endlessly enriching vocation of the *vita contemplativa*. To them I dedicate this work—a small token of appreciation for an unrequitable debt.

INTRODUCTION-AN UNLIKELY TRINITY

רַב דִּימִי אָמַר: יַנְקוּתָא — כְּלִילָא דְּוַרְדָּא, סָבוּתָא — כְּלִילָא דְּחִילְפָּא.
Rav Dimi said: youth is a crown of roses; old age is a crown of thorns.
(Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 152a)

Le malheur de l'homme, a dit Descartes, vient de ce qu'il a d'abord été un enfant.
"Man's unhappiness, says Descartes, is due to his having first been a child."[1]

How are we to square the conflicting encapsulations of childhood pithily expressed in these two epigraphs? Are a person's first years an age of contentment, blissfully and ignorantly unconnected to the last ones, per the fourth-century *amora*; or is the malaise of ripeness a bad fruit preformed in the desolate seeds of youth, as the seventeenth-century rationalist seems to insinuate? The Cartesian prognosis can be chalked up to the French penchant for bitterness, but the Jew does not readily conjure up a contrapuntal stereotypical attitude. Resort to textual context offers little assistance in reconciliation: Dimi's epigram is one of several bemoaning old age, whereas the Beauvoir citation appears in a chapter devoted to the ethical claim that the circumstances of childhood inadequately prepare individuals for the radical freedom of the adult inter-subjective world. In isolation, the authors of these remarks do not elaborate the forces of youth that engender its dominant mood; and their juxtaposition, on its own terms, cannot immediately elucidate why the selfsame period of life, as it is assessed in retrospect, can be distilled into such clashing portrayals.

Across space, time, and temperament, what the "youths" of Dimi and Descartes share is the condition of living under the tutelage of one's parents. Along the lines of a familiar psychical process, we may be tempted to "split" their contrastive crystallizations according to the individual responsible for the tenor, such that it is the mother who gives childhood its sweet

[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel, 1976), 35. Source unknown.

fragrance while the father is the source of a perpetual discontent.[2] The intuition of an abounding maternal provision is corroborated by physicians of the mind and soul alike. For Erik Erikson, the mother's intangible yet equally invaluable milk is that of "basic trust," which is "the first psychosocial trait and the fundament of all others. Basic trust in mutuality is that 'original

[2] The *locus classicus* of this defense mechanism is Sigmund Freud, "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense" (1938), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, XXIII:271-278. [Hereafter *SE*.]

optimism,' that assumption that 'somebody is there,' without which we cannot live."[3] Martin Buber, whose mother had abandoned him when he was four, and who as a result spent a lifetime

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[3] Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Norton, 1962), 118. Erikson has an intimate relation to two of the three figures treated here. Erikson was encouraged by Anna Freud to study at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute, but it was her father to whom he was indebted, once summarizing his research to his teaching assistant Gordon Fellman as merely a footnote to Sigmund's. (I thank Gordon Fellman for this anecdote.) That this deferential utterance acknowledges a fidelity to but obscures a swerve from Freud can be seen in Erikson's second book, *Young Man Luther*. It is a work of psychobiography, a literary genre invented by Freud with *A Childhood Memory of Leonardo da Vinci* (1910). However, as suggested in the book's subtitle, Erikson brought psychoanalysis into conversation with the social sciences, articulating a dialectical relation between the psyche and the socio-historical environment that impinges on it.

Great men are not exempt from the life cycle and the series of trials comprising it: Luther affords Erikson a picture of a poignant and extended "identity crisis," the failure in adolescence to forge for oneself an identity, "some central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of the effective remains of his childhood and the hopes of his anticipated adulthood…" (14). Perhaps the most momentous point of the life cycle, it is during these years that every teenager adult finds himself standing at a crossroads between the old and the new Way, the possibility of discarding old loyalties and commitments in favor of ones that promise greater ideological nourishment. For Luther, this "Great Divide" assumed the form of a provisionally settled but ultimately unresolved conflict between competing paternal authorities demanding his obedience, between his father Hans who wanted young Martinus to pursue a secular career in law, and God, by whom he felt personally addressed and to whom he felt compelled to join the monastic class in absolute devotion (49). Luther's identity crisis emerges in defiance of his father's will, the man whose brutal demeanor and severe personality he seeks to rebel against, but for whose approval and blessing he so desperately longs. Moreover, Erikson insists not only that theology is inextricable from personal experience, particularly the seminal events and interactions of one's childhood, but also that theology can act as a site of fanciful resolution for domestic conflict. On the one hand, Luther universalizes his personal condition by "transferring the desperation of his filial position into the human condition vis-a-vis God," placing the latter in the role of the "dreaded and untrustworthy father" (164, 157). On the other hand, the predication of Christ's saving power acts as a mediator between the wrathful father and the contrite son.

Erikson's study is meant as a corrective to "originology," defined as the "habit of thinking which reduces every human situation to an analogy with an earlier one, and most of all to that earliest, simplest, and most infantile precursor which is assumed to be its 'origin'" (18). His "epigenetic," developmental approach instead emphasizes the determining power of each stage of the life cycle, yet acknowledges that the form and completeness of the resolution colors each of its successive phases (Howard Gardner, "The Enigma of Erik Erikson," review of *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson*, by Lawrence J. Friedman, *The New York Review of Books*, June 24, 1999, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1999/06/24/the-enigma-of-erik-erikson/). It remains a question, however, whether he succeeds in avoiding the trap. Once his diagnosis divulges that, like all great men, Luther possessed a "basic zeal to settle an infantile account or curse," and that the most primitive psychic struggles obdurately persist beyond the teenage striving to create a legitimate psychosocial identity, the pendulum oscillates back to the preformationist side (Paul Roazen, *Erik H. Erikson: The Power and Limits of a Vision* [New York: The Free Press, 1976], 75). Beyond the slippage in method, furthermore, is an ever-present danger of psychobiography, which always subsumes the work under the man, and to privilege psychic causes over cultural effects. This tendency leads Erikson to both vacillate on the question of whether religion has validity and integrity distinct from unconscious human projection, as well as to overlook those many aspects of Luther's theology that only with great difficulty can be explained away by a father complex. The present study thus attempts to avoid the temptation to reduce spiritual dilemmas to domestic conflicts.

stressing the necessity of mutuality in human relations, echoed this sentiment shortly after Hitler's ascent to power: "It is up to us to make the world reliable again for children. It depends on us whether we can say to them and to ourselves, 'Don't worry, Mother is here.'"[4] The mother may smother, but we are not blind to the fact that her annoying solicitousness is an expression of a love that we cannot find elsewhere. The father, however, is another story, commonly identified as the cause of a wide array of pathologies and disturbances. The armchair psychologist in us, equipped with a mental glossary with the acuteness of Ockham's razor, is quick to diagnose the behavior of this power-hungry politician or that wanton woman as rooted in unresolved daddy issues.

From the totality of relationships into which one enters over the course of a life, none is so devoid of complication as that with mom. Yet two qualifications immediately arise: as Philip Larkin reminds us, both parents are responsible for our fateful, unavoidable damage: "They fuck you up, your mum *and* dad. / They may not mean to, but they do. / They fill you with the faults they had / And add some extra, just for you."[5] Moreover, the father is not only irreducible to a destabilizing agent, but is a figure of immensely positive impact and significance in the emotional and psychological life of his son. This fact is brought home in the following wistful passage, which describes the conclusion of a son's interview with his father about the latter's experience as a marine in World War II:

> The second gift came after the interview was over and the tape recorder was turned off. We were just sort of winding down with a little small talk about my two sons, when my dad turned to me and said, "I don't know what you're doing or how you're doing it, but keep it up. It's working.

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[4] Martin Buber, "Die Kinder," *Jüdische Rundschau*, May 30, 1933, cited in Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 2-3.

[5] Philip Larkin, "This Be The Verse," in *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), 143. [My italics.]

> That quiet confirmation from my father of me and my life, my manhood, meant the world to me. That's the handful of words so many men wait for all their lives but never hear.[6]

Lacking any modicum of resentment, these lines divulge a secret buried in the souls of men, as deep-seated as it is mysterious, and whose conscious and unconscious expressions are eventually intuited by perceptive women: paternal affirmation is a son's existential mission, regardless of the kind of life he chooses for himself. Recognition of this sort has a saving power, the epic proportion of an ultimate judgment; regardless of the heights that a man's worldly success reaches, absent the certainty of a father's approbation of his being the feeling of failure, however faint, will accompany him. Given this undeniable reality, we wager that both the roses and thorns metaphorizing youth are due to the experience of and encounter with a father. The lifelong perdurance of this bifurcated sentiment is captured by one memoirist: "I don't know any man my age who wouldn't want his father back, no matter how deformed their relationship had been. I don't know of any man my age…who achieved a proper parting with his father, who didn't feel cheated of one last sailing, one last drink, one last drive to the sunset."[7] The only thing worse than having a father is not having one.

This dissertation is about fathers and sons, a complicated bond whose coordinates comprise love, contestation, great expectations, mismeetings, the search for recognition, the ecstasy of acceptance, the longing for wholeness, and the pain of neglect. A foray into the history of representation, it is a project concerned with how this particular relationship is portrayed,

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[6] Mark Baker, *What Men Really Think: About Women, Love, Sex, Themselves* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 274, cited in Henry Abramovitch, "Images of the 'Father' in Psychology and Religion," in *The Role of The Father in Child Development*, 3rd ed., ed. Michael Lamb (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 32.

[7] Clark Blaise, *I Had a Father: A Post-Modern Autobiography* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1993), 6, cited in Abramovitch, "Images of the 'Father,'" 23.

conceptualized, and thematized in the Western canon. That this corpus encompasses both sacred and secular writing—that is, stories about human beings, divine beings, and their encounters—is honored by a scrutiny of domestic as well as religious depictions of intergenerational interactions. In the proceeding chapters four father-son relationships are considered, not all of which are discussed simultaneously or with even weight throughout but incorporated by the demands of the dissertation's main argument and its implications for the study of literature, history, and religion:

> a) *father-son*: a primal relation, involving biological, emotional, and psychological elements, that first becomes a regnant literary trope in Scripture yet becomes foregrounded in the writings of our early twentieth-century representatives;
>
> b) *God-man*: a religious relation whose metaphorization along familial lines also has testamental roots, and extend, for example, liturgically into the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer and yearly supplication to אבינו מלכנו at the close of Yom Kippur, and idiomatically into the Yiddish invocation of *Tateniu-Foter*. Critiques of androcentrism in theology (e.g., Mary Daly's *Beyond God The Father* [1973]) come up against not simply the adoption of the figuration by "an influential part of the language community," but also its resonating power for those who discern essential and functional likenesses between the metaphor and the referent);[8]
>
> c) *God-Christ*: the analogical potential of the domestic sphere in rendering divine-human relations intelligible also applies to the first two persons of the Trinity (viz., Father and Son). The innovations of the four Gospels and the Pauline Epistles with respect to the Hebrew Bible in the use of this metaphor may be said to consist in 1) individualizing the primary connotation of "son" away from worshippers of Yahweh *en toto*; 2) predicating it first and foremost to the relation between God and one who is both fully human and fully divine; and 3) proclaiming that intergenerational relations attains its consummate state with these two entities;
>
> d) *Judaism-Christianity*: the understanding of these two monotheistic faiths as a family affair could only emerge with the rise of Christianity, bound up with its attempt to establish its identity in light of a derivation yet distinction from Judaism. Different familial models have been proposed over the centuries by Jews and Christians alike, including the maternal (Geiger) and the fraternal (Lessing).[9] This project, however, draws on the paternal tradition, which has a precedent,

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[8] Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and The Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 170.

[9] "There is only one religion of revelation, Judaism. Christianity was carried in the womb of this religion, Islam more indirectly suckled and nurtured by it…" (Abraham Geiger, review of Aloys Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad*, *JZWL* 2 [1863]: 186, cited in Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and The Jewish Jesus* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 53); combining b) and d), the parable of toleration in Lessing's *Nathan The Wise* (III.7) allegorizes Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as three sons of a benevolent father.

> for instance, in the ecclesiological transformation of the concept of the fathers as predecessors in belief (Rom. 9:5) to describe the connection between the Old and New Testaments.[10]

Our exploration of the father-son relationship as a literary thematic, then, moves between literal and figurative valences, between sacred and profane registers, and between natural and supernatural realms, in order to underscore its centrality to Western monotheistic and literary traditions. The four dyads listed above are identical only to themselves and irreducible to any other; yet the project encourages the reader to see them as nevertheless intimately interconnected, with the construal of one pertaining to, bearing on, and with important implications for, the other. That is to say, composing the history of this trope and doing justice to its deployment in the work of our representative writers demands that we think these pairs in tandem.

Within the wide expanse of imaginative creation this inquiry concentrates on seminal moments in modern Germanic high culture, having uncovered a conversation prevailing between the German reformer of Latin Christendom, Martin Luther (1483-1546), the Prague-born Jewish novelist and short story writer, Franz Kafka (1883-1924), and the Viennese Jewish founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). The thesis will be advanced that the representations of father-son relations in Freud's and Kafka's work constitute a secular translation of Luther's stances on sin and salvation. Befitting the presupposition of a discussion that transcends spatial, temporal, generic, and cultural specificities, this argument assumes a dialogical logic, both in terms of detecting a reactive and revisionary quality to Freud's and Kafka's writings relative to Luther's, as well as in reciprocally orienting theological to non-

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[10] Volker Leppin, "Father, Fathers, Fatherhood, V. Christianity," in *The Encyclopedia of The Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Constance M. Furey et al. (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 8:964. [Hereafter *EBR*.]

theological discourse (without dissolving the critical distinctions between them). In other words, religious rhetoric is read with a view towards its secular successions and refigurations, while, conversely, overtly secular rhetoric is mined for its religious dimensions, import, and entailments. This two-way street, then, is just as eager to affirm that the complete thrust of Freud's and Kafka's paintings of the domestic field are comprehensible only within a legacy of Lutheran Christianity, as it is to evince unsaid and unintended faith claims responsive to it. Put alternatively, this study reverses the chronological stream by contemplating the influence of the Christian heritage on German-Jewish intellectuals.

That this trialogue is invisible to the naked eye hints at the operative method of our analysis, which makes no case for either deliberate appropriation or self-styled resemblance. That is, neither Freud nor Kafka are invested in or indebted to Protestant thought in general or to its *spiritus rector* in particular. Even the relationship between the Jewish counterparts rests somewhere between skepticism, indifference, and ignorance. There is no evidence that Freud read or even was aware of Kafka's writings. As much as both were engaged in experimental, even revolutionary endeavors, Freud did not much bother with any contemporary writing that did not enter the orbit of his scientific agenda. With his classical sensibility, predilection for the archaic, and his comfort among Western titans like Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Goethe, he would not have had much patience for avant-garde literature. With Kafka, on the other hand, the story is less cut and dried. There is no definitive evidence that he read Freud but he did read Freudians such as Hans Blüher (1888-1955), the antisemitic philosopher and historian of the German Youth Movement [*Wandervogel*]; and, in 1917, he even befriended one of Freud's

earliest and most distinguished disciples, Otto Gross (1877-1919).[11] The dissatisfaction with Blüher's work that Kafka expressed on one occasion reflects a larger wariness towards the principal teachings and aims of psychoanalysis.[12] In a letter to his paramour Milena Jesenská, the Czech writer and journalist, Kafka deplored its therapeutic intention as well as its insistence on the pathological origins of religious feeling, preferring the notion that sicknesses are in fact "matters of faith, anchorings in some maternal ground for souls in distress…[*Glaubenstatsachen*, *Verankerungen des in Not befindlichen Menschen in irgendwelchem mütterlichen Boden*…][13] In other words, the religious substratum of which illness is the manifestation is more part and parcel of the human soul than the Wednesday Psychological Society is ready to admit.

In both cases, therefore, the constellation of Luther—Freud—Kafka is a hermeneutic one, the product of a manufactured intervention that opens up new ways of reading the three of them as well as, it is hoped, the literary and religious traditions of which they are so formative a part. To be sure, the approach is neither adventitious nor merely heuristic, for the argument of an analytic relation to Luther is supported by two features belonging to the Freudian and Kafkan corpora. The first, relatively new to scholarly interest, is an intricate engagement with

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[11] Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and The Modern Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 121. Kafka's diaries mention Freud twice: once in an entry from September 23, 1912; the other, dated July 10, 1912, appears in his travel diaries [*Reisetagebücher*], when he spoke with a young Gymnasium teacher about Freud during a trip to the Jungborn spa in the Harz Mountains of central Germany (Franz Kafka, *Diaries*, ed. Max Brod [New York: Schocken, 1976], 213, 478). [Hereafter *D.*]

Kafka mentions Gross in two letters written to Max Brod from Zürau in the fall of 1917 (Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston [New York: Schocken, 1977], 153, 167). [Hereafter *LFFE*.] With Kafka present at a party hosted by Brod on July 23, 1917, Gross proposed the idea for a new magazine with the provisional Nietzschean-inspired title *Blätter zur Bekämpfung des Machtwillens* [*Journal for the Suppression of the Will to Power*] (Ibid., 455).

[12] Ibid., 167. Kafka also rejects Freud's father complex as an explanatory scheme (Ibid., 288-289).

[13] Franz Kafka to Milena Jesenská, November 1920, *Letters to Milena*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Schocken, 1990), 216 / *Briefe an Milena*, ed. Willy Haas (New York: Schocken, 1952), 246.

Christianity writ large, critiques that revolve especially around the first two persons of the Trinity on the one hand and its intractable historical, socio-political, and theological relationship to Judaism on the other. This characteristic is not meant to subsume the varieties of Christian experience under a Lutheran umbrella, but only to indicate that, qua faith tradition, Christianity is not altogether alien to Freud's and Kafka's conscious intellectual horizons. The second is what might be labelled the elective correspondences between the three authors by virtue of shared regnant images, governing ideas, and regulative structures in their depictions of intergenerational dynamics. The methodological combination of explicating their historical preoccupation with Christianity, together with a more literary focus on identifying common controlling categories across different discursive forms (theology, fiction, psychology), is ultimately in the service of reconstructing the respective worlds of Freud's and Kafka's writings. Such a goal is driven by questions such as, what kinds of religious landscapes do both theological and non-theological works present? Which given and canonical universes do they demonstrate the most affinity with, and where does its limit lie? And what does the projection of a certain world imply for both the avowed and unstated religious commitments, orientations, and convictions of its creator?

Guided by a greater trust in mimesis than explicit authorial assertion, the contributions to Freud and Kafka scholarship will situate these refracted religious identities at a crossroads. More precisely, that their secular representations of father-son relations demonstrate significant points of continuity and discontinuity with Luther's theological vision is symptomatic of a larger conscious and unconscious convergence with and departure from both Christian as well as Jewish theological models. The chief task of the following readings thus consists in pinpointing

where, when, how, and to what degree this dialectical process occurs, in turn establishing the borders of their ambivalent affiliations.

In so executing, these studies will correct recursive blindspots throughout the voluminous secondary literature. I am not merely referring to the reductivist tendencies, which, as plausible as it might be to do so, interpret the itinerant and hesitating protagonists as Kafka himself, and the inaccessible authority figures of his fiction as so many aesthetic mutations of his own remote father, or attempt to anchor Freud's postulation of a universal father in his own all-too peculiar childhood. (Who is to blame for this approach other than Freud himself, having lent it scientific credibility?) These temptations are immediately resisted here by sharply distinguishing the father from the Father, the biographical father from the literary father, taking Freud's and Kafka's representations of the domestic sphere at face value and on their own terms even as they are thought to point beyond themselves towards a hidden theological meaning. More urgent for our purposes, however, are other neglectful trends in the reception history: in addition to overlooking the exegetical potential in exposing Luther's spectral presence, they either ignore the place of religion in these authors altogether, are unable to recognize their incorporation of symbols and themes *across* discrete and even discordant religious traditions, or fail to think through what such a juxtaposition might mean for an understanding of their work and of the multicolored cultural contexts surrounding it. Both Freud's and Kafka's corpora betray an elaborate and intricate amalgamation of images, concepts, and structures borrowed from a host of sources. Disentangling the various animating strands, so as to perceive and appreciate the richness of their syncretistic products, first requires a sensitivity and nuance to differentiate between Jewish and Christian symbolism. It then demands allaying any fear of or worry about supersessionism, as if

the assertion of a Christian influence on Jewish thinkers somehow replicates Christianity's deep-seated desire to eradicate its forbearer and, in this instance, to deprive a people of men whom they take pride in as two of the greatest of their sons.[14] One senses a possessiveness underneath many discussions of Freud and Kafka, an anxiety to ensconce them in the tent of their Jewish forefathers, buttressed by the simplistic assumptions that identity is encapsulated by racial or ethnic accidents, or that the spirit of a text is informed entirely by the provenance of its author.

I. *Récollection et Soupçon*

At the heart of this thesis is an investigation into artistic worlds and a delineation of the dynamic interaction between them. The interrogation of the relationship between representation and reality extends back to Plato, as does the question, which somewhat recently attained a certain urgency in theoretically inclined literary circles of the 1980s, of whether the former more properly may be said to "reflect" or "construct" the latter. Finding no need to choose between these two options, we aver using Aristotelian categories that "*mimesis* is *poiesis*"; at one and the same time does the work of art express and form an unprecedented albeit recognizable tapestry of feeling, thought, and action.[15] Luther, Kafka, and Freud are indeed geniuses of father-son relations, having created original representations whose resonance derives from their ability to form microcosms faithful to (and disclosive of) human experience. Moreover, the premise that Luther is the most crucial frame for grasping the worlds of Freud's and Kafka's work does not

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[14] This last clause echoes the opening lines of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, the ambit of an argument, pace the biblical account, for Moses's Egyptian origins.

[15] Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and The Human Sciences*, 180. For Ricœur *mimesis* and *poiesis* comprise what he calls the "non-ostensive" dimension of the literary work, that is, the component that projects and refers to a world.

suggest an unbroken fidelity between them; just as the artist does not simply reproduce reality, so too does this comparative endeavor declare any uncritical duplication. Instead, what this labor will reveal is a sophisticated work of convergence and divergence, a nuanced process of suspicion and retrieval of Lutheran motifs and categories. It should be underscored that the parameters of this circumscribed appropriation are established by positing the continuity of secular with religious representations, by surfacing the religious significances of secular representations, and by observing the domestic idiom within which religious critique is undertaken.

Having laid out the four pertinent intergenerational relations above, we can now outline the similarities and dissimilarities that undergird the dialectical relationship between these three authors. The justification not simply for the inclusion of Luther, but for naming him as the primary informing pattern for Freud and Kafka, is founded on the contention that he introduces into German theology and culture a certain way of speaking about fathers and sons, one which is intimately linked to a tradition of Christian anti-Judaism that he also inaugurates. The proximity of these discourses will be laid out in Chapter Two. Central to our concerns is the role that the categories of presence and absence play in this new religious language. With regard to the Father, Luther articulates in his mature period a distinction between a *Deus absconditus* (the Hidden God) and a *Deus revelatus* (the Revealed God). Simultaneously determinate divine attributes and human percepts, these monikers together connote the gamut of emotional impingements and psychological conditions constitutive of the Christian penitent's experience of the deity, ranging from alienating indifference to intimate responsiveness. (The Hidden God should not be confused with the *Deus otiosus*, the figure ubiquitous throughout the history of religions who

isolates himself from humankind and, relegating providential supervision to inferior deities, is unconcerned with the affairs of the world.[16]) By contrast, Luther's *Deus absconditus* is an all-too present if not overbearing force in the life of man. Remoteness and interestedness, furthermore, are not essential properties of separate deities, but are two faces of the same divinity.

Luther's remarkable theological innovation lies less in the dual predication of presence and absence to a supreme God, than it is in fashioning a story of man's encounter with these *dei*, in emplotting a prototypical soteriological drama that progresses from the absconded Father to the revealed Father. As we will see, "hiddenness" for Luther is an umbrella term that gathers a set of estranging experiences under its covering: it connotes the feeling of being at a loss to emotionally and spiritually commune with the Father; that He is out of reach, both by His being doing as well as our own incapability to comply with His law; that through sin man has failed to win His recognition, which inspires more fear and terror even as it augments the longing for approval; and that as His sons human beings cannot understand Him even as they concern and bear upon them in the most pressing of ways.

Life under the *Deus absconditus* would surely lead to damnation were it not for the supplementary doctrine of a God who reveals Himself. Absent this solution, Luther could not resolve the most urgent theological problem of his era: to discover the most certain means of both achieving eternal salvation and ascertaining that one has indeed achieved it. With the *Deus revelatus,* a new relationship between God and man becomes possible as God's mien abruptly changes from ominous to merciful. It is only through this love of and reliance on God, this trust that He is faithful to His vow to redeem, that the Christian in turn experiences "grace," that is,

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[16] For a brief survey of the "remote God" see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1987), 121-125.

God's love for, reconciliation with, and recognition of his individual being even in its sinful state. In other words, at the apogee of the religious life for Luther lies a reciprocal affirmation between God and man and a love that is transparent to each participant. If the Hidden God is the oppressive and accusing force who stands both in opposition to and remote from man, the Revealed God is the one who reaches out to him, quieting his yearning for acceptance.

The novel teaching of a deity who oscillates between contradictory visages is one side of the Lutheran legacy that interests us; closely related to it is what we will name the "elevation of the son," an insight first opened up by Freud's pithy designation of Christianity as a "religion of the son" [*Sohnesreligion*].[17] Luther's paradigm may similarly be classified as a theology of the son to the extent that this figure is moved center stage, and conveys a fundamental optimism regarding his standing vis-à-vis the Father. Luther continues to exert a command over the religious imagination in part because he compellingly illustrates the phenomenological experience of the Christian's aspiration for eternal life, often even recounting his own personal trials with existential dread and meaninglessness.[18] Forgoing the urge to construct a neat theological system from a neutral bird's-eye view outside it (à la Peter Lombard or Thomas Aquinas), Luther instead writes from the perspective of the believer, such that the reader can easily sympathize with and imagine himself in the place of the former.

Yet it is the figure of Christ the Son who not only constitutes the connecting tissue between filial foregrounding and hopefulness, but also between the themes of the elevation of the

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[17] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), in *SE* XXIII:88 [hereafter *MM*] / *Der Mann Moses und die Monotheistische Religion* [hereafter *DMM*], in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud et al., XVI:194. [Hereafter *GW*.]

[18] Paul Tillich labels Luther's rehearsals of despair [*Anfechtung*] as precursors to those of the existentialists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*The Courage to Be* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000], 170).

son and of the Janus-faced deity. As mentioned previously, the spiritual ordeal from hiddenness to revelation reaches its dramatic climax with the reception of grace, conceivable otherwise as the raising of the earthly son from the status of inexorably damnable sinner to one who is satisfiable to the Father. The prerequisite for such an elevation and transformation is a faith in the promises proclaimed by Christ, as well as in the efficaciousness of His salvific activity on the Cross. In Luther's scheme, the Son is promoted to the primary position in the process of the justification of the sinner, in terms of the conferred power of the imputation of righteousness as well as the important function of intermediary between God and man. The son's long sought reconciliation with the Father is not an achievement that the son can bring about by his own efforts; it requires the merciful intervention of a Son who has already—nay, has always—been blessed with paternal approval. Elevated above the sinful, Christ is privileged with a unity and intimacy with the Father that is exceptional among sons, for it is through Him that the *Deus revelatus* reveals himself to humanity. The cooperative bond between Father and Son is not only the transcendental condition of justification, but one that the reconciliation between Father and son is meant to approximate. Therefore, at the core of Lutheran corpus, which would come to divide Europe and irreversibly alter the course of world history, is a family romance involving the Father, the Son, and the son. Luther's project is motivated by the problem of Father-son relations, the inability of these two figures to commune organically and without difficulty; and his intellectual achievement consists in offering a solution to the tragic reality of intergenerational fissure.

It is in the pretense of resolution that the question of Judaism and its putative theological incompleteness arises for us. Thinking Luther's representation of Father-son relations and his

anti-Judaism in tandem, the latter should be interpreted as a necessary consequence of the former. In other words, Luther's animus toward Judaism is subtended by a diagnosis of the tradition's fraught family romance. By failing to incorporate the Son into the drama of the son's pursuit of salvation, Judaism in turn fails to solve the *Vaterfrage*, the primary religious dilemma into which all individuals are flung. Without the redemptive prospect of the *Deus revelatus*, the Jew remains in the futile struggle to appease a stern, inaccessible, and law-giving Father. Fueling and compounding this sense of distance is His institution of a theological system that is impossible to fulfill by his own solitary efforts, invariably leaving His believing son in a perpetual state of sin and thus condemned to eternal damnation. This critical appraisal amounts to a distinctively Protestant version of supersessionism: Judaism presents an insoluble problem with regard to the Law and the consequent inability to either fulfill human longing or gain divine acceptance, which Christianity then answers by announcing the Son's charitable intercession on the sinner's behalf.

With the invocation of supersessionism the fourth father-son relation mentioned above, that of Judaism and Christianity, comes into view. Considering Luther's doctrines of justification and of Judaism alongside each other in fact points to a discrepancy in attitudes towards the figure of the father. On the one hand, the soteriological vision stresses the son's *reconciliation* with the Father, underwritten by a postulation of the *harmony* between Father and Son; on the other hand, the assessment of Judaism as a wanting system of faith over against its Christian derivative exhibits a *substitutive* instinct, the self-perception of *supplanting* its father. Emboldened by its stylization as a religion of the son, the son religion overcomes *its* father religion by a belief in the

redemptive efficacy of the Son, and, as a result, professes to have remedied what it sees as its progenitor's intrinsic deficiencies.

From the second half of the nineteenth century onward, transatlantic literature has displayed a fascination with fathers and sons. Within this tradition Kafka and Freud certainly stand out for their powers of incisiveness, their capacity not just to *confirm* but also *inform* our intuitions about the dynamics of this singular relationship. Yet beyond this thematic preoccupation is a point of view and formal disposition that they share both with each other and with Luther, one that, at least in the estimation of one contemporary critic, is representative of twentieth-century literature more broadly: "The male voice of the last century has been the voice of the son, speaking to and about the father in tones of anger and regret, rebellion and longing, contempt, condemnation, guilt, fear, and, at times, love."[19] The accuracy of the position notwithstanding, we maintain that the *vox fililum* of Freud's and Kafka's writings has a religious, Lutheran, and even Christian prehistory. Across discursive registers do these three authors write from and identify with the perspective of the son; across first-and third-person narration—both of which utilized by Kafka and Freud alike—do they tell the story of the son's experience of and struggle with the father. The son acts and is acted upon, while who the father is seemingly and in actuality do not always correlate.

The figures and ambitions of the father-son relation may have changed between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, shifting from both God to parent and from man to son on the one hand, and from salvation to recognition on the other; but there is nevertheless a great deal of overlap with respect to the dominant elements of the representation. Freud and Kafka carry on

[19] Silke-Maria Weineck, *The Tragedy of Fatherhood: King Laius and the Politics of Paternity in the West* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1.

the Lutheran presumption that the situation of the son is marked by a cardinal *problem*, one due to the presence of a hidden father. The son's difficulties with this *pater absconditus*, furthermore, mirror those of their religious counterparts by a common linkage of sin, filial longing, and paternal law. For Freud and Kafka, the source of much of the intergenerational strife, and the son's emotional suffering that comes in its wake, consists in the inability to fulfill and remain in accordance with the father's law and authority. Formerly religious in character, the austere and onerous domestic law instituted by the father brings misunderstandings, mismeetings, and feelings of paternal absence in either the attempt to live up to it, or in the desire to deviate from it. Simply put, the son is trapped in a vicious circle wherein the imposition of the law creates an emotional distance ever deferring the possibility of communion and reconciliation, while the longing for the father's approval is simultaneously augmented and thwarted by a failure of compliance. To tragically top it all off, the son is powerless to resolve or transcend this predicament by his own efforts.

The congruity with Luther stops at this juncture, for Freud and Kafka show an unwillingness to grant the existence of a *pater revelatus* who could somehow initiate a lasting resolution to intergenerational conflict. Just as the modes of hiddenness vary across their writings, so too do the reasons for why the father can never stand in an *enduring* intimate communion with the son, is never present to him as a caring and understanding figure. Whether on account of insurmountable features intrinsic to the relation or a characterological incompatibility from the perspective of the son, emotional and psychological instability becomes characteristic of the filial situation. Eschewing the hopeful thrust of the Lutheran message, Freud and Kafka develop two attitudes toward the son corresponding to those of Luther toward the

father, namely, the impossibility of communion and the ineluctability of paternal overshadowing. That is to say, the son is never granted or guaranteed paternal approval based on the inability to fulfill the father's law, thus barring the possibility of a perpetual harmony and union between them; in consequence, the specter of the father insistently hovers over the son, who is unable to get him out of his mind, assert any independence from him, or conceive an identity apart from him.

Absent the optimistic prospect of a revealed father, an elevation in the status of the son is precluded. To be sure, Freud and Kafka conserve Luther's decision to tell the story of the son from the son's perspective, and to call the reader's attention to his unique plight; but this formal continuity does not extend to a conviction in the power or success of the son in his dealings with the father. The son must be judged a failure if he cannot secure recognition—for filial longing to be met by and rest in paternal grace—and if the goal of transcending sonship is frustrated by the overpowering figure of the father. We can now begin to see the religious and specifically anti-Christian ramifications of Freud's and Kafka's writings. Depicting both an irreparable intergenerational disunity and a *demotion* of the son implicitly challenges Luther's valorization of the Son in the process of justification, along with his insistence on the possibility of an abiding reconciliation between God and His children. That is, God and Son cannot harmoniously cooperate to grant salvation, nor can the son be purported to receive it. These prominent narrative features work to expose the internal shortcomings of the Lutheran schema, but they also have an inter-religious entailment as well. The failure of the son to escape from and stand outside his father's shadow ought to be understood as a retort to the supersessionist impulse, responding to Christianity's pretension of having replaced Judaism with the counter-portrayal of a persisting

father religion who obstinately stands over the son religion. The suspicious dimension of Freud's and Kafka's confrontation with Luther, therefore, is tantamount to an accusation of misrepresentation and a venture at redress: neither the Father nor the S/son(s) are who Luther claims (and wants) them to be.

Seasoned partners know that Cupid does not prescribe rosy-colored glasses—honest dispute, critical exchange, and even bursts of aggression are intrinsic to any serious and sustained erotic attachment. The arrow with which the god wounds his victims does not just symbolize the painful hunger for the inamorata's requital, but also provides an image reinforcing the age-old adage that you only hurt the ones you love. The juxtaposition of these rehearsals of father-son relations, with their rich palettes of emotional complexity, produces a meta-family romance in which Freud and Kafka betray a simultaneous attraction to and polemical repulsion from Luther's dual bequest of a language by which to paint the spiritual family, and of the combative anti-Judaism bound to it. Chapters Three and Four will show how Kafka and Freud, respectively, navigate this inheritance in their own way.

Only with a view towards Christianity and its Lutheran iteration is the full religious valence of Freud's and Kafka's oeuvre brought out of obscurity and into view, defined as much by what they embrace as much as what they reject. Chapters Three and Four proceed, first, with an exploration of their *historical* reflections on Judaism and Christianity, with an especial attention to the familial metaphors underpinning their critiques; this is followed by drawing the boundaries of a *hermeneutic* or *analytic* relation to Luther. What will emerge is that the explicit ambivalence Freud and Kafka demonstrate towards the two faith traditions is mirrored in their implicit suspicion and retrieval of Luther's construal of the theologico-domestic realm. Here the

overlaps and discrepancies with Luther in the representations of the father and of the son amount to "figural" identifications with Judaism and Christianity alike, insofar as those identifications are expressed through the characterization of particular *figures* (in themselves and in relation to one another) as well as connote *non-literal* forms and meanings of religious identity. Combining the image of a hidden father for whom the son longs with that of the son's failure to reach him borrows from a Christian framework at the same time as it denies total assent to its terms and conditions. Indeed, Freud's and Kafka's demotion of the son can be interpreted as a parry to the hostile anti-Jewish cultural frameworks within which they lived and wrote. Behind the *camera obscura* of secular literature, it could disguise a vestigial attachment to the faith of their fathers in spite or perhaps because of their immediate Catholic environments and, alongside it, a German cultural and intellectual milieu suffused with Luther's spirit and legacy.

Before delving into the ties of this unlikely trinity, we begin in Chapter One with a sketch of father-son relations across Western literary traditions, so as to identify Luther's, Freud's, and Kafka's positions within a longer history of representation.

CHAPTER 1-FATHERS AND SONS: A CROSS-TRADITIONAL GENEALOGY

"*Something arises in the world which all men have glimpsed in childhood,*
a place and a state in which no-one has yet been. And the name of this something is home."[1]

For all the significance of the figure of the father, the academic exploration of him and his role in the economy of the family is a relatively young sphere of interest. Perhaps to be expected, the study first arose in the discipline of Psychology, ever keen on examining the influence of the domestic zone in the formation of personality. In the preface to *Father and Child: Developmental and Clinical Perspectives* (1994), the editors intend the anthology to remember he who is bestowed the moniker of the "forgotten parent": "A decade ago the psychological literature contained few pieces on fathers and fathering…Since then, the focus on fatherhood has intensified, with a proliferation of research studies on the subject."[2] This awakening is corroborated by Michael Lamb, who, looking back on the twenty years since the first appearance of his edited anthology, *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (1976), reports "energetic and extensive research accompanied by thoughtful reconceptualization of fatherhood and father-child relationships."[3]

One such foray included in Lamb's volume is an essay by Henry Abramovitch, who begins by sketching the vicissitudes of the father in the twentieth-century psycho-imaginary. For Abramovitch's survey, both the decline of and succeeding preoccupation with the father must be understood against the backdrop of fluid gender roles, ideals, and expectations. Having

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[1] Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 44-45.

[2] John Munder Ross, Alan Gurwitt, and Stanley Cath, "Preface" to *Father and Child: Clinical and Developmental Perspectives*, ed. Stanley H. Cath, Alan Gurwitt, John Munder Ross (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), xvii.

[3] *The Role of The Father in Child Development*, vii.

challenged the stable and dominant image of masculinity—centered on the traits of strength, power, and decision—the feminist movement left men with a crisis of identity, compelling them to identify with images of either "hard"/abrasive or "soft"/gentle characters. With the writer-cum-guru Robert Bly as his authority, Abramovitch claims that underlying the effete tenderness of the soft male is "tremendous grief and anguish about the remoteness of their fathers."[4] The theme of paternal distance persisted through the subsequent attempt to "re-create" men in the aftermath of the feminist critique, that is, to reunify a splintered image of manhood by redeeming the best aspects of both its hard and soft halves. When this new conception of masculinity was accompanied by a renewed interest in the father, scholarly investigations tended to stress his physical and emotional absence on the one hand, and the son's yearning for reunion on the other: "The key element in all these empirical, mythological, comparative studies is the suffering of the abandoned son, yearning for a father who is loving and emotionally available and who is able to initiate his son into the world of the mature masculine, the realm of 'true men.'"[5] With the underlying issue brought into relief, others could trace the variety of social and psychological dysfunctions such neglect could bring about.

Not before long did the reawakening of interest in the father carry over into the humanities and the cultural sciences; and with this transplantation came alternative stories about the reasons for its emergence, as well as the aims towards which such a pursuit should be directed. The literary critic Toni Tholen, for example, also acknowledges a "new search for the father," along with the central place that the theme of father-son relations occupies in men's

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[4] Abramovitch, "Images of the 'Father,'" 20.

[5] Ibid., 21.

studies—at the time of his essay's publication a growing field of study in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany.[6] While Abramovitch explains the appearance as bound up with gender troubles, Tholen presents a more overdetermined reconstruction. He, too, refers to the impact of the feminist movement and its efforts to rethink the category of masculinity, but also cites two other trends. First, the importance of the family and of the father in particular have grown in inverse proportion to the erosion of voluntary associations such as political parties, unions, and religious organizations. The demand exacted on the family to provide those intangible treasures that can no longer be found in the world outside the home—trust, intimacy, warmth, and community—has altogether disconfirmed the oft-conjured thesis of the "disappearance of the father," thought to be an inevitable consequence of the transformations that industrialization exerted on the traditional concept of paternity. The second trend is that psycho-cultural process known in Germany as *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*, incipiently surfacing with the student movement of 1968 and continuing into the 2000s. For Tholen, coming to terms with the past was tantamount to a confrontation with the father, as it forced activist members of Generation X to work through the deeds and misdeeds of its forebearers. The inability to communicate [*Die mangelnde Mitteilungsfahigkeit*] typical of the baby boomer father could only compound the intergenerational fissure and trouble the historical reckoning.[7]

Yet we should not overlook two important similarities despite the differences in orientation, historical narrative, and aim between these accounts of the reappearance of the

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[6] Toni Tholen, "Vater-und-Sohn Verhältnisse in der Literatur der Moderne: Von Goethe bis zur Gegenwart," *Weimarer Beiträge: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft, Ästhetik und Kulturwissenschaften* 48 (2002): 326-327.

[7] Ibid., 341.

father, for Abramovitch and Tholen share the basic awareness of the centrality of the father in the son's life. At the beginning and end of his article Abramovitch iterates the idea that reconciliation with the father is "one of the fundamental projects in a person's life."[8] Similarly, Tholen writes that "father figures and images are always present and decisive for the identity formation of sons."[9] Furthermore, both writers convey an optimism that intergenerational reconciliation is indeed possible. Abramovitch draws on contemporary psychological research to sketch a typology of the "good enough father," one who manages to achieve a golden mean between authority and intimacy vis-à-vis his children. Tholen's concluding tone is more prospective than realized, more normative than descriptive. For him, the combined force of the feminist movement and the *Studentenbewegung* represent a unique opportunity to redefine both paternity and father-son relations, which hitherto remains a site of intensely ambivalent affects. In their hopefulness for the repair of that which is radically fractured, his last lines portray an uncompounded reconciliation of messianic scope: "This state of affairs harbors the possibility of directing the longing search for a different father and childhood towards a relation in which the older and younger meet [*Entgegenkommen*] in mutual loving care."[10]

Second, Abramovitch and Tholen may be guided by different theoretical architectures, with the former inclining towards Carl Jung and the latter selectively utilizing Jacques Lacan's concept of the "symbolic order" as a heuristic; but both analyses unexpectedly turn to the

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[8] Abramovitch, "Images of the 'Father,'" 32.

[9] Ibid., 327.

[10] "Dieser Zustand birgt… die Möglichkeit, die Sehnsucht auf die Suche nach einem anderen Vater-und Kindsein zu richten, auf ein Verhältnis, in dem sich…der Ältere und der Jüngere entgegenkommen, in liebender Sorge des einen für den anderen" (Tholen, "Vater-und-Sohn Verhältnisse," 342). All German translations are my own.

Western *literary* tradition in order to illustrate the perennial problematics, potential and actual, inherent in the father-son relationship. As the title of his essay indicates, Tholen's literary genealogy is chronologically and nationally limited to the modern German lineage from Goethe onward, but the findings of this circumscription lead him to articulate what is redolent of a universally binding assertion: "That the paternal spirit is, so to speak, always ahead in front of the son—this seemingly inevitable biological and spiritual asymmetry has consequences for the self-understanding and conduct of the son."[11] With his predilection for Jung, on the other hand, Abramovitch presents a series of archetypal images of the father borrowed from the three classical tributaries of Western literature: the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible (viz., the four Gospels and Pauline Epistles), and the Homeric epics—all of which are literary artifacts *per se*, but are at the same time fundamentally "religious" insofar as they relate the words and actions of divine beings.

In what immediately follows I will synthesize as much as build on these preliminary contributions. An adequate genealogy of Western literary portrayals of father-son relations, and of the images that emerge in and through their encounter, first requires a greater representative sample, enough that a *narrative* identifying continuities and discontinuities, corrections and rejections, across space, time, and sensibility, can come into view. Moreover, such an augmented reconstruction of this canon must integrate the archetype *and* its refigurations, the religious and the (strictly) literary, the classical and the modern. In turn, we can fully lay bare what Abramovitch only at certain moments intimates, and which is central to the tectonics of this

[11] "Daß der väterliche Geist gleichsam immer schon da ist, dem Sohn stets voraus—diese scheinbar unumgängliche biologische wie geistige Asymmetrie hat Folgen für das Selbstverständnis und Handeln des Sohnes" (Ibid., 328).

project: that in this literary history there is a spiritual, heavenly Father beside the biological, earthly father, and along with Christ the Son there is a son who, depending on the context, connotes either a domestic or religious figure. It should be said at the outset that these four entities do not always appear in tandem, but they are no doubt separate and oftentimes intersecting—an assumption that will be reflected in the alternations in capitalization in and beyond this chapter.

Out of the imbricated streams of this dilated story four related claims will be advanced: the unoriginal proposition that the absent father is the standard paradigm of the Hebrew Bible, distilled in the story of the "Binding of Isaac"; the more original proposition that the advance of the Christian Bible over its precursor consists in its correction of and resolution to the unsettled problem of father-son relations inherited from the Hebrew; the unoriginal proposition that the narrative synecdoche of this redress, the parable of the "Prodigal Son," is an archetypal image of reconciliation in both its domestic and religious variations, one that echoes throughout the parable's subsequent theological and fictional reconfigurations; and the more original proposition that such visions of biological harmony become the exception rather than the rule in modern literature.

I. Bad Dads?

Is it possible to outline a history of the progress of Western religion through an analysis of its evolving representations of father-son/Father-son relations? The invocation of development in religion might evoke the second half of Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* (1917), but I am not concerned with tracing the historical refinement of the numinous consciousness as it more

adequately indexes both the rational/moral and non-rational components of the deity.[12] Assuming the *reactive* quality of the Christian scriptures to the Hebrew, our interest instead lies with determining what it means to be a father and a son in each corpus, and, by zeroing in on certain archetypal moments, follow how the figuration of their relationship changes across the testaments. If there is development, I do not aim to validate it but to call attention to the profession of it.

Crucial to what follows is the fact that the depiction of deities always relies on anthropomorphic analogization; and, as Paul Ricœur formulates the dependence of mythic narrative on symbolism, "*the most primitive and least mythical language is already a symbolic language*."[13] Through their triumphs and tribulations the early Hebrews encountered the divine presence, however much the certitude of the experience was matched only by its capacity to evade a reduction to conceptual categories. In order to become intelligible, the unfamiliarity of the reality of God had to be translated into a familiar framework of understanding. Émile Durkheim alludes to this endeavor when discussing the emotional import of a country's flag: "For we are unable to consider an abstract entity, which we can represent only laboriously and confusedly, the source of the strong sentiments which we feel. We cannot explain them to ourselves except by connecting them to some concrete object of whose reality we are vividly

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[12] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* trans. John Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 109-111. For Otto, Protestant Christianity is the final and most complete instantiation of this unity.

[13] Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 9. [Author's italics.]

aware…"[14] Although there is certainly maternal imagery in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isa. 46:3; Isa. 66:13), the most frequent and, for them, fitting metaphor by which the Israelites communicated (and consecrated) their experience of their God was by recourse to the experience of the father:

> Ex. 4:22-23—Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son [בְּנִי בְכֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל]. I said to you, "Let my son go that he may worship me."
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> Jer. 31:9—With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel [כִּי־הָיִיתִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָב], and Ephraim is my firstborn.
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> Jer. 31:20—Is Ephraim my dear son [הֲבֵן־יָקִיר לִי]? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord.
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> Hos. 11:1—When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son [קָרָאתִי לִבְנִי].[15]

It is not merely the case that the figuration of God's relationship to His chosen people is modeled on that of a father to his son; the Hebrew Bible actually presents complementary paternal characters, that is, a father and a deity with overlapping features. In pointing out this parallel we intend to revise the stereotypical predication of the Jewish God as angry or jealous—at its most benign, a handy contrast to the merciful God of Christianity; at its most noxious, a convenient weapon of anti-Judaism.[16] It is a simplification that still resonates; as late as 2006 could John Updike write in his novel about the Jewish God who has never "been big on promises," and

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[14] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1915), 251. Here Ricœur is aligned with Durkheim. Both are thinking through the process of cultural concretization, even if the latter is concerned with the conversion of abstraction into symbol, and the former with that of experience into language, itself a special case of externalization.

[15] *The HarperCollins Study Bible, Revised Edition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006) / *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

[16] Portia's plea to Shylock in 4.1 of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is one instance wherein the benign and the noxious forms may be said to meet: "Therefore, Jew, / Though justice be thy plea, consider this, / That, in the course of justice, none of us / Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy; / And that same prayer doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy" (ln. 195-200). For the sixteenth-century English background to the play, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2014), 269-299.

about the lack of fulfillment offered by "a lifetime of drudging loyalty to the tyrant…"[17] The biblical Father's anger is only half of the story, for what the prophetic writings tend to testify to is, rather, a Janus-faced deity, one whose oscillates between compassion and rage:

> Isa. 63:15-16—Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The yearning of your heart and your compassion? They are withheld from me. For you are our father [כִּֽי־אַתָּ֥ה אָבִ֖ינוּ], though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father [אַתָּ֤ה יְהוָה֙ אָבִ֔ינוּ], our Redeemer from old is your name.
>
> Jer. 3:4-5—Have you not just now called to me, "My Father, you are the friend of my youth [אָבִ֥י אַלּ֖וּף נְעוּרַ֑י]—will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?"
>
> Jer. 3:19—I thought how I would set you among my children, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage of all the nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, [אָבִ֣י תִקְרָ֔אִי לִ֑י] and would not turn from following me.
>
> Ps. 103:13—As a father has compassion for his children [כְּרַחֵ֣ם אָ֭ב עַל־בָּנִ֑ים], so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

These verses signal that, in addition to his theological and moral struggle with the Hebrews for the soul of the nation, the prophet is also charged with ascertaining the nature of the deity in essence and in manifestation. Whether they speak on behalf of or in place of Him, the verses quoted above revolve around the attempt to solve whether God is inherently merciful *behind* the appearance of wrath (Ps. 103:13), or whether compassion and anger are coessential attributes (Jer. 3:4-5). The *navi* may want to name mercy the essence and anger the accident, and to construe the Fatherhood of God as grounded on His status as a national protector/savior alone; but both of these dispositions undeniably belong to His makeup.

Such a theological dilemma, furthermore, is exacerbated by the awareness across these

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[17] John Updike, *Terrorist* (New York: Random House, 2006), 24, cited in Eric Ziolkowski, "Aqedah, VI. Literature," in *EBR* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 2:551.

passages of the influence of human conduct upon the divine visage.[18] That is to say, the temper the Father shows his sons is modulated by (although not entirely beholden to) the comportment they show Him. We are not referring here to the urchin, the type of the wayward or rebellious child that occasionally surfaces in the Hebrew canon (e.g., Deut. 21:18-21; Isa. 3:4; 2 Kgs. 2:23-24), but to the *brit* that purportedly exists between Father and son (Ex. 19:5, 34:28). The Mosaic covenant is nothing less than a standard of behavior—the observation or neglect of which entails a basic alteration in the divine demeanor, and, in turn, in the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Whether or not God is essentially one thing or another, the kind of face he puts on for His people depends on their adherence to His law.[19] The rift in the divine character both presupposes and effects a rift in the relationship to his people, expressing itself in everything from mere disapproval through foreign invasion to exile.

The *brit* may constitute the contractual bond between Father and son, but its perpetuation and handing down is a process that occurs between father and son (Deut. 6:6-7, 20-25; 31:12-13; 32:46). A spiritual inheritance is conveyed through biological partners in the domestic sphere; as David Kraemer writes, "The centrality of childhood and children to Judaism obtained forever in the Bible's covenantal system, one that, from the very beginning, commanded the transmission of the covenantal promise, father to child, for all generations."[20] Having no law of his own, the

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[18] The contingent character of the deity crops up in the Apocryphal writings as well. See for example Tob. 13:4-5 ("He has shown you his greatness even there. Exalt him in the presence of every living being, because he is our Lord and he is our God; he is our Father and he is God forever. He will afflict you for your iniquities, but he will again show mercy on all of you").

[19] That the traditional curriculum for Jewish pupils began with the book of Leviticus confirms the primary importance of the divine law, particularly in the formation of children (Tali Berner, "Child/ Children, B. Medieval Judaism," in *EBR* [Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012], 5:90-91).

[20] David Kraemer, "Child/Children, A. Rabbinic Judaism," in *EBR*, 5:87.

father initiates his child into God's Way, and in so doing not only mystically links the generations to one another, but also establishes a legal troika of Father, father, and son. The nexus of this Jewish trinity is found in the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 5:16), which mandates on divine authority to honor one's father and mother. The covenant, in other words, includes the stipulation that respect is owed to one's parents, which is at the same time a respect for God.[21] The intention behind the prescription is not laid bare; but we can surmise that it effects to promote intergenerational accord, if not to provide parents with compensation for the responsibility of passing on the *brit*, and children with an outlet through which to channel their gratitude for receiving it.

Critical to a proper grasp of the precept is the recognition that the honor is unilateral. Parents are called upon to bear the burden of discipline and instruction (Prov. 19:18, 22:6), but they are not under an obligation to establish rapport with or cultivate amicable feelings in their children. Overwhelmingly do biblical parents exploit this exemption, demonstrating that they lie under no compulsion to meet filial piety with a corresponding unqualified regard. Indeed, the injunction to deference regardless of parental bearing seems ironic and unjust in light of the fact that there are, as Bly puts it, "very few [good fathers] in the Old Testament…Abraham…was perfectly willing to sacrifice Isaac; and…Jacob was good to Joseph, but apparently not to his other eleven sons, and he certainly didn't protect Joseph from his brothers' rage."[22] Part of what makes these fathers bad, as the examples in these lines suggest, is their "tendency to select a

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[21] As Abramovitch points out, the Fifth Commandment is the only one of the ten to mention the explicit promise of a reward ("Images of the 'Father,'" 30).

[22] Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1990), 120-121, cited in Eric Ziolkowski, "Father, Fathers, Fatherhood, VII. Literature," in *EBR* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter), 8:969.

'chosen son,'" which necessarily "implies a rejected child. Each rejection is itself a source of abandonment, resentment, frustration, and possibly aggression."[23] Therefore, as seamless as the domestic conveyance of the spiritual inheritance may be presented, we must not forget that transmission of the covenant does not encompass their relationship. Although an important one, the *brit* is but one aspect of it, and the character of the person engaged in the act of *traditio* cannot but compromise and color the *traditum* for the one to whom it is given. The father can be absent to the son even if he carries out his religious duty.

The meaning of the "covenant" in which father and son participate varies according to the book of the Torah in which the term is located. Even if our view is restricted to Genesis, the trial facing the father is the same: it is not to resolve any outstanding relational conflict between generations, but to plant his biological progeny in a spiritual lineage. As Abramovitch phrases it in his discussion of the two patterns of succession, "The Hebrew tradition starting with Abraham…yearned to combine genealogical [inheritance by birthright] and charismatic [inheritance by selection] succession…Abraham…wished that *his* son would inherit *his* God, so that his son could say 'my God' is 'God of my fathers.'"[24] For Abramovitch, this paternal challenge of yoking the trinity reaches both its climax as well as its resolution in the narrative of the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:1-19). The proceeding reading will underline that, on the contrary, this story signifies the diremption of the biological and the spiritual, and *dramatizes* the problem of both the figure of the father and of father-son relations that is the distinctive legacy of the Hebrew Bible. In other words, if Isaac is successfully initiated into a

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[23] Abramovitch, "Images of the 'Father,'" 28.

[24] Ibid., 25. [Author's italics.]

spiritual community oriented towards the Father, it is at the expense of an unsettled domestic problem with his father.

If the legal nexus of the Father—father—son triad is established in the Decalogue, then Genesis 22 is its narrative correlative. More specifically, it is in the Akedah that the characterological paradigm Janus-faced Father—bad father—conditional son receives its clearest expression. God's dual aspect emerges in two different respects: first, consonant with the later prophetic corpus, His approval is contingent on the fulfillment of the command He imposes on His son Abraham, whether it be to bind (v. 2) or to *un*bind (v. 12) Isaac. The Father's satisfaction upon Abraham's compliance with the order to refrain from proceeding with the sacrifice is communicated by the promise of future prosperity (v. 17-18). Yet, as the contrasting directives suggest, divine bisection here assumes an additional form, one unlike either His *regret* over both the creation of man (Gen. 6:6) and his subsequent decreation (Gen. 8:21), or His capacity to be *persuaded* (Gen. 18:16-33). Whereas the former indicates coming to realize the mistake in pursuing a course of action, and the latter implies standing at a crossroads between two possible options, the divine stance in the Akedah episode is one of *ambivalence*, of committing to one

course, and then rescinding it for the sake of its opposite.[25] Abraham, meanwhile, finds himself occupying two contradictory roles, subject to two different assessments, and inaugurating two divergent fates: he is a dutiful son vis-à-vis God, yet a barbaric father vis-à-vis Isaac; he is the exemplar of religious faith as well as the model of paternal cruelty; and for his (in)action he is rewarded, becoming the metaphorical father of a people at the moment he decides to murder his literal son. As for Isaac, his trial as a son is unique—nay, interminable—not because paternal approbation hinges on his conformity to Abraham's rule, but because conformity entails his own suffering. In other words, Isaac's drive for recognition by his father comes at the cost of his father's mis-recognition of him.

With very few exceptions before the eighteenth century, readers of the Akedah sought to veil, obscure, and even justify the *horror domesticis* at the heart of the narrative.[26] What Freud says of the Bible itself applies as well to its profuse reception: "[t]he distortion of a text

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[25] In Genesis 22 God changes His mind—however much more pious interpreters find such a thesis untenable on account of its heretical implications. Against the skeptical accusation of divine inconsistency did Sa'adia Gaon assert God's unitary intention, even if he conceded that the initial command was indeed ambiguous. Joseph ibn Kaspi, a fourteenth-century Provençal thinker, argues that the change in God's name over the course of the story, that is, from אלוהים who commands the sacrifice to יהוה who cancels it, reflects Abraham's greater understanding of the divine will. In a similar vein, Maimonides constructs a hierarchy of prophetic insight in order to show that the command to bind is a lower and thus less discerning revelation than the one to unbind (Aaron Koller, *Unbinding Isaac: The Significance of the Akedah for Modern Jewish Thought* [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2020], 127-140). Subtending these readings are theological commitments both to the idea of an unchanging deity, but also to one who ultimately affirms the dignity of human life. Koller's book continues this medieval tradition, claiming that "God wants child sacrifice, as an expression of love and commitment. But God *more* does not want it, as a reflection of a higher value…" (Koller, 140). [Author's italics.] Behind these theological motivations, however, there is no obvious *textual* reason to support this partial—full model of divine intentionality, one which has roots in the Mishnah (Taanit 2:4, cited in Louis Jacobs, "The Problem of the Akedah in Jewish Thought," in *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals*, ed. Robert Perkins [Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981], 2). Across the divine names and the antithetical orders the blueprint of divine-human interaction is the same: God orders and Abraham obliges, without any trace of progressive revelation (on the part of the former) or moral intuition (on the part of the latter).

[26] I have adapted this term from Søren Kierkegaard, who speaks of a formidable sensation of *horror religiosus* with which one regards the knight of faith in contradistinction to the tragic hero (*Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay [New York: Penguin, 2003], 90).

resembles a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but in getting rid of its traces."[27] Whereas Freud likened *Entstellung* to homicide as a means of anticipating his argument that contortion in fact conceals the murder of Moses, the interpretive tradition of the "Binding of Isaac" distorts to the extent that it covers up his abandonment by his own father.

The effacing disguises proffered across the premodern and modern eras stretch the limits of the exegetical imagination: Abraham as the exemplar of faith (Philo, Abarbanel, Isaac Arama, Jas. 2:21-24); the valorization of Abraham's faith in the absurd (Augustine, echoing Tertullian's *Credo quia absurdum*); the postulation of "Another Abraham" who either stays at home or is uncertain of authenticity of the divine calling (Kafka); the *apologia* for the teleological suspension of the ethical (Kierkegaard, Hatam Sofer, J. Soloveitchik, Malbim, Yeshayahu Leibowitz); the total obliteration of the human will as a spiritual ideal (the Hasidim); that it is really Abraham who sacrifices himself (Soloveitchik); the ambiguity in the primary divine command (Sa'adiah Gaon, Abarbanel); the change in divine appellation as the reflection of greater prophetic perception (ibn Kaspi); the unbinding as the intuition of a higher revelation (Maimonides); the episode as a purely intra-psychological affair (James Diamond); the imposing assertion that Isaac knows the plan before its enactment (*Bereshit Rabbah* §56:3-4); the kindred assertion that Isaac is all-too willing to offer himself (Josephus, Pseudo-Philo, Hatam Sofer);[28] that the binding is, despite appearances to the contrary, an expression of paternal love (*Bereshit Rabbah* §55:8, Malbim); that God never intended Abraham to kill Isaac (Tractate Taanit 4a,

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[27] Freud, *MM,* in *SE* XXIII:43 / *Der Mann Moses*, in *GW* XVI:143.

[28] Isaac as the willing son reverberates through the Corpus Christi plays from medieval England. In order for Isaac to typologically prefigure Christ and His Atonement, as he often does in the mysteries, he must voluntarily and without either coercion or ignorance accept his fate (Ziolkowski, "Aqedah," 545-546).

Nachmanides); that Abraham is, to be sure, torn between his love of God and of Isaac (anonymous Byzantine-era poem in Aramaic); and that Abraham turned his willingness to sacrifice Isaac into a source of merit for future generations (*Midrash Tanhuma* 46, *Targum Neofiti*).[29] Readers should resist the peculiar seduction of commentary, the illusion it fosters of both preexisting in its host text, and of conclusively answering the latter's eternally lingering surface dilemmas. Any reading of the Akedah, even if theologically salutary, that does not culminate with the *katharsis* of the emotions of revulsion toward the father, dubiousness toward the Father, and pity toward the son effectively endorses the erasure of Isaac's personhood. That the story ends without Isaac's literal slaughter is besides the point. Abraham's ascent to Mount

[29] Koller, *Unbinding Isaac*, *passim*; Edward Kessler, "Aqedah, II. Judaism, A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism," and "B. Rabbinic Judaism," in *EBR*, 2:528-531, *passim*; Alexander Even-Chen, "Aqedah, II. Judaism, C. Medieval Judaism: History of Interpretation," in *EBR*, 2: 531-536, *passim*.

Moriah resembles a murder in its psychological and emotional negation of the son, and the preponderant strand of the reception history resembles a murder by excusing it.[30]

In the effort to sort through the long and inter-traditional reception history of the Akedah, the typologically minded have identified two cross-cutting exegetical trends: a non-moral interpretation that views Abraham's response to the curious divine demand as a paragon of religiosity, and a moral interpretation that focuses on the ultimate withdrawal of the command. While the scriptural sense to which these options are primarily attached may differ, they both privilege one character and one part of the narrative. That is to say, whereas the non-moral

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[30] Koller does mention several premodern instances of rebuke that are, interestingly, outside the exegetical tradition properly speaking. There are the *piyyutim* [liturgical poems] of Elazar be-Rabbi Qillir ("The young man with whom you graced him when his strength was spent / he bound on the wood of the altar… / He forgot how a father is supposed to have mercy on a son / a prayer or plea he should have offered.") and Rabbi Levi ben Gershon ("He stretched out his arm like a cruel person, to murder"; he should have beseeched you, to ask for mercy / to spare his only child from a fire of coal"; he did not pity but you pitied, full of mercy…" [*Unbinding Isaac*, 17]). The most famous example in the visual arts is Caravaggio's *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (1603, Uffizi Gallery, Florence), in stark contrast with his untitled painting from the previous year that depicts Isaac smiling and embracing his ovine substitute (Musei Capitolini, Rome).

But it is not until the Enlightenment that a critical reading of the Akedah, freed from the hermeneutical commitment to pious didacticism, is unleashed. Kant inaugurates this tradition in *The Conflict of The Faculties* §7:63 and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* §6:187, interrogating the authenticity of the divine voice and denying that a "divine directive can ever make right an action that would be wrong in the absence of God's involvement" (Ziolkowski, "Aqedah," 548).

The recasting of Abraham in a negative light that began in late eighteenth-century philosophy passed over into twentieth-century poetry and literature. Indeed, the Akedah lent writers a mythic paradigm for thinking through the various catastrophes of the period, which facilitated the tendency to identify and sympathize with the filial sacrificial victim over against the savage father. Else Lasker-Schüler's "Abraham und Isaak" (1914) faults the titular father for a misdirected love, while Wilfred Owen's "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" (1918) uses Abraham as a synecdoche for World War I Europe, sacrificing half of the continent's children in order to maintain its (jingoistic) pride (Ziolkowski, "Aqedah," 549-550).

The cataclysms of the Shoah and Israel's successive wars for survival provoked similar sentiments among Hebrew writers. For Haim Gouri's poem "Inheritance" (1960), the Holocaust attests to the knife irremovably lodged into the hearts of Isaac's descendants. The shift in perspective towards the Akedah in the Israeli imaginary is encapsulated in Adam Baruch's poem "Akedah: Afterword" (2002): "Several dates about the Akedah: / Until '73 the hero of the Akedah was Abraham (the parents). / Since '73 the hero of the Akedah is Isaac (the sons)." That Isaac's binding offered a familiar albeit evocative framework to lament the suffering war inflicts is documented in the work of S. Yizhar's *Days of Ziklag* (1958); Menachem Heyd's "Isaac Went to Mount Moriah" (1976); Aliza Shenhar's "Akedah"; Yitzhak Laor's "This Idiot Isaac"; and Aharon Megged's short story from 1985, "The Name" (Ziolkowski, "Aqedah," 551-553; Koller, *Unbinding Isaac*, 25-28).

reading stresses the original commandment to bind and Abraham's commendable readiness to fulfill it, the moral stresses the climax during which God reveals his ethical core by ordering Abraham to retreat.[31] Yet despite their contradictory leanings these two trends both presuppose the episode's educational purpose, which the activity of exegesis aims to uncover. This is especially the case with the "happy ending" strand, which discerns an edifying lesson in the *Angelus ex machina* and his prohibitive intervention. However, there is a twofold hermeneutical issue with this conflict of interpretations and the binaries (God—Abraham; beginning—ending; First Commandment—Second Commandment; ethics—faith) that buttress it. The first is the shared conflation of narrative with *kerygma*, of myth with homily. Stories may address ethical teachings or quandaries but are not in themselves ethical discourses, with an intended message to be evinced. Put differently, myths are disclosive without being didactic.[32] For instance, one might say that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) opens the reader's eyes to the creativity of man in constructing meaningful frameworks in the face of suffering, and that Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878) exposes the susceptibility of erotic relationships to failure, but he would be at a loss to articulate what pedagogues often refer to as the "takeaway" of these fictions.[33] The second problem is the ironic fact that these ethical and spiritual interpretations edify the reader *at the*

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[31] James A. Grady, "Aqedah, II. Judaism, E. Modern Judaism," *The Encyclopedia of The Bible and Its Reception*, 2:538; Jacobs, "The Problem of the Akedah," 1-2. Jacobs also cites the readings of Ernst Simon and W. Gunther Plaut, which creatively propose a third way that attempts to reconcile these two positions (7-8).

[32] For one classic rendering of the disclosive function of myth, see Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1963), ch. 1.

[33] Both Jacobs and Koller work within a religious—ethical either/or logic. Koller's book not only falls squarely on the side of the moral tradition, but turns out to be an endeavor of constructive biblical theology in its stated intention to render the story "ethically defensible" (xxxii), its presumption of the Hebrew Bible's "ethical" nature (110), and its declaration of the "normative value" (139) of God's second command over against the first.

expense of Isaac, furthering the former's religious formation even as they tolerate the latter's torment at the hands of his father and Father. In other words, to assert the import of the episode for the life of either piety or morality because it ends with Isaac's deliverance nevertheless denies the reality of his traumatic ordeal, mirroring or continuing the father's absence.[34]

One way to transcend this binary framework, and, in turn, to escape the reinscription of Isaac's anguish, is to approach the episode through a literary-psychological lens. To be sure, this method does not altogether avoid reading *into* the text—difficult to resist under any discursive circumstances but rendered virtually impossible given a biblical literary style that the comparatist Erich Auerbach labels as "fraught with background."[35] Yet in lieu of excavating some religious insight, it attunes and delimits the reader to the sentimental dimension of the narrative, and to the relational framework within which emotions may be said to operate, lie dormant, or remain unexpressed. Instead of hurrying to "fill in" and "fill out" an unembellished tale of *parricida interruptus* with finalizing morals—just as Abraham rushes to fulfill God's will—it encourages the reader to cling to his shock, to hesitate, to linger with the problem that the story poses, to remain silent.[36] Furthermore, in highlighting the violation of Isaac, irrespective of his ultimate rescue, we broaden onto an emotional and relational plane Auerbach's attention to a silence both literal and as metaphor for stylistic sparseness. His analysis is justifiably restricted to the ascent

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[34] Sensitivity to Isaac's plight is heightened by the aggadic tradition that Isaac is in fact sacrificed. This lore first appears in Tractate Z'vachim 62a, mentioned and rejected *en passant* by ibn Ezra, yet enshrined in a poem from the twelfth century by Rabbi Ephraim ben Jacob of Bonn (Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint* [New York: Oxford, 1991], 16-24); Barry Dov Walfish, "Aqedah, II. Judaism, D. Medieval Judaism: Martyrology and Liturgy," in *EBR*, 2:537. The prooftext is v. 19, wherein no mention is made of Isaac descending the mountain.

[35] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 12.

[36] Ziolkowski, "Aqedah," 544.

and the incident atop the summit, but a glance towards their aftermath will hint at just how deep this motif stretches. After the Moriah affair the Hebrew Bible records no subsequent conversation between Abraham and Isaac. That the Akedah had forever altered their relationship is proposed by Abarbanel's gloss on Gen. 23:2, extrapolating that Abraham went alone, without Isaac, to mourn the death of his wife Sarah in Hebron.[37] The literal silence between father and son also connotes their irreparable rupture, stemming from the silencing of the son on the mountain, from being overshadowed and mistreated by the father.

The narrative concludes with the intergenerational inability to speak, *Die mangelnde Mitteilungsfahigkeit*; yet from the plot and its denouement thematic implications relevant to the present investigation can also be abstracted. First, v. 2 ("Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love") foreshadows two related and recurring characteristics of Hebrew scriptural consciousness: the formation of identity as intimately tied to and bound up with the father, especially with the abidance of a wounding experience; and the centrality of the father figure across subplots.[38] That the Akedah is *Abraham's* "test" (v. 1) is one datum bolstering an obvious meta-narrative of the Hebrew Bible, namely, the adventure of fatherhood, whether literal (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), socio-political (Moses, David), or onto-theological (God). Concomitantly, Leslie Fiedler speaks of the Testament's "willful, to us almost perverse, resolve not to exploit the possibilities of the child, even in stories which demand for him a central

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[37] Isaac Abarbanel, *Commentary on the Torah* (Jerusalem: Bene Arba'el, 1964), §1.277, cited in Koller, *Unbinding Isaac*, 49.

[38] For the stamping of biblical psychology as "father centered" see Abramovitch, "Images of the 'Father,'" 25.

role."[39] Second, the grammar of biblical narrative envisions the subsumption of the father-son relationship under the *brit* and the task of its transmission, but what transpires after the Akedah underscores, on the contrary, that a relational complex may be said to exist outside of a law that can impinge upon and threaten it. The divine—paternal covenant presumes and purposes to bind the generations, but Isaac's literal binding by an alliance of father and Father is probative precisely of its capacity to rift them. Third, motivation and action both point not simply to the separation of the biological from the religious realm, but to the elevation of the latter over the former. In a slight swerve from the dominant biblical pattern, Abraham's choice of Isaac (to be slaughtered) is simultaneously an abandonment, so to speak binding himself to the law of the Father rather than to the life of his son.[40] God may have launched this sadistic act, but His rescue reassures Isaac of a merciful Father who stands above the cruel father. Therefore, the father's intention and the Father's action together point towards the ultimacy of a supernatural—domestic family over against its natural emanation.

The integration into the spiritual family of Father and son can thus compromise the accord of father and son. But as we know the Father is also two-faced, holding out a law that throws His sons into the whirlwind of approval and disappointment. Lasting reconciliation between the asymmetrical dyads of the trinity seems out of reach; for Malachi, the *Entgegenkommen* between father and son about which Tholen fantasies is deferred to the messianic era:

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[39] Leslie Fiedler, "The Eye of Innocence: Some Notes on the Role of the Child in Literature," in *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*, vol. 1 (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), 472, cited in Eric Ziolkowski, "Child, Children, VI. Literature," in *EBR*, 5:97.

[40] In subjecting Isaac to the ordeal and sacrificing his emotional integrity, God may also be seen as choosing one son (Abraham) over another (Isaac).

וְהֵשִׁיב לֵב־אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְלֵב בָּנִים עַל־אֲבוֹתָם פֶּן־אָבֹוא וְהִכֵּיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ חֵרֶם׃
He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse. (4:6)

The national restoration is thus at the same time a reunion of Father with son, of father with son.

II. Typology as Redress

The Hebrew Bible thus leaves us with an aporia plaguing domestic dynamics, in their biological (father—son) and spiritual (Father—son) iterations discretely as well as in their interaction. Devised by the Father yet executed by the father, Isaac's entrance into the divine family brought him to the brink of death before he was spared by God. Indeed, across the Pentateuchal and prophetic testimonies paternal wrath and compassion move along an unpredictable pendulum onto which sons are precariously cast. The Father's determination to inflict pain on His sons, combined with their inevitable lapses into sinful behavior, guarantee the existence of a puncture deflating the possibility of an abiding concord between them. Unsurprisingly, therefore, did survivors of the long history of Jewish persecution not only recursively turn to the Akedah as an archetypal "paradigm and leitmotiv" through which to see, understand, and cope with their agonizing situation;[41] through the haze of suffering they were also repeatedly compelled to ask, in the vein of an anonymous prisoner in Elie Wiesel's *Night*, "Where is merciful God, where is he?"[42] As he gazed upon a child hanging from the camp's gallows, he most likely was summoning the God of the Hebrews, expressing the disjunction between the hopeful expectation of pathetic intervention and the disappointing reality of indifferent absence. If this unnamed

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[41] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 38.

[42] Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 64), cited in Ziolkowski, "Child, Children," 5:101.

victim did not know that mercy was but one aspect of the divine character, admixed unsettlingly with ineradicable anger, the specter of systematic extermination was there to remind him.

The textual prism to which Jewish martyrdom referred and conformed is in general derived from the Hebrew Scriptures, but it is the Christian Bible that proclaims an answer to the prisoner's vexing question about the terms of the contract governing divine-human affairs. Simultaneously drawing on and swerving from the Tanakh, the Gospels and Epistles try to reduce the price of admission into the family of God, and to heal the embittered conflict between the generations. It does so by radically recasting the demeanor of fathers away from cruelty and towards compassion, and by elevating sons from their former status of silent captives to paternal whims. In the predication of not simply a responsive but a *restorative* impulse of the Christian Scriptures, we are indebted to the construal of a "figural" connection between the two testaments wherein the older anticipates and is completed by the newer. Underneath the various metaphors used over the centuries to denote the nature of their relation (e.g., concealed—revealed, promise—fulfillment, carnal—spiritual, *signum—res*, image—reality) is the shared contention that the belated testament builds upon and improves its precursor.[43] Yet our preoccupation with the novelty of the New Testament is less its ascription of perfection or fulfillment vis-à-vis its predecessor, and even less its announcement of the "good news" of salvation, than its *emendation* of the images of both F/fathers and S/sons, its pretension of having repaired and resolved the relation between them.

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[43] Jill Robbins, *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1-10. Although it is Paul, not Augustine, who arguably invents the idea of figural interpretation, Robbins shows that the bishop of Hippo is one of its most vehement spokesmen, utilizing these binaries interchangeably throughout his writings.

The articulation of a corrective aspect to the newer testament is founded on the notice of discrepancies as well as figural links. The majority of the 810 occurrences of the word "father" in the Hebrew Bible refer to a biological entity.[44] By contrast, it appears on 343 occasions in the Christian, but the use of the metaphor of father for God is "strikingly frequent."[45] Furthermore, the quantity of reference has no bearing on quality, for we witness a dramatic transformation in characterization. Earthly fathers are rarely mentioned, but they come across as solicitous protectors of their children (Mk. 5:40, 9:21-24; Lk. 11:11). Correspondingly, the heavenly Father is consistently represented as caring, charitable, and comforting (Mt. 6:26; 2 Thes. 2:16; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 5:1; 1 Jn. 3:1), the realization of Isaac's intimation of a merciful supernatural entity. Absent from New Testament fathers, therefore, is any trace of a wrathful paternal aspect; the gospel and epistolary authors could not imagine them as standing in any other position in relation to their children than that of provider.

That God is father to both Jesus and believers alike signals the introduction of a third domestic pairing, that of Father and Son. Crucial to the Christian's Bible's redress, the concord and uncomplicated adoration of God and Christ for each other constitutes the yardstick of intergenerational relations, in which the impurity of paternal mal-intent on the one hand and filial ill will on the other have been extirpated. The Father's confirmation, independent of any expectation of obedience to a law, perfects both the "contingent" Father and the malicious father,

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[44] Hermann Spieckermann, "Father, Fathers, Fatherhood, I. Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament," in *EBR*, 8:951.

[45] Christine Gerber, "Father, Fathers, Fatherhood, III. New Testament," in *EBR*, 8:958. Marianne Thompson restates this disjunction as the "relative infrequency of the term 'Father' for God," contrasting "sharply with the regular use of the term in the New Testament" (*The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in The New Testament* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000], 39). For the number of references to father, see Ziolkowski, "Father, Fathers, Fatherhood," 8:966.

while the Son's total cleavage to Him outside of the pressure of legal adherence completes the wayward son. The Synoptic Gospels all contain a variation of the baptismal scene wherein God's Fatherhood is avowed and Christ's existence is approved without either qualification or caveat: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11; Mt. 3:17, 17:5; Lk. 3:22). John corroborates this unconditional affection from the Son's side, attesting moreover to both a cooperation as well as unity of interest, objective, and power between his Father and Him.

> Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. (Jn. 5:19-23)

Out of the protracted Christological controversy the Nicene Creed of 325 will ratify into orthodoxy the belief in the consubstantiality [*Homoousion*] between Father and Son; yet behind this metaphysical dogma is the acknowledgment and enshrinement of a harmony, a reciprocal love in which the two members attain identity and equality. Aristophanes approximates this erotic underlay when he writes that lovers are struck "by a sense of belonging to one another," of being unable and unwilling to be "separated from one another."[46]

Beyond its putative inviolability, the relationship the Son is privileged to possess with his Father functions as an ideal template that the earthly son can come to resemble (but not replicate). John's Prologue pronounces that the fatherhood of God pertains solely to Christ until the faithful recognize the Son: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of

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[46] Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 28.

the will of man, but of God" (Jn. 1:12). With its antithesis of carnal and spiritual birth, along with its suggestion that human beings are not strictly speaking sons of the Creator until such a gesture of fidelity to Christ is made, the verse suggests that fatherhood and sonship are not primarily domestic realia or statuses but instead connote psycho-emotional attitudes of trust and recognition. Paul confirms this suspicion in his letter to the community at Galatia:

> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Gal. 4:4-7)

By the logic of this formulation, life under the divine law and childhood under the sign of the divine are mutually exclusive conditions. By the benevolent mandate of the Father, the Son displaces the covenant that revealed itself to be as much a disruptive as connective force between the generations. Finally supplanting the *brit* and its complication it introduced into F/father-son relations, the Son both kindles the filial yearning for the paternal presence and gently reassures that longing, saying to the devout, in an inversion of Buber, "Don't worry, Father is here." Through the Son, in other words, Father and son are reconciled (Rom. 5:11).

Liberation from the law constitutes the well-known cornerstone of the Christian gospel, yet the aforementioned passages from John and Galatians emphasize its intimate association with the natural family. Redemption from the law through the reception of Christ entails saying *adieu* to one's given domestic environment, leaving the father for the Father and the Son. Birth and childhood both assume in these contexts a literal/biological and a metaphorical/religious meaning, with a clear hierarchy implicit in the binary. That is, emergence from the vaginal canal is not, *stricto sensu*, being born, and existence under the aegis of one's parents does not truly

render one a child. Like the law of which Paul spoke (Rom. 7:14), the authentic family is spiritual; to use the language of figural interpretation, it is the revelation or fulfillment of the biological. Because of this precedence of the spiritual family the Synoptic Gospels all recount episodes in which Jesus informs aspiring followers that the prerequisite for participation in a new, heavenly unit is the renunciation of one's given family (Lk. 14:26; Mt. 10:37-38; Mk. 3:32-35). Whereas the Hebrew Bible thematizes the difficulty of integrating the biological and spiritual spheres, their absolute diremption is an explicit goal of the Christian. The schism is enacted for the sake of purity, to prevent the attenuation and contamination of a merciful realm led by Father and Son with the miasma of the father and the law with which he is coupled.

The verses from John and Galatians represent but two instances promulgating Christ's role as mediator between the individual and God. Such a function assumes that, for whatever reasons, human beings do not possess the spiritual resources to approach the Father (viz., to become sons) directly and by their own efforts, but instead require a filial middleman (Lk. 10:22; Mt. 11:27; Jn. 1:18, 14:7). The idea of an intermediary between the divine and human realms is neither alien to Jewish thought, nor, for that matter, unique to the history of religions. The departure and significance instead consist in Christ's effective replacement of the covenantal law as the intermediate force. The hypostatic union of his divine and human natures, intimated throughout the Christian canon and raised to a credo with the Council of Chalcedon in 451, is the transcendental condition and onto-theological valorization of the singular privilege of go-between. Indeed, with its insistence on the recognition of and identification with the Son, along with the necessity to work through him in order to reach the merciful Father, the innovation of Christianity with respect to its predecessor consists in the elevation of the son in the theological

hierarchy. The bread and wine lifted for the congregation to behold during the sacrament of the Eucharist signify more than the body and blood; they symbolize the promotion of the son from the margins to which he was pushed in the Hebrew canon, lifted to the point of deification.

The centrality of the Son to the Christian theological imagination grounds the testament's interest in childhood itself, first signaled by the reduction in references to fathers mentioned above. Almost as compensation for Leslie Fiedler's disappointed appraisal regarding the overlooked son of the Hebrew Bible, "NT texts teem with references to children and childhood and use a wide array of child-related terms and metaphors."[47] Corroborating this feature, George Boas writes that with the development of Christianity, "new literary material was available for the admirer of childhood."[48] This new esteem first and foremost manifests itself in the Gospels' purposive decision to chronicle the Son's sonhood, relating events from and details about his ancestry, birth, circumcision, baptism, and early prophetically styled pastoral work.[49] Jesus's treatment of, concern for, and identification with children is intended to convey pictorially not only a likeness in status and domestic position—a *Homoiousianism* of Son and son—but also his divinely authorized vocation of transmogrifying individuals into sons of the Father. That childhood, metaphorically construed, is the telos of devotion accounts for its soteriological associations: Jesus admonishes his adult disciples that they must "become like children" in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:3); that the kingdom of God must be welcomed in a childlike disposition (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 18:17); and that it is the angels of "little ones" who

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[47] Marcia J. Bunge, "Child, Children, II. Greco-Roman Antiquity and New Testament," in *The Encyclopedia of The Bible and Its Reception*, 5:84.

[48] George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1966), 15, cited in Ziolkowski, "Child, Children, VI. Literature," 5:97.

[49] Bunge, "Child, Children, II," 5:86.

continually see the face of the Father in heaven (Mt. 18:10). The Son has the power to save *in spe* sons, who, having discarded a law that hitherto caused their recalcitrance, now become pleasing to God.

The New Testament's turn to the S/son, bringing him into the narrative spotlight and conferring on him the crucial role of mediator in the process of salvation, has the effect of lending a voice to the silenced and marginalized children of its precursor. In the Hebrew Bible, the father stands at the forefront, and, complementarily, through the technique of anthropomorphization, the Father literally speaks to select children. Despite the ubiquity throughout the Gospels of paternal metaphors for God and the ascription of His merciful nature, He is predominantly spoken *about*. It is now the s/Son whose story is told, and who tells the story of the Father. Identifying the v*ox filium* as a Christian innovation in turn allows us to rethink the typological linkage between Isaac and Christ, extending back to the epistolary corpus (Rom. 8:32, Heb. 11:17-20), through the patristic era (Melito of Sardes, Origen), up to the illustrated *Bible moralisée* and *Biblia pauperum* of the medieval period.[50] Postulating the corrective instinct of the Christian Bible, the connection between the two figures is founded less on their common destiny as sacrificial victims than on Christ as Isaac *endowed with a voice*. In other words, the speaking Son is the reincarnation of and answer to the son who, through the Akedah and its exegetical reception, had been silenced, sidelined, and unacknowledged.

The Son talks about and even addresses the Father (Mk. 14:36), but he also speaks to other (would be) sons about fathers and sons, and about Fathers and sons. Although the motif of

[50] Ziolkowski, "Aqedah, VI. Literature," 2:544; for the Aqedah motif in the Epistles, see Gert Steyn, "Aqedah, III. New Testament," in *EBR*, 2:540. Whereas Melito sees Isaac as a type of Christ, since they both carry the wood for their respective sacrifices, Origen casts Christ in the double role of saved Isaac and sacrificed ram (Hans Josef-Klauck, "Aqedah, IV. Christianity," in *EBR*, 2:540).

families appears in more than one tale told by the Nazarene (e.g., Mt. 21:28-32, 33-45), the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" is the only instance in which the relationship between father and son itself is the axial subject. Unique to the Lukan redaction and a story "so perfectly shaped and phrased," the parable crystallizes the figural revamps that we have been tracking across the testaments: the merciful Father, the solicitous father, the foregrounded son, the unrebellious son, and the achievement of reconciliation between father and son, between Father and son.[51] Furthermore, that Abraham prefigures God the Father in medieval mystery plays about the Akedah, for example, supports our extrapolation of the binding's intended typological fulfillment by the parable.[52] The practice of figural interpretation in early Christianity, which puts the Judaic in the anticipatory and thus inferior position, tends to operate on the level of the personage, whether in the correlation of characters (e.g., Adam and Christ, Moses and Christ) or in their allegorization (e.g., Abraham's two wives as embodying two discrete covenants).[53] Rarely if ever in this exegetical tradition is the biblical *episode* the unit of analysis and comparison. This hermeneutic lacuna thus affords an opportunity to read the parable as a revision of the Akedah in its enunciation of a new, restorative vision of intergenerational relations.

The story of the Prodigal Son is the third of three parables in Luke 15 connected by the theme of things lost and then found: sheep (v. 3-7), coin (v. 8-10), and son (v. 11-32).[54] Because

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[51] George Mackay Brown, "The Tarn and the Rosary," in *Hawkfall* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1974), 189, cited in Alison Jack, *The Prodigal Son in English and American Literature: Five Hundred Years of Literary Homecoming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

[52] Ziolkowski, "Aqedah, VI. Literature," 2:546.

[53] For Adam and Christ, see Irenæus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, I.3.31; for Moses and Christ, see Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 74-75; for Hagar and Sarah as the Jerusalem present and above, respectively, see Gal. 4:22-30 and Augustine, *City of God*, XV.2.

[54] Jack, *The Prodigal Son*, 4.

of the parable's fame only a short summary of its plot is necessary. A father's younger son asks for his inheritance, so the father splits his property between his two sons. The younger takes his portion to a faraway place where it is eventually wasted. When that place is plagued by famine, he is reduced to taking a job feeding swine. In dire need and hunger, he has a change of heart and devises a plan to return home and ask to be given a position as his father's servant. Upon his arrival home, his father runs to greet him before the son can declare his intentions. His father embraces him and calls for a robe, sandals, and a ring to be brought, and a feast to be prepared in honor of his son's return. Working at a nearby field, the elder brother becomes incensed when the occasion for the festivities is explained to him, and refuses to participate. When his father comes out to speak to him, the older brother expresses his frustration and jealousy at the treatment given to his younger brother, who, in his view, is unfairly rewarded. The father reassures his angry son about his ongoing progress, but asserts that celebration was necessary because of his brother's return.

Father and Son, Father and son, father and son, all converge in this parable: the Son tells a tale to audient sons about a father and a son; yet the anonymity of the characters facilitated the patristic identification of the father with God, and of the son with the penitent (Jerome, John Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria).[55] At one and the same time does the reunion of father and son as related by the parable mirror the harmony of God and Christ, and assure the sinner of a reconciliation with God. In so doing, the factors that contributed to the intergenerational estrangement constitutive of the Akedah and its aftermath are imaginatively remedied: the cruelty of Abraham is supplanted by the doting father, who, exhibiting no disapproval of his

[55] Ibid., 6.

son's prodigality, runs eagerly to welcome him back. If there is a law or rule that may be said to govern their relationship, it is one not of command but of forgiveness. The son was lost and then found, but the father's joy upon his son's arrival suggests that he too was lost, disoriented and incomplete until the son found him. The *Entgegenkommen* invoked by Tholen as a mantra for the future of father-son relations thus has its foundation in this parable.

Moreover, a trial centered on the father now becomes the one of the son, who is humiliated before he is elevated, and who has to squander material riches in order to attain the superior wealth of *storge* [familial love]. The Isaac who neither descends Moriah with his father (Gen. 22:19) nor accompanies him to Hebron is here replaced by a son who longs for his father, and who, spurned by the outside world, yearns for the warm canopy of paternal security. In the anagogical register, the God who authorizes one of his sons to murder, and another of his sons to be murdered, is substituted by the hopeful Father who concernedly awaits His son's return to Him, and who showers him with a perhaps undeserved affection. The present of the ring thus symbolizes the eternity of the unbreakable communion that Father and son will experience.

While ethical and penitential readings of the parable allegorize the brothers in terms of moral and hamartiological categories, such that the younger brother and his reckless departure from home typologically symbolizes the contrite sinner and the older brother the righteous but unrepentant individual, ethnic readings instead view them as synecdoches of peoples, linking the older brother to Israel and the younger to the Gentiles (Augustine, Tertullian).[56] Refining the fraternal distinction into one between Judaism and Christianity as modes of faith, which has an epistolary precedent (Rom. 9:6-12), fully evinces the polemical dimension of the parable. It is

[56] Ibid.

certainly deliberate that Luke has Jesus tell this particular story to Pharisees and Scribes (v. 2), announcing through indirect means the father's choice of the "younger" son over the "older." In an ironic inversion, the parable appropriates the Hebrew Bible's tradition of upending genealogical succession and of favoring the younger son (i.e., Abel, Isaac, Jacob) in order to narrate God's preference for Christianity over Judaism.[57] When the father confronts his elder son, it does not intend to cool the ire either towards him or his brother, but to simply explain the reason for his glee. That Luke in turn prevents the older brother from responding does not suggest a concession, but it effectively forecloses any interrogation or dispute.[58] Indeed, the elision of fraternal reconciliation at the parable's end not only identifies an irremediable tenseness at the heart of this inter-religious relationship—one that has been borne out by the long course of history—but also projects onto the spirit of the elder brother a harnessed yet nevertheless palpable envy towards the younger.

When the familial logic of figural interpretation is incorporated into the discussion and superimposed onto the Prodigal Son parable, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity moves away from a fraternal to an intergenerational model—which, as stated in the introduction, also has Pauline roots. After all, what grounds this hermeneutic mode if not the presumption of the son's dependence on and emergence from, albeit the eclipse and supersession of, its father?

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[57] Ibid., 10.

[58] Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (1779) is a most fitting intertextual reference here. It yokes the image of the ring to this "religious" strand of interpretation in its parable of the three rings (III.7), adapted from Boccaccio's *Decameron.* Moreover, that the Prodigal Son images a rejection of Judaism through the figure of the elder brother finds a parallel in a 1933 performance of the play by the *Jüdische Kulturbund*, a cultural federation established by the Nazis for the purpose of reghettoizing Jewish life. The production introduced a slight change into the stage directions by leaving Nathan alone on the stage at the curtain's close, while the Templar Knight (a Christian) and Sultan Saladin (a Muslim) depart arm in arm (Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999], 41-42).

On this reading, two attitudes towards the "father" are juxtaposed: the elevation of the son into the foreground of the parable is a narrative technique with theological entailments, correlative to the pronouncement of the son's (Christianity) *triumph* over its father (Judaism) by virtue of its capacity to finally *reconcile* Father (God) and son (man). In the parable Christianity's desire to overcome Judaism expresses itself in the younger son's departure from home on the one hand, and the elder son's rebuke of the father for celebrating his return on the other. In other words, these moments of filial aggression provide Christianity, personified here by elder and younger brother alike, with an aesthetic opportunity to vent hostility towards its predecessor.

The parable and the testament of which it is a part aim to perfect the image of the father, and, in so doing, perfect *its* father. The figural fulfillment of the binding by the parable would be complete, were it not for the entrance of the elder son in the coda. This denouement immediately invites the symbolic reading of faith's primacy over works, of the unjust justice by which righteousness and salvation are imputed not to the one who prevails over sin, but to the one who succumbs to and then atones for it; but the literal level of the parable concludes by introducing the dynamic of sibling rivalry, an intergenerational aggression that then spills towards the father on account of his preferential treatment. Consistent with the Pentateuchal traditions in which the choice of one son entails the rejection of another, the affirmation of the younger son by the father in the parable comes at the cost of neglecting the elder. Each in their own ways father and younger son are lost and then found, but the older brother remains lost because he goes unnoticed and unrecognized by the father for his unwavering loyalty—that is, for not leaving home in the first place. As we saw above, just as Isaac was silenced by paternal indifference to his plight, so too does Luke literally and metaphorically silence the loyal son.

In light of the alienation with which the parable ends, the question is begged, has the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" moved beyond the Akedah and its dual bequest of the absent father and the abandoned son? Has the Christian Bible solved the problem of generations handed down by the Hebrew Bible, or has it merely been transposed into a new key? That an aporia looms as well over the "Prodigal Son," divided irresolutely between the representations of intergenerational reconciliation and estrangement, lends less credence to Hegel's formulation of the parable as the neat correspondence of a concrete appearance and a universal meaning, than to Jean Calvin's concern over the genre's intrinsic capacity to simultaneously illuminate and obscure by narrative indirection.[59]

III. *Heimweh* and Its Disruptions

Until quite recently did Christian readers prove themselves undisturbed by the lack of closure that troubles the relations of the elder son with both his father and brother, and that in consequence obfuscates the purported message of the parable. They instead focused almost exclusively on the anagogical sense of the younger son's circular journey, his sudden departure and depleted return home to his father's embrace. As mentioned above, interpreters quickly detected a referential and supra-literal quality to the apologue, allegorizing the father as the Father and the son as the son (man), and perceiving in its plot a mimesis of the spiritual course of the sinner who rebels against but who is ultimately forgiven by God. Yet exegetes eventually

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[59] G.W.F. von Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University, 1975), 1:378, cited in J. Hillis Miller, "Parable and Performative in the Gospels and in Modern Literature," in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book*, ed. Gene M. Tucker and Douglas A. Knight (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 58; cf. Calvin, who writes that divining the meaning of parables is contingent on belonging to the class of the elect over against the reprobate (*A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, vol. 2 of *Commentaries*, ed. David and Thomas Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 64.

moved beyond this penitential thrust towards an identification of the parable's archetypal and existential meaning, its instantiation of a narrative "ordering design[s] by which men have tried to come to terms with their nature and destiny."[60] Less a *Weltanschauung* than a *Daseinsanschauung*, it crystallized the trajectory of human being lived in the providential shadow of the Christian deity.

The parable's refigurations in English, Scottish, and American literature from the Elizabethan age onward are discussed in Alison Jack's new book on the "Prodigal Son," but its appropriation veritably antedates the modern era. This theological, philosophical, and literary "prehistory" is beautifully traced by Meyer Howard Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*, the monumental study of the religious reformulations guiding continental Romantic poetry.[61] His genealogical reconstruction somewhat ironically begins with a passing reference to Plotinus, who does not speak of the parable, but who, in his seminal position as the junction at which the roads of the Hebrew, Christian, and Greek canons intersect, is formative for the subsequent construal of the parable's spiritual significance. His doctrine of the circular course of the soul out of and back into the One was informed by an allegorical reading of the Homeric epics, illustrated in Odysseus's departure to Troy and circuitous return to Ithaca where he at long last reunites with both his son Telemachus and his father Laertes. This consummation of the longing of fathers and sons for each other on home soil (e.g., *Odyssey* 16.212-214; 24.359-360, 385-389) symbolized the pleromatic fulfillment constitutive of the soul's inevitable and ultimate re-communion with

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[60] M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 146.

[61] Ibid., 164-195.

the divine: "There the father is, and there is everything."[62] In this respect, Plotinus may be said to have atomized the collective longing of the Israelites, and to have adapted the prophetic yearning for reunion with the divine through national and political restoration, to the soul's lifelong pursuit of its loving father. In turn, the "tendency towards a personalization of the idea of God through father metaphors, which was in part connected to the theologizing of ontology, and became visible in Stoicism (as in Platonism), encouraged the plausibility and universalization of the primary Christologically defined title of Father in the NT and influenced its further interpretation in Early Christianity."[63] That the locus of return shifts from the collective-political-earthly to the individual-mystical-heavenly can be gleaned from the respective endings of the testaments, with King Cyrus's edict to the Babylonian exiles on the one hand and the Spirit's beckoning of the spiritually thirsty to the holy city. Home is where the Father is.

Plotinian thought enters the Christian theological tradition through Augustine, where it converges with the "Prodigal Son" parable. By no great work of harmonization could the teaching of the circular course of the soul coexist or fuse with the metaphorization, derived from Hebrews 8:11-16, of life as the linear quest for a distant place. According to this kindred conception, "Man was *at best* a pilgrim and thus in need of understanding his wandering nature and the conditions of his pilgrimage. The conversion [submission to the divine will and the acceptance of Christian dogma] signified the very moment of enlightenment whereby a blind stumbling and a vagrant wandering about could be converted into a fully purposeful pilgrimage,

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[62] *Enneads* 1,6,8, and 1,2,3, conflated by Augustine in *City of God* IX, xvii. Line numbers for *The Odyssey* are taken from the Robert Fagles translation (New York: Penguin, 1996).

[63] Reinhard Feldmeier, "Father, Fathers, Fatherhood, II. Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *EBR*, 8:955-956.

a *peregrinatio* homeward."[64] Postlapsarian man is an exile and wayfarer in an alien land, separated from the divine source of his being, and the journey of life is the search for the dwelling where he truly belongs.[65] With *Confessions* (397-398), the first spiritual autobiography of Western culture, Augustine patterned the journey of his own life on that of the Lukan character (I.xviii). The Prodigal Son was the archetypal template upon which his religious persona could be modeled, while Plotinus provided Augustine with its metaphysical underpinning, equating fallen existence with fragmentation, privation, and conflict that ceases only with the return to God: "You are my eternal Father, but I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul, until the day when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together to merge into you" (XI.xxix).[66] Pace Thomas Wolfe, you can go home again.

The journey of the sinful son back to the forgiving Father, first plotted so compellingly by Augustine, supplied great fodder for the subsequent masters of Christian fiction, in which "the significance is not literal but allegorical, and the action [of the plot] is a journey in quest of a land or city…"[67] Traces of this blueprint can be seen in Dante's *Comedia* (1308-1321), the ascent from the realm of sinners to the paradisal "*fons et origo* of all light love and joy" (XXX. 28-42); in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590-1596), a Christianization of the medieval chivalric romances in which the adventures of the Red Cross Knight culminate in the Land of Eden, a clear echo of

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[64] Karl Weintraub, *The Value of The Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 37. [Author's italics.]

[65] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism,* 165.

[66] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 244.

[67] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 167.

humanity's primal home; and in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the Puritan iteration of the homeward bound *peregrinatio*. Faithful to the father of the parable who runs to greet his younger son, the feminine personifications of the Godhead in these epics (e.g., Dante's Beatrice, Spenser's Una) beckon towards and exert a pulling force on the approaching quester, reminding the eager Christian that the Father longs for him just as he longs for the Father (Rev. 22:17).

The circular progression dramatized in the "Prodigal Son" thus proved fertile for and immensely generative of secular literary and philosophical surfaces. Dropping the allegorical suggestibility of its preceding reconfigurations, Romantic literature frequently employed the trope of the wanderer, who is "in search of an unknown or inexpressible something which gradually leads [him] back towards his point of origin." Encompassing "a fall from unity into division…which in turn compel[s] the movement back toward a higher integration" (à la Plotinus and Augustine), the journey of the Romantic hero is "an education in experience through stages of awareness which culminate on the level of intellectual maturity—a stage of integrity, power, and freedom in which the protagonist finally learns who he is, what he was born for, and the implicit purpose of all that he has endured on the way."[68] Abrams is here alluding to *Bildung*, the educational ideal of self-cultivation and formation that emerged during the German Enlightenment. Set apart from either technical mastery or encyclopedic erudition, *Bildung* is "an eternal, unending process; its goal is self-refinement and the enhancement of one's humanity through a continuously deepening knowledge of the world."[69] Touchstones of the *Bildungsroman* genre, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*

[68] Ibid., 193-194.

[69] Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews*, 10. Mendes-Flohr is paraphrasing Herder's formulation of the category, the universal entailments of which are compromised by the *völkisch* dimension of Herder's thought.

(1795-1796), underscore that all knowledge is tied if not ultimately tantamount to self-knowledge. One of the wonderful facets of the German-Jewish experience pertinent to the animating concerns of this project is not that "Jews adopted Bildung as the cultural and social matrix for the shaping of a modern identity," but that the cultural and spiritual principle they zealously ran to embrace has its roots in the interpretation of a Christian parable as the journey of man out of and back towards its original home, and of the yearning for fulfillment captured in the German word *Heimweh*—homesickness for the lost place of parental protection.[70]

Unlike Augustine, Goethe, one of the most vocal proponents of the *Bildung* ideal, did not fashion himself on the Prodigal Son; but his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811-1833) describes his own formation by the guidance of paternal figures, with his loving father playing a central role in the development.[71] Nevertheless, the paradigmatic potential of the parable for authors as well as their characters outlives the age of *Bildung*. Transatlantic writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries utilize the story from Luke even as they jettison any subterranean allegorical intent, detecting its capacity to serve as an archetypal representation not of the relations between Father and son, but between father and son. Along with Toni Tholen, discussed above in the context of the supposed "*Verschwinden des Vaters*," the informing power of the "Prodigal Son" for *fin de siècle* avant-garde German literature is explored by Harro Müller-Michaels. The respective readings of these two critics bear out the "iconoclastic" treatment of Scripture by modernists, that is, their propensity "to wrest from it ideas and values antithetical to its own ostensible intentions, and certainly antithetical to the interpretive

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[70] Ibid., 16; Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 194. Is figural interpretation itself an expression of *Heimweh*, a practice motivated by a yearning for fulfillment?

[71] Tholen, "Vater-und-Sohn Verhältnisse," 328.

consensus of tradition."[72] By bringing their analyses into conversation, we can come to appreciate something that may be said of literary criticism and theory by and large: just as the reasoning undergirding summative statements about "literature" of a period or *en toto* acquires a circularity by adducing substantiating examples, the precise inflection of the modern inversion Michaels and Tholen identify depends on the work(s) they enlist to illustrate it. As surveyed above, the interpretive tradition of the "Prodigal Son," propelled by theological considerations, prioritizes the conciliatory return over the rebellious departure, understanding the end of the narrative as surpassing and closing the tensive drama of its middle. Michaels and Tholen share the insight that modern retellings of the parable address this disparity, whether by distributing the weight of the point of view more equitably across the impulses of revolt and homecoming, or by upending the primary element.

Michaels's touchstone is Rilke's only novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), which in his view privileges the departure over the return by virtue of its instrumentality for existential liberation. This inversion is in line with a common *Lebensgefühl* and *Kunstwillen* expressed in the modern art forms of young intellectuals, who took advantage of a declining conviction in the immutability of aesthetic principles around 1890 to open up new realms of experience and test alternative perspectives of vision.[73] Unlike the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* who are propelled towards more complete personal integration, modern heroes are marked by internal disunity and revel in perceptual diversity. In Malte's case, the "Prodigal

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[72] Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 66.

[73] Harro Müller-Michaels, "Ermutigung zur Krise: Das Motiv des Verlorenen Sohnes als Paradigma der Moderne," *Diskussion Deutsch* 26 (1995): 119. German denominates the son of the parable as lost [*verloren*] instead of the more literal term for wasteful [*verschwenderisch*].

Son" becomes a self-referential lens through which he can make sense of his condition: his own painful fall into disorientation, the loss of a coherent pattern that would give order to the incessant flux of experience, have arisen as a result of leaving his family to go to live reclusively in Paris. He finds, however, that such dissociation is the precondition of freedom; it is the purgatory through which one must traverse in order to reach the paradise of self-discovery. Prodigality thus takes on a positive valence for the novel, while home becomes for Malte a site and source of self-estrangement: the alienation and fragmentation that initially drives him away is that which he also feels upon his eventual return.[74] In two respects does this stark shift in the emotional posture towards one's primal environment index a dialectical relation to Augustine. Both he and Malte identify with the Prodigal Son, but the latter's subversive severance of homecoming from reconciliation and reintegration leaves the parable a mere *komplementäre Vision*, certainly satisfying "a drive to unity" [*einheitsstiftenden Impuls*] but not constituting a blueprint onto which his own fate actually maps.[75] Moreover, Augustine and Malte in different ways associate existential fragmentation with departure from home, but only the former believes that the misery due to separation from it is healed by the return to it. If the *distentio animi* is for him a necessary prerequisite of emancipation, it is a freedom not for but from the finite world.[76]

Tholen's rendition is the more balanced, arguing that the modern literature concerning fathers and sons, although indebted to the Lukan parable as a "narrative template"

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[74] Ibid., 122.

[75] Ibid., 121.

[76] The Latin phrase is from *Confessions* XI.xxix. For a distended discussion of this concept see Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), vol. 1, 3-87; for a deflated yet trenchant analysis, see Richard Rosengarten, "The Recalcitrant *Distentio* of Ricœur's *Time and Narrative*," *Literature and Theology* 27.1 (2013): 170-182.

[*Erzählsvorlage*], is notwithstanding situated within the "tension of revolt and return" [*Spannung von Revolte and Rückkehr*].[77] This equilibrium is for him best instantiated in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862), applying both to the motifs of the story as well as its own stance vis-à-vis its biblical archetype. Turgenev's novel is loyal to yet departs from the structure of the parable in the following four respects. First, it maintains the two-son model but inserts them into different families, rendering the mentor Evgeny Bazarov and his disciple Arkady Kirsanov "brothers" only in cast of mind. Second, it transforms a father-son relationship disturbed by greed and profligacy into an *Antigone*-like intergenerational conflict between the worldviews of "romanticism" (represented by Nikolai Kirsanov, the father) and "nihilism" (represented emphatically by Bazarov and, at least for a time, Nikolai's son Arkady). Third, it is faithful to what was earlier labelled the narrative slant of the "elevation of the son," since it is concerned primarily with the formation and reformation of Arkady's ideological commitments and his journey through (dis)illusionment with father figures; but it is also interested in how the separation of children, both physical and emotional, affects their parents. (After all, the reader knows that the Prodigal Son's father runs to greet his son, but he is not brought into the mind or the heart of the father during his son's sojourn.) Fourth, it reverberates the circularity of the parable, for Arkady's ultimate "return" is at once an embrace of his father and his philosophical outlook, as well as a *re*affirmation of a value system to which he is inclined before his seduction by Bazarov.[78] On the other hand, Turgenev follows Rilke in divorcing homecoming from reconciliation, physical from spiritual return: at the beginning of the novel Nikolai is greeted by

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[77] Tholen, "Vater-und-Sohn Verhältnisse," 333.

[78] Harold K. Schefski, "'The Parable of the Prodigal Son' and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*," in Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Children: An Authoritative Text*, trans. and ed. Michael Katz (New York: Norton, 2009), 374.

his child who, during his years at the University of St. Petersburg, has fallen captive to a destructive materialism and prosaic scientism. That "the son still remains prodigal even after his physical return" may also be said of Bazarov, who is ministered in his parents' home unto his untimely death but who, like the elder brother of the parable and unlike Arkady, dies spiritually estranged from them.[79]

For all of its sentimental potency, and its achievement in giving expression to the reciprocal longing between fathers and children, Tholen admits that Turgenev's novel is an outlier in the landscape of modern literature; its vision of intergenerational reconciliation and the notion of the home as an ideal space are exceptional, overshadowed by rehearsals of unsolvable conflict as in the work of Joyce, Freud, Robert Musil, and Expressionists playwrights such as Walter Hasenclever and Arnolt Bronnen.[80] Crucial to our concerns is that both Tholen and Michaels cite the work of Kafka as illustrative of this domestic crisis, yet perhaps counterintuitively locate him within a literary tradition of the "Prodigal Son," inasmuch as he operates within (and muddles) the contrasts of departure and return. Again, curation determines vision: the choice of evidence will inflect a different relation to and bear out different aspects of the same paradigmatic text. For Michaels the Kafkan touchstone is the parabolic story "Heimkehr" (1920/1936).[81] With the poignant question its anonymous protagonist poses, "Who will receive me?" [*Wer wird mich empfangen*?], homecoming is not merely dissociated from reconciliation (as with Turgenev and Rilke); it is altogether divorced from an expected paternal greeting. If there is no person to come home to, this *verlorene Sohn* is for all intents and purposes

[79] Ibid., 369.

[80] Tholen, "Vater-und-Sohn Verhältnisse," 335.

[81] Müller-Michaels, "Ermutigung zur Krise," 123.

still away from home, lost to any welcome relationship with the father. For Tholen, meanwhile, it is the *Brief an den Vater* (1919) that most closely approximates the scriptural archetype, but only by understanding the desire to be free of the father and the longing to be near him as variations on "departure" and "return," respectively. In other words, the son of Kafka's letter interiorizes the movement of the younger son and flattens what is a linear progression of discrete events into an ambivalence. Yet to the extent that it is mutually negating, this simultaneity of opposing emotions guarantees the failure of both the struggle to escape and the hunger for nearness. This son can neither leave nor come back.[82]

With Kafka as the exemplum, the tenor of twentieth-century literature on fathers and sons suddenly outpaces the overarching designs implemented to organize it, for unwittingly is the archetypal function of the "Prodigal Son" exceeded by its imaginative descendants. Once the motif of unsettled crisis predominates, we have in fact regressed to an "Akedah" model of intergenerational relations. That is to say, insofar as their depictions of unresolved conflict are uneasily juxtaposed with a dynamic of rebellious departure and longing return, the authors mentioned by Tholen and Michaels stand at an intersection between testaments by combining and continuing the tableau presented in both scriptures. We must remember that, prior and even into the nineteenth century, the canonical portrayals of father-son relations were erected not on a grammar of revolt and reconciliation (viz., in the vein of the "Prodigal Son") but on interpersonal rupture and absence ("The Binding of Isaac"). Besides the sexual perversions of *Oedipus Rex* are a series of broken relations: Oedipus may have unknowingly killed his father King Laius at the narrow bridge, but in the tragic Sophoclean universe it is possible that such an act is retribution

[82] "Der Weggang ist die Unmöglichkeit wegzugehen, wie die Rückkehr die Unmöglichkeit der Rückkehr ist" (Tholen, "Vater-und-Sohn Verhältnisse," 338).

for Laius's own abandonment of his infant on a Theban hillside. If so, "the curse of your mother and father" (ln. 417) of which the blind oracle Tiresias speaks primarily refers to the one he inflicts on them (murder and incest; objective genitive) but proceeds and is perhaps caused by the one they inflict on him (desertion; subjective genitive). In turn, Oedipus worries that his crimes will forever stain the reputation of his children and insert a *chora* between them and him (ln. 1476-1510).[83] Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (ca. 1599-1601) softens the element of visceral disgust present in *Oedipus Rex* but is still preoccupied with the problem of disorderly succession. Here the peace between father and son is not torn by any wrongdoing committed by the one person on the other, but, on the contrary, by a filial loyalty driven by the work of mourning. The character of the ghost as either a benevolent or malicious spirit notwithstanding, his exhortation of Hamlet to avenge his most foul and unnatural murder (I.v.761) by his brother Claudius precipitates a chain of events that similarly leads to his demise. With Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-1880), the reader may never ascertain which of Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov's legitimate or illegitimate sons killed him (even if the eldest son Dmitri is ultimately sentenced for it); what he does learn is that their father was consistent only in his utter forgetting and neglect of his children, especially at a time when they needed him most: upon the death of their mother.[84] The suspicion of filial revenge on paternal apathy thus brings the novel into an unexpected proximity to the spirit of the Theban plays.

Grouping this triad is not unprecedented, for it was Freud who deemed *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* as two of the finest literary masterpieces, and *The Brothers Karamazov* as "the most

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[83] Lines are from Sophocles, *Theban Plays*, trans. Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003).

[84] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David McDuff (New York: Penguin, 2003), 24.

magnificent novel ever written."[85] Certainly blue-chip choices, even if more skeptical readers may smell a whiff of narcissism in the selection. Freud acknowledges that all three works deal with parricide—a phenomenon he spent his adult life plumbing—but this thematic thread is not the source of their greatness. Their preeminence instead consists in disclosing something of the universal filial situation, whether the analysand is a fictional character, its author, or the reader. The "gripping power" of the Greek legend, according to Freud, "seizes upon a compulsion [i.e., being in love with the mother and jealous of the father] which everyone recognizes because he senses its existence within himself. Everyone in the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy and each recoils in horror from the dream fulfillment thus transplanted into reality…"[86] *Hamlet* "has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*" even as the oedipal drives remain hidden, which is reflective of the "secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind." For Freud it is no coincidence that Shakespeare wrote the play within five years of losing his eleven-year-old son Hamnet in 1596 and immediately after the death of his father John in 1601, forcing him into lucubration on mourning and its paralyzing consequences. Hamlet is highly active in all endeavors *except for* the exacting of vengeance, because in Claudius, the man who kills Hamlet's father and marries his mother, he sees the realization of his own repressed wishes extending back to childhood: "Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better

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[85] Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide" (1928), in *SE* XXI:177, 188.

[86] Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, October 27, 1897, in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 272. Freud advances a psychoanalytic theory of tragedy in "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage" (1905 or 1906), in *SE* VII:305-310, which also contains a brief discussion of *Hamlet*.

than the sinner whom he is to punish."[87] Instead, Hamlet brings down punishment on himself on account of his unconscious sense of guilt for these unacceptable instincts.[88] In the case of *The Brothers Karamazov* Freud establishes a closer connection between creator and creation, arguing that Dostoevsky's last novel betrays both his parricidal wishes and abiding guilt for them. Therefore, the universality and innateness of the oedipal complex, unconsciously expressed in these literary paragons, thwarts the intergenerational reconciliation of which the parable and its theoretical offshoots speak. Aspiring to become the good enough father (Abramovitch) or promoting new conceptions of *Vater-und Kindsein* (Tholen) cannot fix the fissure at the core of father-son relations. Speaking pessimistically of the Communist project yet making a larger point about nature's primacy over nurture, Freud writes that "Aggressiveness was not created by property."[89]

The story of Western representations of father-son relations is the story of the *agon* between the Akedah and the Prodigal Son, understood as typological constructs; the literary history to which they give birth can be written as the history of their differentiation as much as their amalgamation. The "Moriac imperative" to sacrifice one's son and the parricidal wish to kill one's father are two sides of the same coin, betokening a caesura interminably deferring the embrace across generations. The Lukan parable serves as its counterpoint, capturing the inextinguishable and unalloyed love of fathers for their sons, and the longing of sons to return to the paternal dwelling from an inhospitable world. This battle of archetypes culminates with Freud and Kafka, who, like other writers from the milieu of the early twentieth century, manage

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[87] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in *SE* IV:264-265.

[88] Freud to Fliess, October 27, 1897, in *The Complete Letters*, 273.

[89] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), in *SE* XXI:113. [Hereafter *CD*.]

to achieve a détente by blending elements from both sides. More specifically, they reaffirm the Akedah model of crisis but elevate the son by telling the story from his perspective; and they speak of filial yearning for the father without an enduring reconciliation. This juxtaposition in turn enables Freud and Kafka in different ways to confuse the binary of departure from and arrival home, depicting, on the one hand, a muted albeit impassioned revolt of the son against the father that occurs *within* (and not outside of) the domestic sphere, and, on the other, a return to the father that heralds not any ecstatic reunion but an inability to escape his overshadowing presence. Their writings will be explored later—but not before an investigation of Martin Luther, whose theology may be regarded as an enlarged meditation on the "Prodigal Son," and who in so expanding introduces into German literary and theological discourse a new way of speaking about Fathers and sons, fathers and sons, Fathers and Sons.

CHAPTER 2-MARTIN LUTHER AND THE JANUS-FACED DEITY

FATHER: What does it mean to have God for one's father?
CHILD: Two things… As I have been created by God and recreated to eternal life, I love God totally… [and] I shall never forget that he is my father, and that out of his fatherly love he will give and do more for me than any earthly parent ever could.

FATHER: What does it mean to know that all things are in God's hand?
CHILD: That I hold God above all things and desire his grace…and trust in his protection and fatherly favor in all adversity.

FATHER: What does it mean to you that Christ sits at the right hand of God in heaven?
CHILD: That I can trust completely in my lord Jesus to whom the Father has given all power in heaven and earth and have no doubt that he will in the end save me from all sin and misfortune and let me dwell with him in heaven in eternal blessedness.[1]

The above quotation is an excerpt from the appendage to the 1534 Strasbourg catechism for children and youth. As a discrete literary genre, the catechism possesses a dual purpose: pedagogically, it serves as an enchiridion for the young on the essential doctrines of the Christian faith—in this case and at this particular historical moment, as they were interpreted and preached by the provincial representatives of the incipient albeit rapidly spreading reformed[2] church; attitudinally, it aims both to cultivate the catechumen's awareness of his relationship to governing divine figures, and to inspire confidence as a genuine believer in their effective reality for his own life. There are two noteworthy and interrelated features of this iteration that immediately capture one's attention. The first is its clever fusion of form with content: the manual here assumes the shape of a dialogue between a generic parent and child, the goal of which is to ensure that the latter (and, ultimately, the young reader) has internalized true teachings about God the Father, Christ His Son, and their interrelationship. The second is the

[1] *Kurtze schrifftliche erklärung für die kinder und angohnden*…, cited in Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 174.

[2] That I am expressly *not* referring to the church spearheaded by Huldrych Zwingli is signaled by the lowercase "r"; I use the term with reference to those groups that had renounced the Roman Catholic Church's pretension to act as the final spokesman on all matters concerning Christian life.

parallel construction of both an ideal and harmonious relationship; that is to say, both the father and son who speak and about whom they speak are portrayed as carrying out an exemplary task —noble in itself and proper to their respective roles—and doing so in a spirit of mutuality and cooperation. Christ is figured as the filial counterpart to God's omnipotent metaphysical governance, focusing strictly on soteriological matters; yet both work in unison to address and solve issues of urgency for human existence. Similarly, the father demonstrates his affectionate concern for his son's spiritual development by proctoring this gentle assessment, and the answers that his son provides are an index of the success and efficacy of his instruction. That the father asks the right questions, and that the son responds correctly to them, indicates that they have fulfilled their duties to one another, and out of love for and the sake of the other. However, in a subtle ironic inversion, the passage makes clear not just that the Creator and Savior are allies more powerful and sure than the child's own parents, but also that the child's gaze should ultimately be directed towards the heavenly Father.[3] In other words, perhaps the most important lesson the father must impart to his child is that, even and especially at this sacral teachable moment when his paternal authority is brought into its clearest relief, it is eclipsed and compromised by a higher one.

This passage serves as a felicitous epigraph to this chapter for two reasons: first, because it contains, *in ovo*, some of the major themes with which this chapter will be occupied: the relationship between father and son in both its domestic and theological variations; the anxiety over sin in the life of the Christian; and the collaborative salvific work of God and Christ for the

[3] Ibid.

believer. Second, the theological paradigm subtending this dialogue is indebted to Martin Luther, whose life and thought will constitute this chapter's exclusive focus.[4]

In his second set of lectures on the Psalms [*Psalmvorlesung*], delivered between 1519 and 1521 at Wittenberg, Luther writes that "A theologian is born by living, nay dying and being damned, not by thinking, reading, or speculating [*speculando*]."[5] Oft-quoted, it appears within the context of a protracted commentary on Ps. 5:11 and echoes the distinction that William James would later make in *The Principles of Psychology* between "knowledge of acquaintance" and "knowledge-about."[6] The line conveys the idea that life itself, not degrees bestowed by prestigious scholastic institutions, is the best training ground for the aspiring student of theology, while the deliberate use of the final gerund evokes *speculatio*, that practice Luther frequently admonished against as a means of encountering and apprehending the Christian God.[7] With attention towards the biography of his pre-1517 years, we are justified in teasing out the implications of Luther's statement by arguing that experience deeply informed the central tenets

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[4] Although overshadowed by the town of Wittenberg as ground zero for Protestant thought and practice, Strasbourg also plays an interesting role in the history of the Reformation. In the movement's early years, the city vacillated between Luther's and Zwingli's positions on the Lord's Supper. However, in the interest of forming a united Protestant defense against the joint assault by the Catholic Church and Emperor Charles V, Strasbourg reluctantly joined the Smalcald League in 1530 and signed the Augsburg Confession in 1532. See Scott Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 204-205, 223-224, 234.

[5] Martin Luther, *Psalmenvorlesung*, in *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesammtausgabe*, 5:163 [hereafter *WA*], cited in Erikson, *Young Man Luther*, 251.

[6] Richard R. Niebuhr, "William James on Religious Experience," in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 222-223. For James the decisive criterion between these two forms of knowledge consists in their communicability: unlike knowledge by acquaintance, which connotes participation in that which one comes to know, knowledge about something can be imparted to others. Religious experience is for James a premier example of the former. Yet Luther's genius as a theologian perhaps lies in his ability to convey phenomenologically his particular experience of the divine.

[7] Egil Grislis, "Luther's View of the Hidden God: The Problem of the *Deus Absconditus* in Luther's Treatise *De Servo Arbitrio*," *McCormick Quarterly* 21 (July 1967): 81.

of his church-and-continent-shattering theology. Indeed, the first wager of this chapter is that an examination of Luther's relationship with his father, as it extends from his childhood to his adult years, provides a valuable key to comprehending the theological outlook he would later come to champion; more specifically, discernible is a hidden thematic correspondence between life and thought, between the personal dynamic at play with "Gross-Hans" as read by Martin, and the latter's construal of the interaction of God with humanity on the one hand and God with Christ on the other. By correlating the private and the universal, the domestic and the religious in this way, we can come to appreciate not only the ability of experience to influence theological discourse, but also the existential function that such discourse can play for those who take it up. Besides the obvious truth value that he held religion to contain, Luther repeatedly stressed its emotional utility, namely, its capacity to act as a source of comfort and strength to believers.[8] We have reason to suspect that there is a self-referential quality to this judgment.

Notwithstanding the discovery of this symmetry between *Leben* and *Werk*, this chapter is nevertheless devoted to a consideration of a subset of Luther's theological stances in their complete and irreducible integrity. Approaches to the study of the reformer tend to be divided between those who concentrate on the man and his personality (neurotic or otherwise), while others set their gaze on his locus within the history of Christian thought: continuities with medieval thought, unique divergences from it, and points of departure for subsequent Protestant theology. This venture charts a middle course between this Scylla and Charybdis by borrowing

[8] To provide only one example: Luther writes the following on the responsibility attendant upon preachers: "[W]e should pay attention to how suffering consciences are to be counseled, lest they perish with the wicked rabble. If we were to keep silence, the consciences that are so inextricably captured and ensnared in laws and human traditions would have no comfort [*consolationem*] at all" (*Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1-4* (1531), in *Luther's Works*, 26:306) [Hereafter *LW*] / *Galatervorlesung*, in *WA* 40-I:475b.

from the insights of each camp. After all, the psychological fount from which his writings emerged help mold but do not determine them; as a finished product whose intention is to reach the mind of another, the work cannot be said to be fully derived and extended from the life. Moreover, perhaps an even surer index of the need to resist the temptation of projection is the initial and continuing appeal of Luther's unique understanding of the nature and meaning of Christianity. Those within and even outside the Protestant Way have heard and affirmed the corpus's address. Therefore, the claim regarding the message's self-reflexive status must be counter-balanced with an acknowledgment of its formidable resonance, of its capability to engage the spiritual hunger of others.

Part of the spiritual distress that Christianity identifies, and the satisfaction that in Luther's hands it supplies the apprehensive penitent, is founded on the categorical distinction that Luther draws between the two contrastive ways God appears to man. Conjured from a reading of 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus* are at one and the same time divine attributes and human phenomenological realities.[9] By focusing on these dissonant yet complementary characteristics of the deity, two related and consequential aspects of Luther's theological scheme come into view: first, we can begin to see it as centered on a family romance, a dramatic triangulation whose *personae* include God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Christian son. Second, the notion is opened up that the crux of Luther's theological import for Christianity consists in revalorizing the Father's and Son's shared redemptive action

[9] Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 32. The verse reads, "He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God"; Luther's exegesis of the passage wherein the distinction is made can be found in "The Bondage of the Will" (1525) [hereafter BW], in *LW* 33:139.

in the life of man. Indeed, the thrust of his polemical efforts against those deemed *falsche Brüder* is the insistence on keeping the Father, the Son, and their intimate relationship as the inviolable foundation of theological thinking.

It is undeniable that much of Luther's output is occasional in nature; Luther's treatises are context bound, and, whether assuming an offensive or defensive posture, are animated by and respond to a definite and contentious theological debate of the moment.[10] The final part of this investigation moves one step beyond this impression by pointing instead to their tendentious, propagandistic nature. On the basis of numerable comments that are explicitly polemical, as well as the innumerable targeted ejaculations peppered throughout the corpus, we are guided by the conviction that Luther's writings, even those composed before the battle over indulgences, are never neutral, that they are always in the service of advancing a point of view to be adopted. Often this interestedness takes the form of grievance and suspicion, an exhortation to his flock to be wary of the devil's dissimulating ways. With this rhetorical tendency in mind, we will conclude with an adumbration of Luther's reflections on one satanic system that threatened the message Luther had worked so laboriously to disseminate: the Jewish faith. Frequently the secondary literature on Luther's relationship to both Judaism and the Jewish people—whether intending as it often does either to downplay or amplify—divorces the topic from the greater intellectual context of his theological project. As a corrective to this isolating tendency, we will argue that at the core of Luther's anti-Judaism and incendiary remarks about the Jewish people

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[10] This characteristic of Luther's work leads Markus Wriedt to designate it as "assertoric" or "conflict-aware": "With persistent and uncompromising theological statements as well as sharp polemic, certainly not sparing his opponents, Luther unfolded the fundamental lines of his theology in the diversity of challenging arguments and conflicts. The *assertio* becomes the expression of choice for the Christian faith and finds its premise in the clarity of Holy Scripture" ("Luther's Theology," trans. Katharina Gustavs, in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 111-112).

lies an anxiety about and emphatic repudiation of its understanding of the Father and His relation to His sons, in favor of the Christian alternative that amounts to nothing less than its purported supersession.

I. "No Power on Earth Is So Noble or So Great As That of Parents"[11]

The Strasbourg catechism may also be seen as a synecdoche for the typical cultural attitudes and practices of the domestic sphere in early modernity. The title of Steven Ozment's book on family life in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, *When Fathers Ruled*, names the person who typically steered the ship of home during that era as well as the spirit in which its navigation was imposed and regarded. Ozment begins his discussion on the rearing of children by informing his reader that around the time when a child reached the age of six, his father became the *axis mundi* of his life. The maternal reign of affection and gentleness under which the child was nurtured in infancy gave way to a patriarchal rule whose organizing principle was the cultivation of discipline, a different order of care. Although the child was classified as a species between animal and human, within him was thought to inhere an inclination towards the latter that guaranteed the former's overcoming.[12] Yet the only means of ensuring this victory was by the implementation of a strict moral-theological rule of conduct, entrusted to the more unyielding parent, that extended into every aspect of life. Conversely, the cardinal sin of the time was the willful indulgence of this temptation to the bestial, whose deleterious spiritual, societal, and

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[11] A very popular statement by Luther, cited in Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 168.

[12] Immanuel Kant, a Lutheran by upbringing, would later make a similar distinction between man's predisposition towards the good [*Anlage*] but propensity [*Hang*] for evil the cornerstone of his anthropological vision and the hope for the emergence of the *unsichtbare Kirche*. See *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. Parts One and Two.

political effects—which could manifest themselves at any moment—represented a constant cause of worry for those concerned with human development and the commonweal.[13]

The *axis mundi*, the pole situated at the midpoint of the cosmos that is thought to unite heaven and earth, is an apt image to describe the father's increased role: it not only conveys the status as the central figure in his child's life, providing the latter with worldly mooring, but also suggests his crucial function as the mediator and connecting tissue between the child and the deity.[14] After all, it was God's commandments that had to be impressed onto the child at a young age, and the father was considered their acting representative—the *in loco divinitatus* of the house.[15] This state of affairs entailed that the only authority parents had over children was that which derived from the responsibility to rear them in accordance with God's law and discipline; the word of the father demanded obedience by virtue of both his superior standing in the cosmological hierarchy as well as his task as transmitter of the word of God.[16] Therefore, by a circular logic of ideological justification, God's authority is enhanced by his paternal emissary, while the father's authority is derived from its divine foundation.[17] Just how thin the line could feel between the divine and the paternal, and that which warrants the correlation between the domestic and religious realms that is here ventured, is exemplified in Luther's concept of the

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[13] Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 132-134.

[14] See, for instance, Mircea Eliade's work on the pervasiveness of this figure across religious traditions in *The Sacred and The Profane*.

[15] Ozment, *When Father's Ruled*, 133. Luther uses Ps. 78:5 as prooftext for this parental duty: "He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children" ("Treatise on Good Works" [1520], in *LW* 44:83).

[16] Ibid., 153.

[17] Ozment confirms this point when he mentions that *Lutheran* (not Luther's) theology would later subject parents and children to a divine plan of duties in both domestic and religious life, which would ultimately have the effect of enhancing the bond between them (Ibid).

"estate" [*Stand, Ordnung*]. A metaphor employed sporadically throughout his writings, the estate connotes the idea that there are particular secular institutions that receive their legitimacy and dignity from a divine mandate; hierarchically ordered with respect to each other for the purpose of civil stability and social order, each station has its proper duties that it is required to fulfill.[18] Even when this word is not explicitly used, the notion nevertheless can be invoked; for instance, included as part of a letter offering solace to his firstborn son Hans, who had fallen into deep depression after the recent death of his sister Magdalene, Luther wrote the following: "Obey God, who, through us [*per nos*] desires you to work where you are, and then thou wilt easily overcome your weakness."[19] Thus the preposition "through" suggests that God works by means of parental agents in order to bring about the alleviation of suffering.

Ozment's book possesses an overt scholarly agenda, which is to correct pervasive negative stereotypes about the raising of children in Reformation Europe. He concludes his study with the following correction to the putative objectives undergirding the practice:

> It is a great, self-serving myth of the modern world that the children of former times were raised as near slaves by domineering, loveless fathers who owed them nothing, the home a training ground for the docile subjects of absolute rulers. To the contrary, from prenatal care to their indoctrination in the schools, there is every evidence that children were considered special and were loved by their parents and teachers, their nurture the highest of human vocations, their proper moral and vocational training humankind's best hope. Parenthood was a conditional trust, not an absolute right, and the home was a model of benevolent and just rule for the "state" to emulate.[20]

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[18] Luther stresses that despite the imbalances in authority of the estate system, *sub specie aeternatis*, every individual by virtue of his faith is equal in the sight of God. Perhaps as a temporal intimation of this leveling, those in superior positions are expected to exhibit considerateness [*Sorgfältigkeit*] in proportion to the obedience [*Gehorsam*] expected from the inferior ("Treatise on Good Works," in *LW* 44:99 / "Von den guten Werken," in *WA* 6:264]. Expanded articulations of the "estate" concept can be found in *LW* 13:368-370; 21:265-269; 22:93-95; 51:347-354.

[19] Luther to Hans Luther, December 27, 1942, in *The Letters of Martin Luther*, trans. Margaret A. Currie (London: Macmillan, 1908), 420 / *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel*, 10:229. [Hereafter *WABr*.]

[20] Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 177.

Ozment criticizes those who, taking for granted a socio-cultural context within which codes of parenting have largely attenuated in severity, from a position of assumed superiority impose a "presentistic" outlook on the past—that is, anachronistically assessing previous paradigms by contemporary standards. As a necessary emendation to this unjust viewpoint, he emphasizes the solicitous intention behind the old model (even if he does not deny its strictness). While Ozment's revision is commendable, the vision of early modern life that this passage advances seems to flirt with the nostalgic and the rose colored. This portrait may have been the ideal of an era, and it may even correspond to how that era actually perceived itself and its own success in the exacting and complicated art of child rearing, but the situation on the ground, as it always is, admittedly had to have been more complicated. One factor that threatens to taint or disrupt Ozment's idyllic picture lies in probing the *response* to this austere system. In other words, the primary limitation of his work is its lack of consideration for how the disciplinary attitude of the age was received by those subject to it.

Although the religious and social advantageousness of an ordered and moderated existence can be readily admitted, what is neglected is the experience of the rule from the point of view of the child. Are we duly attuned to its impact on him; and are its noble purposes, even though clear to the parent, always clear to *him* during this onerous and overbearing maturation process?

The delicacy of the child's position can already be registered by the psychological burden of having to comply with the demands of two masters: the father and the deity. To be sure, the child was less confronted by the existence of a dual system of law than by the possibility of confusing the lawgivers, of failing to understand whom he was ultimately serving. After all, he

only deals with the mouthpiece; and, at least at the outset of the disciplinary regiment, does not exactly realize the father's status in the grand scheme. This entwining of messenger and sender is a highly pertinent motif in Luther's personal formation; indeed, the course of his turbulent relationship with his father, just one generation or so prior to the demarcated temporal focus of Ozment's book, can serve as a test case for the durability of the latter's paradigm, for such an exploration will do justice to the son's perspective on his own upbringing.

Our sole concentration on the relationship of father and son, that is, not of mother and son, assumes that that which can be scrutinized will yield richer fruit than the hypothetical; that is to say, it is vindicated by the plain literary and historical fact that Luther's mother seldom makes an appearance in his voluminous correspondence. Support for this glaring dearth lies, for example, in the suggestive datum that while we do not know how his mother's death affected him, we know that his father's certainly did.[21] The reality of comparative disproportion is not intended to argue either that Luther was altogether unmoved by Margaret's being, or that there is overwhelming reflection on Hans in the *Briefwechsel*. Yet on the surface of the few extant remarks by Luther that make explicit reference to his father, we can clearly gather that this relationship was of premier significance for him, and that he held his father in high regard throughout his life. Erik Erikson's popular psycho-biographical account constructs an image of young (and old) man Luther more despondent, tumultuous, and vengeful than the evidence permits, for Luther was no doubt aware of the extent of his father's love for him, and had to have recognized that the conditions for the possibility of his greatness were laid out by the sacrifices his father made on behalf of his family. The "Luders" came from a long line of peasants tilling

[21] Erikson, *Young Man Luther*, 18-19.

the land of central Germany; but Hans, blessed with both determination and the good fortune of auspicious economic prospects due to the rise of mercantile exchange, was the first in the family chain to escape the bonds of serfdom by taking advantage of the local mining boom whose hubs were the towns of Eisenach (where he met Margaret) and Mansfeld (where "Martinus" was born), and would eventually acquire substantial regional social and political clout.[22] That Hans sent his firstborn to college in lieu of putting him to work in the Mansfeld copper mines might indicate the high esteem *he* too held for his son—perhaps even an inkling of his intellectual potential.[23]

Direct and indirect attestations to Luther's sense of indebtedness to the chances he was afforded are located in two letters he wrote during the last months of his father's life: one addressed to fellow colleague and diplomatic church reformer Philip Melanchthon, the other to Hans himself. It is wise to bear in mind the timing of these documents: if any crisis provokes expressions of genuine tenderness, of feelings that may have long remained suppressed but that now compel conversion to speech, it is the final days of a loved one. The letter to his father responds to the news relayed by his brother James of their father's grave illness—both of whom were living in Mansfeld at the time. Luther's letter is simultaneously "Christian" and "classical" in its occasion and content: on the one hand, it is meant to offer consolation to its addressee in the face of fatal ailment by reasserting Christ's ultimate victory over death as well as the promise

[22] Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, 19.

[23] *Letters*, in *LW* 48:330. [Hereafter *L*.]

of returning to His side in the hereafter.[24] On the other hand, typical of the classical purpose of letter writing, this letter denotes the next best thing to the intimacy of physical presence, the written substitute and compensation for the lack of immediate speech.[25] Not only does Luther voice sincere sorrow over this lamentable turn of events and frustration over his inability to visit, but hopes that Hans will consider coming to live in Wittenberg so that he is secured better care and supervision: "it would be a heartfelt joy for me to be around you in person and to show, with filial faithfulness and service [*mit kindlicher Treu und Dienst*], my gratitude to God and to you, according to the Fourth Commandment."[26] A similar sentiment is echoed in Luther's letter to Melanchthon, shortly after being apprised of his father's passing by his childhood friend Hans Reinicke. He writes that the God who inspires grief over His power to deprive one of life at will is also He who freely provides that which cannot be recompensed, the gift of a dedicated father:

> Even though it comforts me that my father, strong in faith in Christ, fell gently asleep, yet sadness of heart and the memory of the most loving dealings with him have shaken me in the innermost parts of my being, so that seldom if ever have I despised death as much as I do now…Since I am now too sad, I am writing no more, for it is right and God-pleasing for me as a son to mourn such a father, from whom the Father of mercies [*pater misericordiae*] has brought me forth and through whose sweat [the Creator] has fed and raised me to whatever I am.[27]

Because of what is entailed in the concept of the estate, as we saw above, thankfulness is directed inseparably (almost to the point of conflation) towards both his biological father and

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[24] Luther to Hans Luther, February 15, 1530: "Therefore let your heart now be bold and confident in your illness, for we have there, in the life beyond, a true and faithful helper at God's side, Jesus Christ, who for us has strangled death, together with sin, and now sits [in heaven] for us…" [*So laßt nu in Euer Schwachheit das Herz frisch und getrost sein; denn wir haben dort in jenem Leben bei Gott einen gewissen treuen Helfer, Jesum Christum, welcher für uns den Tod sampt den Sünden erwürget hat und itzt da für uns sitzet*…] (*L*, in *LW* 49:269 / *WABr* 5:240).

[25] For a lengthier discussion of the conception of letter writing in the ancient world, see Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and The New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), esp. "Foundations—Two Letters of Apion and Two Letters of the 'Elder.'"

[26] *L*, in *LW* 49:269 / *WABr* 5:239.

[27] Luther to Philip Melanchthon, June 5, 1530, in *LW* 49:318-319 / *WABr* 5:351.

"the Father, who has made you my father and given you to me" [*den Vater, der Euch mir zum Vater geschaffen und gegeben hat*].[28] In both letters, the thought is communicated that God and the envoy through whom He operates and manifests His overabundant charity deserve signs of gratefulness.

If, in the interest of not remaining eternally unsaid, the encounter with a beloved's mortality issues forth intense terms of endearment, the poignance of the circumstances also involves a blinding effect whereby previous emotions, events, and reactions are shrouded. Indeed, these letters to and about Hans have the advantage of total retrospection, of looking back from the lofty vantage point of the End that is able to survey the landscape of the past; yet that view is no more definitive, true, and partial than those that were originally experienced otherwise. Relying on the tone and substance of these documents alone, we would infer that Luther and his father carried on in undisturbed tranquility and untainted accord. However, a letter from nine years prior tells a different, more complicated story. Specifically, it will shed light on two facets of their relationship that haunt and undermine the affection betrayed in the concluding months of Hans's life. First, that the yoking of the Father to the father, crystallized in the *Stand* concept and, as seen in the February letter, supernaturally ordained in the Fourth Commandment was not always a natural and harmonious juxtaposition; in other words, the linkage presupposed as natural between the paternal entities could be and was torn asunder in

[28] *L*, in *LW* 49:269 / *WABr* 5:239.

response to historical contingencies.[29] Furthermore, the aspirational, opportunistic ethos that enabled Hans to escape the stagnating cycle of poverty came to constitute the fulcrum around which intergenerational tensions would escalate.

We concur with Erikson when he asserts that the pressing dichotomy of Luther's early life consisted in determining to whom his ultimate obedience was owed and to be directed: to the natural father or the Heavenly Father.[30] Written from the seclusion of the Wartburg fortress in Eisenach in the aftermath of the papal Diet of Worms, Luther's letter is worthy of close inspection because it acts as an entry point into and literary distillation of that existential preoccupation. Ostensibly its motive is to dedicate to Hans his newly-published treatise "On Monastic Vows" [*De votis monasticis*], the project of which is to expose the cloistered life as lacking any scriptural foundation and to eschew the code of spiritual perfection that it espouses; yet the letter is primarily geared towards establishing a degree of closure between author and addressee, thus moving its tenor away from the expression of gratitude and reassurance and towards redress, of setting things straight. Hans, a Christian only nominally compared to his son, may seem like an odd choice for dedicatee to a book on the spiritual bankruptcy of monkery; however, not only does the subject have personal relevance for Luther, but the writer, the inscribed, and the topic are all in fact intertwined.

A little bit of background knowledge is required to be clued in to the biographical

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[29] The Fourth Commandment [or *Das erst Gebot der ander taffel Mosi*] illustrates the notion of divine-secular *Ständen*, insofar as God institutes the office of parenthood and, through the injunction to *honorare*/*ehrenn*, legitimates parental authority over children. For Luther, the Fourth Commandment held a special place in the structure of divine law: not only did it represent the suture between the preceding (that which humans owe God) and proceeding (that which humans owe each other) commands, but is also the source from which all earthly forms of authority (church, state, masters) are derived. His most extensive treatments of the commandment can be found in *LW* 44:80-100, and 51:146-152.

[30] Erikson, 49.

allusions of this document. In reconstructing the story of Luther's theological development, reference is often made to the *Turmerlebnis*, the "revelation in the tower" during which he, pouring over Romans 1:17, supposedly chanced upon the doctrine of justification by faith.[31] Yet an equally consequential episode in his life was what we may call the *Gewittererlebnis* of 1505, which he interpreted as a divine ordinance commanding him to join the Augustinian order in Erfurt.[32] However, as with many origin stories, these two sudden, unconditioned illuminations occlude their gradual, accretive histories in favor of dramatic simplicity, and should be plotted on an evolutionist rather than a creationist model.[33] The *ex nihilo* character of the thunderstorm is debunked by Luther himself when he confesses that his entrance into the monastery in 1505 was a cowardly act that had resulted from his parents' overly strict discipline, which he believed had rendered him timid. Moreover, he indicts his parents for failing to sufficiently take into account the effect of their punishment on him.[34] Luther may be slightly mischaracterizing his plight, for a timorous teenager would have to garner an impossible amount of courage to undertake this grand gesture. If pusillanimity truly drove him out of the house and into the monastery, so too did the all-too reasonable desire to flee oppressive and abusive parents. Erikson entreats his reader not to

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[31] Hendrix, 51.

[32] Ibid., 24.

[33] The scholarly consensus holds that Luther's *sola fide* did not emerge all at once while he was defecating, but rather emerged slowly and through his three-year-long lecture course on Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

[34] *Luthers Werke in Auswahl* 8.111, no. 3566A (1537), cited in Ozment, *Protestants*, 166. Ozment's confounding presentation of corporal punishment reflects the ambiguous view on it of the era itself. On the one hand, it was condoned only as a last resort and with moderation; on the other, the harsh parent was thought to err less than the lenient one, and sparing the rod was a mark of a parent who did not adequately love his child (Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 146-150). In addition, even if Ozment is correct in the statement that Luther was not the frequent object of "harsh, arbitrary discipline," it is by no means directly proportionate to its inconsequentiality for the victim (Ibid., 148). That is to say, Ozment may here be charged with the same oversight and negligence as that of which Luther accuses his parents. That the latter spoke of beatings already suggests that they left emotional (as well as physical) marks on him.

underestimate the injurious psychological effects of brutality on children by the hands of their parents: "Some day, maybe, there will exist a well-informed, well-considered, and yet fervent public conviction that the most deadly of all possible sins is the mutilation of a child's spirit; for such mutilation undercuts the life principle of trust, without which every human act…is prone to perversion by destructive forms of conscientiousness."[35] The child's trust depends and rests on the bedrock of the love that it receives, but the feeling of its privation cannot but induce sadness, guilt feelings, and the desperate hope and belief that one can become worthy and deserving of love by additional effort and greater measures of compliance. This is perhaps the cardinal insight of Lutheran theology.

This sense of repulsion and detachment engendered by cruelty was only compounded when Hans referred to his son's "calling" as "an illusion and a deception" [*illusio et praestigium*].[36] Hans vehemently objected to what he saw as an demonically-inspired impulse on his son's part; possessing a secular rather than sacred sensibility, he wanted Martin to pursue law in the interest of both his son's professional respectability and his own enhanced social prestige.[37] The scenario rehearses the perennial problem of the zealous longing for parental approval: because the child loves his father, he wants to please and be recognized by him regardless and independent of the choices he makes; but this dependence on the father's blessing as mysteriously indispensable for *self*-confirmation leaves open the possibility of rejection, giving rise not only to tidal waves of disappointment and uncertainty, but to the forlorn blending of love and abandonment. In Luther's case, this assumes a particular coloring because of the

[35] Erikson, 70.

[36] Luther to Hans Luther, November 21, 1521, in *LW* 48:332 / *De votis monasticis*, in *WA* 8:574.

[37] Erikson, 24.

stakes of the decision. As rehearsed in the November letter, the clash over vocational direction signifies less a struggle over the makeup of one's identity and the vulnerability opened up in discarding the security of one's past so as to embrace the uncertainties of the future (as Erikson would ultimately have it) but over whose law is paramount. Hitherto, the only law to which Luther was subject was that of his father; to take on the yoke of the collar—despite if not also because of his father's disapproval—effectively intimates a substitution of masters and legal binds.[38] Hans's rejection of his son's wish to heed the call of the divine dictate thus had the double consequence of creating a rift between the father and the Father in the heart of the son, and of exacerbating the emotional distance between father and son.

Therefore, aside from its anchorage in Luther's term as a monk, it is most fitting that *De votis monasticis* be dedicated to his father, for the November letter makes apparent that this fateful quarrel continued to perturb Luther sixteen years after its occurrence, and even after he had become convinced of the falseness of the monastic way of life. Hints of this lingering wound are revealed, for instance, when Luther admits that "I have hardly ever in all my life heard any man say anything which struck me so forcibly and stayed with me so long" as when his father asked, in an effort to dissuade his son from embarking upon this path, "Have you not also heard that parents are to be obeyed?"[39] Indeed, the issue of the cowl served as the avenue by which Luther could discuss the personally-rooted question of to whom a son ought to ultimately pledge

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[38] Ibid., 94. Ozment writes that in patriarchal Europe, "no parent was supposed to override the mature wishes of his child in choosing either a vocation or a spouse; if a parent attempted to do so, the child courageous enough to pursue them had both informal and legal alternatives" (*When Fathers Ruled*, 177). That Luther did not avail himself of such routes contributes to the impression that, in his decision to enter the monastery surreptitiously and without waiting for his father's assent, he was driven more by shame and love than by vengefulness.

[39] *L*, in *LW* 48:332.

his loyalty, the answer to which (as it is derived from and in accordance with Scripture) represented the transcendental hinge on which any détente between Martin and Hans could open up.

For Luther, the solution to the intractable problem of negotiating this triangulation revolves around a proper understanding of the Fourth Commandment, which he pretends both he and his father misunderstood at the time of their dispute. For his part, Luther was unaware of the irony of attempting to curry divine favor at the price of disobedience against His proxy (i.e., that honoring thy Father is inextricable from honoring thy father); as he puts it, his monastic vow "was not worth a fig, since by taking it I withdrew myself from the authority and guidance of the parent [to whom I was subject] by God's commandment…"[40] Yet Hans is deemed equally at fault for his failure to realize that the single caveat to his authority consists in the pastoral vocation, a qualification stipulated by Christ himself: "[I]f the authority of parents conflicts with the authority or calling of Christ, then Christ's authority must reign alone. Therefore… I could not have refused to obey you without endangering my conscience unless [Christ] has added the ministry of the Word to my monastic profession."[41] Echoing the contradictory logic of Manor Farm's slogan in *Animal Farm*, this means: all of God's commandments are important, but some are more important than others. Just as Luther did with all of his other interlocutors, then, the argument built into the letter to his father appealed to the authority of the New Testament [*sola scriptura*] as its incontrovertible anchor.

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[40] Ibid.

[41] *L*, in *LW* 48:335.

This mutual ignorance bears on the most striking feature of the letter, which is the subterranean admixture of obedience and rebellion, worshipful adoration and sullen revolt, of which the grown Luther remains in his father's clutches. On the one hand, his self-indictment of human presumption is a sign of deference and humble remorse to the man whom he disrespected, while his disavowal of the monastic life is an indirect and tacit acknowledgment that his father was right about its futility all along ("indirect" because he left the monastery neither *on account of* his father's disapproval nor for the reasons the latter presaged). In other words, to be in agreement on this score constitutes a return to the father's side. Yet perhaps most importantly for our purposes is Luther's attestation of a double vision, the myopia of synchronicity and the transparency of retrospection: "In your paternal love you were fearful about my weakness because I was then a youth, just entering my twenty-second year…and you had learned from numerous examples that this way of life turned out sadly for many."[42] In other words, only later could Luther detect the loving concern behind and underneath the expressions of disapprobation.[43] Indeed, the distinction between appearance and reality, between what seems to be the case at one moment but that is understood in its totality from another angle, will figure into his conception of the dynamic relationship between man and the deity. On the other hand, the persistence of vengeful suffering surfaces not only in the original decision to abandon the home, but in the declaration that fatherhood is a conferred privilege: "Nevertheless [God], who

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[42] *L*, in *LW* 48:331.

[43] Erikson invests much significance in the fact that Hans's disapproval is voiced during Martin's initiation into the order. The First Mass, meant to represent the final escape from the primary identity of sonship and the entrance into a higher family, only ends up reinscribing it. This event thus dramatizes the conflict of obediences to paternal figures.

has taken me out of the monastery, has an authority over me *that is greater than yours*…"[44] As retribution for a lifetime of pent-up aggrievedness and perhaps even as a vital means to cope with it, Luther recalls the ontological hierarchy to both himself and his addressee, who forgot his place in the great chain of being. The result, therefore, is a "compromise formation," wherein both dimensions of an ambivalence are vented.[45]

We come full circle by returning to the beginning, to the quotation by Luther heading the section title. Based on the limited biographical data at our disposal, we have offered a glimpse into the tempestuousness characterizing Luther's relationship to his father, and into his attempt to work though the clashing emotions he felt towards him. Yet the quotation suggests that the realm within which parental power asserts itself was fortunately restricted to the temporal; for Luther, parental authority should be thought of as a *Grenze,* for it is exceeded and offset by a supernal one from which its legitimacy is derived.[46] If additional evidence should be marshaled for this claim, it can be found in a line from *Eine Predigt, dass man Kinder zur Schulen halten solle* (1530), the goal of which was to urge magistrates to provide compulsory education in religion and the arts.[47] On the need to educate children, Luther wrote, "Your children are not so completely yours that you have no obligations to God on their behalf; God has his rights in the

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[44] *L*, in *LW* 48:335. [My italics.]

[45] I use some poetic license in borrowing Freud's term that appears in the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1916-1917). For him it denotes the manifestation (dream, symptom, parapraxis) resulting from an impasse between an unconscious wish and a conscious defense against it, whereas I employ it here to convey the discordant emotional states concealed between the lines of Luther's letter.

[46] Jos Vercruysse underscores this point with reference to the Decalogue in his brief but helpful study: "Luther states that one should not keep the fourth commandment for the sake of the parents, but for the sake of the first commandment…The emphasis on obedience for God's sake stands under the primacy of the first commandment" ("Conscience and Authority in Luther's Explanation of The Fourth Commandment," in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era: Papers for The Fourth International Congress for Luther Research*, ed. Heiko Oberman [Leiden: Brill, 1974], 192).

[47] Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 153.

lives of your children; they are more his than yours."[48] It is reminders like this of God's ultimate sovereignty and ownership over His earthly sons that enabled Luther to keep his domestic battle in perspective. Having examined his paternal complications, we now move to an analysis of Luther's construal of another father-son relationship as it plays out within the domain of theology.

II. Light Inaccessible

Even as he was besieged by false brethren, Luther found emotional relief in the fact he and Hans had quelled their conflict—in large part expedited and secured by recourse to the supremacy of divine authority. The rehearsal of this crisis and its resolution described in the previous section obliquely attempted to show the way in which "revelation" and "hiddenness" are helpful categories in delineating the windy path of father and son, that is, alternating moments throughout a delicate relationship between two people during which, at different times and propelled by various catalysts, they either feel close to and estranged from one another. Continuing our case for the correlational quality of Luther's life and work—yet also looking for those points that confirm the irreducibility of the latter to the former—this antinomy will also prove valuable in reconstructing his construals of the twofold visage of the deity as perceived by man on the one hand, and the intimacy between God the Father and Christ the Son on the other.[49]

The task of this section, then, is to elucidate Luther's complex meanings of hiddenness and revelation as it pertains to God, to enumerate the ways He is understood to conceal Himself

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[48] Luther, "Eine Predigt, daß man Kinder zur Schulen halten solle" (1530), in *WA* 30-II:532, cited in Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 153.

[49] Our justification for juxtaposing these two father-son relationships can be found with Luther himself, when he writes in his commentary on the first and second articles of the Apostles' Creed that God is Father to both Christ and all Christians (*Großer Katechismus* [1529], in *WA* 30-I:183-187).

from and disclose Himself to humanity, and to explain how the two divine "faces" or personalities relate to one another. Indeed, part of what continues to make Luther compelling to readers is his ability to narrativize Christian existence, and to emphatically articulate a message that organizes and provides coherence to that story. The demarcation between *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* stands at the fulcrum of that dynamic narrative, thereby enabling a grasp of a whole host of its critical elements.[50] Furthermore, to spell this out would effectively clarify misunderstandings about not just the reality, locus, and discoverability of the divine as (re)formulated by the reformers, but would also allow us to set the record straight genealogically as regards the origins of the so-called death-of-God period in which we find ourselves. For example, in the introduction to his study of Victorian literature, which sketches the erosion of religious belief in the modern era, J. Hillis Miller invokes the term *Deus absconditus* in connection with Zwingli's pivotal reinterpretation of the Eucharist as signifying God's absence.[51] To do so is rather misleading for two reasons: first, because the Latin term in its designation, definition, and elaboration is rather the hallmark of *Luther's* theological orientation. Although Luther undoubtedly cannot be credited with the initial formulation of the idea, nowhere in the Christian theological tradition is it given greater emphasis than with him.[52] Second, Miller's phrasing leads the reader to believe that absconsion and absence are interchangeable predicates of the Protestant deity, but it is precisely Luther's subtle view of the elusive workings of the

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[50] David Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 23.

[51] J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 6. Actually, there is a slippage between "Zwingli" and "Protestant" in Miller's naming of the architect of this interpretation. The fierce debates over the proper understanding of the sacrament throughout the 1520s warns against this confusion.

[52] John Dillenberger, *God Hidden and Revealed: The Interpretation of Luther's Deus Absconditus and Its Significance for Religious Thought* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), xvii.

divine that compels us to resist such a conflation. Yet in order to fully appreciate and appropriate his distinctive world of thought, we have to imaginatively work our way back to precisely the *terminus a quo* of the trajectory that Miller traces, to an intellectual culture preoccupied with one's status in the eyes of God, and wherein the eternal destination of one's soul was considered a matter of the utmost importance.

As early as the *Dictata* and as late as his last major exegetical work, the *Commentary on Genesis,* Luther spoke of God's remoteness from the human intellect.[53] For Luther, that hiddenness is a peculiar property of the Christian God has a scriptural basis (Ps. 18:12; Ps. 30:8; Is. 45:15), but the sporadic cries of Israelite prophets on the difficulty in finding God needed to be supported by greater theoretical articulation for those Christians urgently facing the same spiritual problem.[54] Indeed, such an exigency touches on a growing trend in scholarship on both Luther and the greater Protestant Reformation, namely, an increased attention to the intellectual frameworks to which it responds and out of which it emerges. An outline of this background will not only serve to situate Luther in his late medieval context, but would also attest to how the motif of divine hiddenness functions as a synecdoche for the theological anxieties of the age.

Susan Schreiner's recent work on early modernity as a distinct chronological-intellectual framework presents a comprehensive gloss on trends characterizing late medieval piety. Under the facade of the proliferation of "theologies of comfort" of the period, which supplied consolation to believers and sought greater guarantees for grace and their salvation, in fact lay an

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[53] B.A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and The New: Essays on The Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 132.

[54] "He made darkness His screen; / dark thunderheads, dense clouds of the sky / were His pavilion round about Him"; "for You, O Lord, when you were pleased, / made me firm as a mighty mountain. / When You hid Your face, / I was terrified"; "You are indeed a God who concealed Himself, / O God of Israel, who bring victory!" (JPS)

emphasis on the desire to obviate death and damnation in the face of divine judgment and wrath over human sin. The "dark side" motivating these compassionate efforts consisted in the postulation of a certain view of God's personality and a logic arising from it: If He were not so demanding and His justice so severe, there would be no need to offer mercy, consolation, and assurance to hopeful penitents.[55] The obsession with contrition escalated due to the failure of medieval theological paradigms (concentrated in the scholastic tradition) to extend absolute certitude regarding one's acceptance in the eyes of God. The *viator* (viz., man qua earthly pilgrim) on the way to his judgment knew that the infusion of justifying grace [*gratia gratum faciens*] was conditional upon the voluntary pursuit of holiness, for the scheme presupposed a just and reasonable God who rewarded the moral and the contrite.[56] However, his continual re-immersion into the filth of sin reinscribed his ignorance as to whether he was in fact worthy of faith formed by divine love [*fides caritate formata*]. To pretend certainty, even to speculate into how far along one was in the process of being made righteous, was itself a seductive form of *superbia* and was the surest sign of sin's obstinate presence.[57]

This doubt and the preoccupations attendant upon it were reflected and intensified with the rise of the nominalist school of thought [*via moderna*], embodied in the work of such figures as Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Gabriel Biel (all of whom Luther had studied carefully). Even as it parted ways with the *via antiqua* of the scholastics and its unsettling intermingling of philosophy and theology, it nevertheless continued its forebearer's evasion of

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[55] Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47.

[56] Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 108.

[57] Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise?*, 38-40.

absolute certitude.[58] The assertion that God is no man's debtor (Ockham)—that is, God is under no obligation to recompense our good behavior—was coupled with a sense of resignation that man could neither determine what God demands of him nor do anything in his power to improve his chances of salvation. The pessimistic implications of these contentions were offset by the conviction that God would save anyone who did what was in his power [*facere quod in se est*], even if the best one could do was for all intents and purposes inadequate. This slightly paradoxical attitude towards the human will was meant to be preparatory to divine grace: at one and the same time it constituted an inclination toward God while simultaneously acknowledging one's sinfulness and, in turn, asking for divine forgiveness.[59]

The soteriological framework of the nominalists was undergirded by a metaphysical posture that prioritized God's freedom over His rationality. Localized in the binary *potentia Dei absoluta-potentia Dei ordinata*, they argued that the order of creation decided upon by God represented merely one arrangement out of an infinite set of possibilities available at His disposal. Recent scholarship has attempted to mitigate the arbitrary character of the God implied in this picture by reassuring us that, as *fait accompli*, reality qua *potentia ordinata* cannot be modified or overturned by *potentia absoluta*; yet what is indisputable is both the contingency of the created order as well as the weakened bond between it and its creator, linked as they are by

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[58] For nominalism, the two disciplines differed in both object and in mode: whereas philosophical speculation must be tested against experience and reason, theological speculation must be tested by the authority of Scripture as interpreted by the church (Gillespie, *Theological Origins*, 103). For Heiko Oberman, this methodological divorce facilitated the emergence of modern science (i.e., the discovery of the laws of nature by means of human reason and sensory experience (*The Impact of the Reformation* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994], 10-11, 20).

[59] Gillespie, 105.

the latter's volition and not by some necessary mechanistic causation (as the *via antiqua* would have it).[60]

The nominalist foregrounding of God's freedom had the effect of figuring Him less as a philosopher king, guided by the principles of justice and rationality in dealing with His subjects, than as a whimsical, all-powerful monarch; but it also—and this is an implication more often insinuated than stated outright—intensified the Father's remoteness by lengthening the epistemological and moral avenues by which man could reach Him. Why God chose this shape for the world over all others poses an enduring mystery to searching minds—especially one that often appears inhospitable to His own creatures. Furthermore, and this approaches the nub of Luther's existential-theological critique of nominalist cosmogony, if this God was supremely free, He could consequently be unrelentingly merciless in the wrath poured out on sinners.[61] Of the travail of his monastic tenure, Luther writes in the 1545 *Preface to the Psalms* that his striving for spiritual perfection was constantly plagued by the guilt of sin and the fear of God. He could be sure of grace as an "objective certainty," that is, something theoretically bestowed to the elect;[62] but whether Christ intended it for him specifically remained an insoluble dilemma. Had he done enough for the Father to meet him halfway?[63] How could one even come to know?

His repudiation of nominalist theology notwithstanding, the slippery character of its God

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[60] Oberman, *The Impact of the Reformation*, 8-9.

[61] Gillespie, 108.

[62] Luther, "Vorrede zum ersten Bande der Gesamtausgabe seiner lateinischen Schriften" (1545), in *WA* 54:185-186, cited in Schreiner, 40-41.

[63] Jane Strohl, "Luther's Spiritual Journey," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 153.

stands against the backdrop of Luther's recursive discussions of divine hiddenness.[64] For him "hiddenness" is an umbrella term that gathers a range of religious experiences under its tent: it connotes the feeling of being unable to emotionally and spiritually commune with the Father; that He is out of reach, either by His doing or our own; that we have failed to win His recognition and approval, which inspires more fear and terror; and that we as His sons cannot understand His strange ways, even as they concern and bear upon us in the most pressing and momentous ways. This robust definition, less voiced in than inferred from Luther's writings, enables us to simultaneously subsume a variety of related facets under one category yet also to call attention to shades that are sometimes muted in Luther's reception, thereby doing greater justice to the theme in his work and reinforcing its centrality to it. We are invited to take up this labor of clarifying and expanding on account of the inadequate distinction set up within certain strands of Luther scholarship between two forms of divine hiddenness, denominated by the likes of Brian Gerrish, David Tracy, and John Dillenberger as "Hiddenness I" and "Hiddenness II."[65] In a similar vein, David Steinmetz speaks of divine hiddenness "inside" and "outside"

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[64] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: A Study in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 204-205.

[65] Interestingly, these terms appear within the contexts of drastically divergent purposes. Gerrish's essay "To The Unknown God" contrasts Luther's and Calvin's conceptions of the concept, with the ultimate aim of "inquir[ing] about the ranges of religious experience that lie behind the notion of hiddenness II and to show how they shape the Reformation idea of faith" (*The Old Protestantism and The New*, 134). Tracy invokes the binary to point to the ways in which postcolonial theologies have appropriated the notion of divine hiddenness to come to grips with collective suffering and marginalization ("The Hidden God: The Divine Other of Liberation," *CrossCurrents* 46.1 [Spring 1996]: 5-16). Although Dillenberger's *God Hidden and Revealed* predates this popular parlance, the ideas with which he is engaged are coterminous with those to which it refers. His claim that there is no conflict between H_1 and H_2 is the starting point for a reconstruction of the reception of Luther's *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* in German Protestant theology from Albrecht Ritschl to Karl Barth.

revelation.[66] It is not so much that these binaries have to be revised as they have to include a more capacious specification of the different forms that divine hiddenness assumes.

We will save expositions of H_1 and H_2 until after bringing those muted variations to the fore. The suggestion is less that they have been ignored as important aspects of Luther's thought than that they need to be classified as distinct species of divine hiddenness. The first to bring to attention is the hiddenness of God in creation (H_3), perhaps most probative of, on the one hand, the need to discriminate between hiddenness, absence, and transcendence when speaking of God's relationship to the world, and, on the other, that Luther's *Deus absconditus* is decidedly not identical to the omnipotent force of the Greeks.[67] It is summarized in the following statement from a 1524 interpretation of Psalm 127: "The course of the world…is God's mask in which he hides himself, reigns and busies himself so wonderfully in the world."[68] The impetus for this exegesis may have been found in the mystical tracts of Pseudo-Dionysius, H_3 is the idea that God conceals Himself within His created order.[69] All created things are in other words masks of God (*larvae Dei*), premised on the postulation of a radical dissimilarity between created and divine being and on the dissonant logic that although God is not identical to His creation (pantheism), neither is He separated from it (Gnosticism); that while God is in all things (panentheism), He is

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[66] David Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 23-31.

[67] An example of this misconception that sometimes turns up in the secondary literature can be seen in Rudolf Köhler, "Der 'Deus Absconditus' in Philosophie und Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 7.1 (1955): 48-49.

[68] Luther, "Der 127. Psalm ausgelegt an die Christen zu Riga in Liefland" (1524), in *WA* 15:373, cited in Steven Paulson, "Luther's Doctrine of God," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingle, and L'ubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 190.

[69] Alfred Adam, "Der Begriff 'Deus absconditus' bei Luther nach Herkunft und Bedeutung," *Luther Jahrbuch* 30 (1963): 101-102.

at the same time irreducible to them.[70] Included in this type are all of the following entities: the three *Stände* of family, church, and government, all indirect means by which God both renews and exercises dominion over His creation; various external agents, such as man, Christ, and the devil, through whom God carries out His hidden plans and purposes; and the total realm of nature and the cumulative progress of history, both of which *prima facie* seem to be bereft of the guiding and caring hand of divine providence.[71] In fact, were reason and sensuous experience man's sole faculties of fully apprehending reality, they would in tandem have no choice but to conclude "either that God is wicked or that he is not" (*aut malum aut nullum esse Deum*).[72] This epistemological shortcoming no doubt motivated Luther's insistence on the inability of natural theology to penetrate God's veil and to cognitively seize its object, and for that reason ought to be substituted by a more sophisticated art capable of distinguishing the mask from the masked and thereby able to disseminate saving knowledge.[73]

Hans Grass and Robert Jenson, for example, were correct in adding H_3 alongside H_1 & H_2; yet it was Werner Elert who accurately identified man's experience of divine wrath (H_4) as an

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[70] Hans Grass, "Der verborgene und der offenbare Gott bei Luther," *Reformation und Gegenwart: Vorträge und Vorlesungen von Mitgliedern der Theologischen Fakultät Marburg zum 450. Jubiläum der Reformation*, vol. 6 (Marburg: N.G. Erwehrt Verlag, 1968), 60. Luther borrowed the notion of total metaphysical discontinuity between God and man (except through Christ and His incarnation) from the nominalists (Gillespie, 113).

[71] Respectively, Paulson, "Luther's Doctrine of God," 198; *Lectures on Deuteronomy* (1523), in *LW* 9:41; and Heinrich Bornkamm, "Der verborgene und der offenbare Gott," *Theologische Rundschau* 16 (1944): 42-43.

[72] Luther, *De servo arbitrio* [1525], in *WA* 18:784, cited in Robert Jenson, "Luther's Contemporary Theological Significance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 279.

[73] Luther, *Galatervorlesung*, in *WA* 40-I:174, cited in Bornkamm, "Der verborgene und der offenbare Gott," 48.

additional kind of hiddenness.[74] The reason for overlooking this form is obvious enough: conventionally speaking, "wrath" denotes an all-too immediate feeling one either feels or senses is directed towards him, and its emotive power is nothing short of overwhelming when it is registered. This somewhat topsy-turvy usage should alert us to the fact that for Luther, hiddenness is not to be understood in a strictly literal way when applied to the deity, as meaning physically out of sight or incapable of being intuited. He maintains, rather, that God's wrath is poured out upon the inexorability and inextricability of human sinfulness; it is, in other words, an inevitable consequence of rebellion against and failure to follow His law [*lex vetus*]. In this regard, H_4 is different from the other forms, insofar as the necessary condition for its emergence is in the nature of man, not in God. Extrapolating from this metaphysical basis, it is really man who "hides" from God; that is, God's reactive wrath serves but to intensify His pre-existing hiddenness, creating a vicious and ever-expanding cycle of mutual concealment.[75] Just as with H_3, reason is a culprit in leading man astray: on the road to eternal life it reasonably supposes that righteousness is attained through conformity to God's revealed commands, thereby ultimately finding favor in His eyes.[76] Operating under a calculus of retributive justice, whereby

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[74] Dillenberger, *God Hidden and Revealed*, 66. Luther's worry about the nihilistic conclusions to which natural theology would arrive is connected to his tendentious interpretation of the Eucharist. Buttressed by the doctrine of the Real Presence, which claimed that the bread and the wine *are* the body and blood of Christ, the sacrament was meant to function as a ritualized synecdoche of the sacrality and God-suffusion of creation. For a treatment tying Luther's doctrine of the Eucharist to his doctrine of creation, see Richard Strier, "Martin Luther and the Real Presence in Nature," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37.2 (Spring 2007): 271-303.

[75] The idea of reciprocal hiddenness, although not explicitly formulated, is built from Luther's premise that God does not withdraw Himself from us, but that He hides Himself on account of human behavior (*Lectures on Isaiah* [1528], in *LW* 16:93). Sin thus represents that force that ever distances God and man from each other. This extrapolation is consistent with Luther's continuation of the medieval accent on the noetic effects of the fall (Schreiner, 57): sin may lead one to construe God's hiddenness as His nature— not as a function of His revulsion from sin.

[76] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, *Chapters 1-4*, in *LW* 26:305.

each actant is given his due, reason must conversely conclude that disobedience must be judged and punished accordingly.[77] But here rational presumption is merely an accomplice, for it is the will, bound to and yet responsible for sin, that cannot but defy divine orders even and especially when striving to comply. Yet Luther's *Deus irae* does not factor in or take into account one's sincerest intentions and attempts to approach Him: if "sin" is cheating God, then damnation is man's lot.[78] Therefore, His Law, seemingly the medium that holds out the promise of bringing giver and receiver together, functions only to keep them apart. God remains "hidden," therefore, because His approval is never met through this way, His blessing never granted to human effort. In this Luther makes clear that the category of hiddenness is essentially bound up with divine recognition, satisfaction, and affirmation: "Even if under this judgment there are just and godly men whose righteousness…could be pure, still nothing of this is now of any use to them, so that they are like the most polluted of those who are even now sinners. God in this wrath does not recognize [*agnoscit*] them, but abandons [*tradit*] the godly and ungodly alike."[79] H_4 will become especially salient for Luther's appraisal of Judaism.

To violate God's law is a sure way of provoking His anger, but not the only way. For Luther there is a further activity—this time contemplative—that invites divine fury, and which touches upon the hiddenness belonging and proper to God (H_2), outside and independent of His

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[77] Vítor Westhelle, "Luther's Theologia Crucis," in *The Oxford Handbook*, 161.

[78] Together, reason's misguidedness and the will's bondage stand at the center of Luther's impassioned debates with Erasmus in the first half of the 1520s. Luther claims Erasmus subjects the God to human standards of morality in an attempt to rationalize the relation between the divine and the human; yet to do so is all but to ensure man's damnation, seeing as though he cannot refrain from sinning (Grass, 64). In order to make salvation possible, there must be an appeal to God's mercy, or to a conception of justice as defined by what one deserves.

[79] Luther, "Against Latomus" (1521), in *LW* 32:172.

creation, decrees, and revelation.[80] Named in Luther's later works as the *Deus nudus*, this iteration of absconsion refers to the awful sublimity and terrifying majesty of God in Himself, whose will, mind, and intentions are eternally inscrutable and willfully concealed from human understanding.[81] That this version would emerge in the commentary on Genesis is not coincidental, for both the experience of the *mysterium tremendum* and the human inaccessibility to penetrate or take hold of it conceptually is a result of and punishment for the fall. And a fitting sentence it was, since man's first, fateful, and fatal crime was prying into God's nature and His secret, unrevealed will: "For this inquisitiveness [*curiositas*] is original sin itself, by which we are impelled to strive for a way to God through natural speculation [*speculatione*]."[82] For Luther, there is nothing inherently wrong with either the attempt to find God or with inquiry per se—the problem consists in their convergence, in using the latter means for the former end.[83] Indeed, *speculatio* is used in a technical and specific sense, defined as the prohibited act of probing that which lies beyond the boundaries of human understanding. Echoing Rom. 11:13 and 1 Tim. 6:16, Luther writes that Adam "should not have inquired into the reasons for the divine command; for this is to judge the will of God and to search out His ways, which are unsearchable, and to try to

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[80] Gerrish identifies a tendency running through Luther reception of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that attempts to gloss over the reality and discreteness of H_2 for the reformer (145-146). Dillenberger's book traces the same trend, but is an example of the pot calling the kettle black in its own minimization of the *Deus in se*. Proof of this lies in the teleological scheme he constructs in which Barth "solves" or most equitably balances the ostensible antagonism between divine revelation and hiddenness by positing their dialectical relation: "revelation defines God as the hidden God" (Dillenberger, 119).

[81] Steinmetz, 27.

[82] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, *Chapters 26-30* (1538), in *LW* 5:44 / *Genesisvorlesung*, in *WA* 43-II:459. See also Grass, who claims that even prior to the fall, God has never shown Himself to man as the naked deity (61).

[83] *Speculatio* must not be confused with either thinking as such or curiosity, oftentimes labelled as an anti-Christian impulse that is best inhibited. To be precise, Luther inherited from nominalism a delineation of both the proper modes (philosophical vs. theological) and sources (experience and reason vs. Scripture as interpreted by the church) of critical investigation (Gillespie, 103).

comprehend His judgments, which are incomprehensible."[84] To do so is beyond the human *Stand* and will inevitably lead to the proclamation of heretical positions.

However, the fact that man was exiled from his original home in Eden does not suffice to stifle his attraction to divine matters.[85] On the contrary, according to Luther the speculative urge is a symptom of fallen, sinful reason, which erroneously sees itself as self-reliant in its ability to think its way directly to God and thereby encounter Him face to face.[86] Yet just as works (which are a function of reason) were thought to be the manner of bridging God's remoteness but only served to magnify it; so too does reason, pretending to a mysticism of negative capability, ignite God's wrath and accentuate His hiddenness.[87] To engage in *speculatio,* then, is not only to illusively long for the prelapsarian paradise of intimate communion with the divine, but also to reenact the fall and to reinscribe our sinful nature. In light of this ever-present temptation, Luther exhorts his reader to assume a fairly dissonant attitude to this totally unknowable God: on the one hand, one should cultivate utter indifference to His plans, purposes, and reasons, especially as it concerns the individual's ultimate destination;[88] on the other, one is to feel absolute

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[84] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20* (1538), in *LW* 3:139.

[85] In the context of the history of Christian theology, one distinguishing feature of Luther's work is the shift in construing original sin away from Eros (e.g., Augustine's *concupiscentia* and Heidegger's "mobility of falling" [*Bewegtheit des Verfallens*]) and towards immoderate thinking.

[86] Egil Grislis, "Luther's Understanding of The Wrath of God," *The Journal of Religion* 41.4 (1961): 286.

[87] The danger of reason motivated Luther's eschewal of the *theological* appropriation of Aristotle characteristic of the scholastic tradition of medieval thought. For a deeper treatment of this issue, see B.A. Gerrish's *Grace and Reason: A Study in The Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), esp. Parts I & II.

[88] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20* (1538), in *LW* 3:139.

adoration and fear for this unknowable God.[89] With the second requirement, a discrepancy opens up between how we *definitely* ought to feel about Him and how He *potentially* feels about us. This discordance will become especially exigent for the question of predestination and the indeterminable status of one's salvation.

As alluded to above, certain strands of Luther scholarship name two forms of divine absconsion in his writings, invoking spatial metaphors in order to underscore the difference. Juxtaposed with a hiddenness "behind" or "outside" all relationality (H_2) is one "in" God's disclosure through His Son Christ (H_1), the kernel out of which Luther germinates his foundational *theologia crucis*. Adapted from 1 Cor. 1:18 and first used in the lectures on Hebrews (1517-1518), the "theology of the cross" expresses the idea that God reveals Himself exclusively in the concealment that is the humiliation and shame of Christ's Passion on the Cross at Calvary, which becomes known to future Christians through the Word of Scripture.[90] Its *locus classicus* is the Heidelberg Disputation, where it is contrasted to what Luther sees as the regnant albeit poisonous *theologia gloriae*:

> 19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened.
> 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.
> 21. A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.[91]

The problems characteristic of the theologian of glory points to several themes already discussed, as he is the embodiment of the spiritual dead ends discussed above. As Luther will elaborate

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[89] "This [divine] will is not to be enquired into, but reverently adored [*reverentia adoranda*] as by far the most awesome secret of the divine majesty, reserved to Himself alone and forbidden to us…" (Luther, BW, in *LW* 33:139 / *De servo arbitrio,* in *WA* 18:684).

[90] Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 21.

[91] Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation" (1518), in *LW* 31:40.

elsewhere, this kind of thinker seeks immediate communion with God, either through the performance of ethical activities (as the surest means of satisfaction) or rational speculation on God's worldly work (putatively leading straight to the Worker).[92] However, the elusive character of the deity does not permit these direct and simple modes of access. If the Atonement represents the possibility of personal salvation charitably made available by God, then the Christian must look to this redemptive moment in order to secure his chance at its attainment.

If this is the case, however, Luther may be accused of mischaracterizing his distinctive brand of theology, for it appears as though the cross theologian is the real inverter of values, refusing to call something by its name. Who with any pretension to piety could assume that God reveals Himself at the site of suffering, indignity, and death? What is more unlike, unbecoming, and unworthy of His stature? Yet to ask these questions betrays a rational logic, whereas Luther construes the Cross precisely as the great counter-rational offense to philosophy and theology. In other words, God reveals himself s*ub contraria specie*, in ways contradictory to and beyond the analytical gaze of human reason.[93] Rejecting the possibility of experiencing God's pure presence, Luther asserts that this concealed form of self-disclosure is another legacy of the fall: our human condition and constitution do not allow us to recognize God or comprehend His nature without a covering.[94] Yet this indirection nevertheless possesses a merciful purpose, namely, to reveal Himself in a way that man is capable of perceiving, to accommodate Himself to finitude and sin.[95]

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[92] Ibid., 20.

[93] Westhelle, "Luther's Theologia Crucis," 164.

[94] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5* (1535), in *LW* 1:11.

[95] Steinmetz, 25.

Befitting our limited abilities of spiritual discernment, it is to this *Deus crucifixus* that Luther encourages his reader to flee from the formidable terribleness of the *Deus nudus*. In escaping the awesome lure of the latter we are also escaping the meaning of "hiddenness" undergirding it and moving towards one that suggests greater eschatological potential. Whereas H_2 uses the word synonymously with absolute resistance to *cognitive* scrutiny, H_1 associates it with concealment that is capable of (or even awaiting) discovery by the seeking spirit—provided it knows where and how to look. In fact, aside from H_1, all of the forms of hiddenness adumbrated above represent a set of insurmountable attempts to find God, since they seek Him outside of His disclosure in Christ, the Father apart from His Son. The glaring implication of this exception is that H_1 is not technically true hiddenness, as it is meant to point towards divine revelation; put alternatively, H_1 is the nexus upon which the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus* converge, the suture at which God's hidden character gives way to His merciful character.

Dillenberger bases his distinction between these two divine faces on Luther's own in *De servo arbitrio*: God in himself, as He is in His nature (*DA*), and God as He is revealed in His mercy (*DR*).[96] Similarly, Steven Paulson grounds the difference on God in Himself and God for man, the latter of which signifying the theistic onto-theological wager that God cares not just about human affairs but about the purity of each individual soul (*pro me/pro nobis*).[97] While these binaries have heuristic value in identifying the crux of the difference between the two "Gods," they overlook the ways in which the *DA* is not merely not disassociated from man, but

[96] Dillenberger, 75, based on *LW* 33:139.

[97] Paulson, 194.

also is *pro nobis* like the DR. Luther insists that the numerous forms of hiddenness are for human benefit, which already indicates that man is dealing with a considerate deity even in His evasiveness: H_4 forces us to suspend and realize the futility of the *via activa*; H_3 and H_2 remind us that God's naked majesty would overwhelm our faculties even if we were capable of perceiving it; and H_1 tries to show that concealment is an antidote to *superbia*.[98] A better formulation is as follows: the *Deus revelatus* is a God who can emerge from absconsion. The *DR* is not simply the compliment to the *DA*, but is in fact its theological solution, for it promises that the hiddenness and mutual alienation which seems endemic and unconquerable between God and man can in fact be overcome.

III. "He Who Sees Me Also Sees The Father" (Jn. 14:9)

Within the context of this chapter's purposes, H_1 will be seen to hold a centrifugal position in Luther's thought, as it brings into view the key topics with which this section will be engrossed. First, it is again *The Bondage of The Will* that ties H_1 to God as "preached, revealed, offered, and worshipped": "We only have something to do with him insofar as he is clothed and set forth in his Word, through which He offers [*obtulit*] himself to us."[99] "Offers" suggests that in the transition from God hidden to God revealed in (albeit hidden under) Christ, an entirely new relationship between God and man becomes possible, in which God's mien abruptly changes from ominous to merciful. The bedrock of and transcendental condition for this new relation is faith, that is, trust not in the hidden Father but in the Revealed God who *is* Christ the Son.

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[98] Luther, "Sermo Die S. Matthiae A. 1517," in *WA* 1:138, cited in Loewenich, 30.

[99] Luther, *BW*, in *LW* 33:139 / *De servo arbitrio*, in *WA* 18:685.

Much has been written about Luther's conception of faith, so only a brief summary is required in order to render intelligible its connection to other germane issues. From his earliest writings Luther was concerned with the question of faith and doubt, particularly vis-à-vis the expectation to fulfill divinely-instituted works.[100] As mentioned above, the innate human impotence to do so naturally led to an anxiety over what was sure to be God's damning response. Luther's spiritual mentor Johann von Staupitz, who in 1511 wooed him away from the University of Erfurt to teach at the University of Wittenberg, first taught him the futility of pleasing God by striving for perfection, and to instead rely on the *Misericordia Dei* that is extended even (if not exclusively) to those souls adulterated by sin.[101] Yet Luther used this reassurance merely as a stepping stone to ascend to the unprecedented theological assertion that the effort to fulfill God's law was of no avail in justifying oneself before God, and that only faith in God's mercy and promises (as they become known through Scripture) bring the consoling and relieving certainty of God's forgiveness, justification, and salvation.[102] In so doing, Luther makes the following theological innovations. First, he moves the definition of "faith" away from *assensus* to *fides*, that is, away from the cognitive concurrence to certain propositions about religious matters to an emotional and existential *affectus* about them.[103] Second, by 1518 he inverts the medieval conception of faith as a pious doubt to a redemptive certainty. Faith is the prerequisite of grace, while doubt is no longer the humble recognition of one's own sinfulness

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[100] Schreiner, 53.

[101] Hendrix, 54; Schreiner, 45. As Schreiner points out, Staupitz remained within a nominalist framework in his commitment to the *facere* ethic.

[102] Schreiner, 51; Gillespie, 116.

[103] James Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 182, 186.

but the devil's work, the sin of unbelief in God's promise to save the contrite heart.[104] Third, he assuages his reader that this certainty of one's own salvation can be experienced in the here and now rather than, as the medieval scheme would have it, at the end of the *viator*'s journey.[105] Encapsulated in the phrase *simul iustus et peccator*, Luther's scheme contradicts the holiness ethic that insists Christians have to be free of sin in order to win the Father's acceptance. Because or in spite of the fact that one is never fully approved by the Father on the basis of his works, Christ exchanges his righteousness for the believer's sins, thereby undercutting the necessity to become holy enough to merit divine forgiveness.[106] Luther thus describes justification as the "wonderful exchange" [*mirabilem mutuacionem*] because it nullifies reason's definition of justice as giving each his proper due.[107]

Elicited by the despair over one's failures at self-fulfillment and effectuated by the *verbum Dei* (i.e., the presence of Christ in the mode of the preached word), "faith" is defined by Luther as the sinner's belief in the divinely-proffered promise of forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal salvation announced in and through the Gospel.[108] It is only through this love of and reliance on God, this trust that He is faithful to His vow, that the Christian in turn experiences

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[104] Schreiner, 56-57.

[105] To situate this departure in the theological context and language of his time, Luther argues that *iustitia Christi* (Christ's gift of passive righteousness) and *iustitia Dei* (the eternal and immutable law of God) are granted simultaneously (Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of The Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992], 120). At the time he places justification (God's exculpation of the sinner through Christ) and sanctification (the final union with God) at separate points along the road to holiness (Grislis, "Luther's View," 87). Dupré points out that this bifurcation is an inheritance from nominalism (*Passage to Modernity*, 205).

[106] Hendrix, 47.

[107] Luther, *Vorlesung über Jesias* (1527-1530), in *WA* 31-II:435, cited in Westhelle, 162.

[108] Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 50. Loewenich reminds us that the experience of God's love is first kindled by the content of the Gospel, but this does not excuse the sinner from the obligation of listening to, absorbing and accepting it (101).

God's love for and recognition of his individual being ("grace") even in its sinful state. The correlated if not causal relation between faith and grace is a facet of Luther's theological scheme that is often understated in the secondary literature; at the apogee of the religious life for him lies a reciprocal affirmation between God and man, a love that is transparent to each participant and within which the line between giving and receiving utterly dissolves. Just as with the predication of *absconditus*, then, *revelatus* also signifies not so much a spatial locus but a relation and attitude: if the Hidden God is the oppressive and accusing force who stands both in opposition to and remote from man, the Revealed God is the one who reaches out to him, and in whom man places his confidence; He is the one who is emotionally present, and who brings comfort and solace to the anguished; the one who sees beyond human faults and loves His creature despite if not also because of them; and who accepts man not according to what He thinks he ought to become, but to what he is. For Luther, it is only within the situation of faith and under the sign of the *Deus revelatus* that man calls and feels God to be a "Father." Perhaps his most prominent and suggestive appellation for the deity, he uses this metaphor to depict God's *ultimately* merciful and benevolent disposition. In other words, wrath is improper to His true character.[109]

Yet for Luther it is crucial that God's paternal temperament only becomes accessible through Christ, His Son and His Word, for it was He who voluntarily shoulders human guilt, intervenes on behalf of man's justification, and enables him, by virtue of faith, to become worthy

[109] For instance, see Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, *Chapters 26-30*, in *LW* 5:46.

of redemption and reconciliation with God.[110] As Luther writes of the Gospel, it "presents Christ to us and teaches that the Father Himself has introduced and given Him to us as a Mediator and has also placed Him at His own right hand to remove all wrath, sin, and death from us."[111] The concept of the *Deus revelatus* is thus the nexus point at which the dyads Father-son and Father-Son meet. That is to say, that man can exclaim "Abba" and that he can be accepted as a son in the deity's eyes is grounded in and modeled off of the unadulterated harmony and uninterrupted union of God and Christ. Even if Luther was compelled to reject the infallible authority of church doctrine, he never forswore the Nicean formulation of the *homoousion* of Father and Son, the fourth-century dogma asserting the shared and identical essence of God and Christ.[112] It is beyond the human estate to capture or replicate this intimacy and mutual presence, which is in part reflected precisely in the theological reality that man's connection with God is always mediated, whether by the event and subject of the Passion (H_1) or by the Word—both incarnated and preached—that discloses them; however, through his dependence on and solicitation of Christ, man can come to approximate and taste something of this eternal rapport.[113] Therefore, Luther's theology *in toto* might be classified as an "elevation of the Son," not only because it

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[110] The miracle of justification opens up an anthropological distinction between *proprietas* and *possessio*, for the righteousness that is conferred upon man by Christ is not earned or deserved but is charitably imputed (Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 120). Man may be said to possess righteousness but it is not his property. A related contrast is made regarding the kind of guilt Christ assumes on our behalf. As Preus explains, Luther is cautious to say that Christ does not share human *culpa* but takes upon himself our *pena* (*From Shadow to Promise*, 167-168).

[111] Luther, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15" (1532-1533), in *LW* 28:140.

[112] For example, see Luther, "The Disputation Concerning The Passage: 'The Word Was Made Flesh'" [John 1:1]" (1539), in *LW* 38:256-258. This tendentious doctrine teaches not just that God and Christ possess the same substance, but that they *are* one. This latter component stands in productive tension with the fact that these two entities perform distinct roles in the drama of personal salvation.

[113] Having opined that the way to God is *via filius*, that is, indirectly, Luther could not accept mysticism because it stresses immediate unity with God the Father. However, he could believe that faith created a mystical union with Christ (Hendrix, 72).

underlines Christ's salvific power vis-á-vis the earthly son but also for the unique and unrivaled standing He cherishes with the Father.

However, just as the Cross reveals God to be hidden in Christ, it simultaneously amounts to nothing less than a trial during which the uncompromised union between Father and Son is tested and threatened with severe punctuation. Luther reads Paul's "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15; Gal. 4:6) as performing the exclamation of a sinner-turned-believer, capable of rising to expression only upon relinquishing human agency over salvation and denotative of an inner peace and tranquility.[114] Yet this utterance echoes Christ's prayer at Gethsemane (Mk. 14:36), vented in a state of *Anfechtung* and under the fearful awareness of his imminent betrayal and death. The invocation of a "Father" here, therefore, does not appear to evince a spiritual security and serenity; on the contrary, the garden episode seems to suggest that the paternal, solicitous side of God is called on precisely at the moment when it feels most hidden and beyond appeal. This sense of divine abandonment culminates and only intensifies on the Cross, when Christ asks his Father why he has forsaken him (Mk. 15:34). The question could alternatively be posed as, what has come of the unabated love that I thought we shared and that I believed You felt towards me?

For Luther, however, understanding both the meaning of the Gospel and of human existence requires the knowledge that Christ voices this sentiment ironically and inauthentically; that is to say, the expression of desertion and the reality of suffering belie his certitude that his F/father has in fact *not* left him, the sureness in which is meant to model for the believer the attitude to imitate when faced with life's travails. The absence of despair in the Son is rooted in

[114] Schreiner, 57-59.

the conviction that the crucifixion not only does not threaten the trust in his Father's goodness, but in fact serves to confirm it. Out of the *theologia crucis* Luther derived the notion that affliction is counterintuitively a sign of God's grace and of our ultimate salvation, proof *sub paradoxis* that man is in fact His beloved child.[115] In other words, on the basis of the Passion Luther can claim that everyday tribulations, which are merely its repetition, have become *meaningful*, both in the sense that it points to something beyond itself (i.e., divine favor), and that it is ultimately conducive to and substantiative of redemption. At its core, then, "faith" for Luther is nothing less than the cultivation of a particular kind of depth perception, a gifted alteration of vision that enables its possessor to see through burdensome events, and to recognize the love and concern of the deity hidden under and despite all appearances to the contrary. Faith recognizes suffering as an alien work [*opus alienum*], that is, untrue to and not emanating from His essentially good character, and is able to discern the Father's mercy (viz., His proper work [*opus proprium*]) as concealing itself in apparent forsakenness.[116]

Faith's radical transformation of sight brings to light and fills out the dialectical relationship between hiddenness and faith: Luther declares that every object of belief (e.g., God) needs to be hidden in some way in order to activate the capacity for faith, and faith conversely has hidden things (such as God's goodness) as its object.[117] Furthermore, the binary *opus alienum—opus proprium* touches on a significant feature of the theology of the cross, namely, the metaphysical distinction upheld between appearance and reality. Faith is such a challenging test of the human spirit because of the Quixote-like insistence that meaning is not exhausted in

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[115] Loewenich, 119.

[116] Ibid., 134.

[117] For example, BW, in *LW* 33:136.

the given, that some things of ultimate concern are contrary to or betrayed by what their surface presentation lead us to conclude. The intuition of divine abandonment *per se* is not to be trusted, for by the paradoxical logic of this depth hermeneutic of suspicion, it is in fact according to Luther a propitious indication that God *is* present and as such cares for our well being—which only serves in turn to increase our love for Him.[118]

The disjunction between being and seeming is rooted in the theological reality that the Christian God in Luther's view is a *Deus ludens*, a God who plays games with humanity. This divine denomination is associated with the experience of and ideal response to *Anfechtungen*, trials of trust whose proximate cause is the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune. The only felicitous reaction to hardship is to recognize it not on its own ostensible terms, but as a playful test executed by the deity out of love and for the purpose of spiritual upbuilding in order to test the solidity of an individual's faith.[119] Such a stance is only maintained if it is subtended by a confidence that the Creator is well-disposed towards man on the one hand and by the categorical discrimination between playfulness and dissimulation on the other. Consistent with what has been said above, it comes as no surprise that the concept of play is crucial to Luther's description of God as "Father," since by the lens of faith His paternal intentions can be detected behind the oftentimes sinister games He conducts with His children. It behooves the believer to eventually realize that a game is in fact underway, one that seems torturous but is ultimately carried out for

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[118] "Ein Gott heisset das, dazu man sich versehen sol alles guten und zuflucht haben ynn allen noeten" (*WA* 30-I:133, cited in Bornkamm, 45). Responding to the question posed in *Der Große Katechismus*, "What does it mean to have a God?" this answer underscores that God is ultimately an object of dependence and comfort for the faithful.

[119] Christopher Boyd Brown, "*Deus Ludens:* God at Play in Luther's Theology," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81 (2017): 162. Brown interestingly points out that the rationalist tradition in continental philosophy that proceeded the Reformation was in large part driven by an attempt to tame the *Deus ludens* and to make Him intelligible within the bounds of human reason (153).

his benefit. Yet even with this knowledge the Christian can never escape or outgrow this state of play, and so he forever remains a loving son, completely dependent on his Father's grace and ever fostering a doting reliance upon Him.[120]

Having presented Luther's complex portrayal of the Christian God, we are now compelled to ask the basic question, just who exactly is this deity? Scott Hendrix leads us in the right direction when he writes that "[f]or Luther, God was indeed a harsh judge of evil, but God was also merciful, trustworthy, and committed to his creation…"[121] It is indisputable that man experiences the reality of God in two antinomous ways, that He shows us two conflicting countenances (or rather backs, since our view of Him is always indirect); instead, what is still in question is how Luther construes the relation of these faces to each other. On the basis of the foregoing reconstruction, two schemes come into view: one, advanced with slight differences of accent by nineteenth-century German Protestant theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl and Ernst Troeltsch, in which the Hidden God of wrath [*DA*] is merely a veneer occluding the truth of a loving and paternal God [*DR*], the confusion about which arises from the noetic and moral effects of the fall but which is corrected by faith.[122] Out of this configuration arises, for example, the firm division between God's alien and proper work (viz., between activities seen as essential and inessential to His nature), the subsumption of earthly suffering on the Cross under the redemptive mission of the Incarnation, and the capability of faith to provide retrospective

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[120] Ibid., 163. Brown contrasts Luther's position with that of Erasmus, who similarly posits a conception of a playful God but who sees life as a process of continuous spiritual maturation, of a progressive ability to stand on one's own feet. The difference between them, then, is in their respective claims regarding the kind of game God plays with His creatures, and what its objective is.

[121] Hendrix, xiii.

[122] Heinrich Assel, "The Use of Luther in the Nineteenth Century and the Luther Renaissance," in *The Oxford Handbook*, 567; Grislis, "Martin Luther's View of the Hidden God," 84-85.

understanding.[123] Even though he famously conceived of reason as the "Devil's whore" that ever threatens contaminating the purity of a theology founded on the Word, this scheme nevertheless demonstrates that an integral strain of his theology is very much indebted to the Platonic distinction between appearance and reality, crystallized in the analogies from *Republic* of the cave and of the divided line.[124] To see God *per ipsum* as anyone other than the Good Father He indicates the affliction of faulty vision.

The other scheme is one in which these visages stand independent of and irreducibly alongside each other, one in which wrath, hiddenness, and love are all predicated of God's *true* nature and essence. That this scheme is operative comes into view in part from the logical contradiction that exists within dialectical Protestant theologians like Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Egil Grislis, who as a result of their readings of Luther acknowledge the *reality*—not simply misleading appearance—of divine wrath and hiddenness but who nevertheless aver that love is God's fundamental character.[125] That the *Deus nudus* for Luther is associated with anger and majesty already prevents these thinkers from having it both ways;[126] yet perhaps an even stronger refutation lies in *De servo arbitrio* when Luther speaks of God's *doppelter Wille* with regard to mankind: "God does many things that he does not disclose to us in his word; he also wills many

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[123] In his exegesis of Rom. 12:2, Luther writes that "even when they [the faithful] may have been most harshly tested, they then begin to learn how good this [divine] will has been, even though hidden, and even misunderstood when it was being fulfilled" (*Lectures on Romans* [1515], in *LW* 25:437). In other words, one now understands something about the past that was inaccessible to him prior to that recognition.

[124] For a greater treatment of appearance and reality in Luther, see Chapter 7 of Schreiner's *Are You Alone Wise?* For Luther on reason as the Devil's "hochste hur," see for example "Die letzte Predigt zu Wittenberg, 17. Januar 1546 (Rom. 12:3)," in *WA* 51:126a.

[125] For a comparative breakdown of Barth and Brunner, see Dillenberger, ch. 4; for Grislis, see "Luther's Understanding."

[126] See, for example, Luther, "The Misuse of the Mass" (1521), in *LW* 36:142-144.

things which he does not disclose himself as willing in his word. Thus he does not will the death of a sinner, according to his word; but he wills it according to that inscrutable will of his."[127] Furthermore, the juxtaposed faces that God presents to man are, as we saw above, mirrored on the human side in the conflicting postures that man holds towards God. The *Deus revelatus* is an object of love due to its drive for forgiveness and reconciliation with His sinful sons, yet the *Deus absconditus* inspires an uneasy mixture of fear and adoration, the latter evident in the active attempt to placate it and the former resulting from the continual failure to do so. Therefore, this scheme is not one of being and seeming but of ambivalence, since both Father and son demonstrate opposing attitudes and emotions towards each other that exist if not express themselves simultaneously. This model is significant for the history of ideas because it constitutes a proto-iteration, three centuries ahead of its time, of both ambivalence and perspectivism, as God appears to man in two different ways and man correspondingly feels two different ways about Him.[128]

Although previous scholarship on Luther has indeed identified the existence of both of these schemes, they have neither called attention to their *simultaneous* existence nor have accepted the fact of their dissonant irreconcilability and mutual incompatibility. We may surmise that the source of the discrepancy between the models lies precisely in the fact that, absent an *inherited* language and conceptual framework through which to discuss ambivalence, it was probable that a definite relationship between *caritas* and *irae* would remain confused and indeterminate. Yet to hedge our interpretive bets and to do full justice to these dissonant models

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[127] Luther, BW, in *LW* 33:140.

[128] I call its status "proto" both because Luther remains attached to the Platonic distinction and because the ambivalent feelings neither completely interpenetrate each other nor are fully expressed simultaneously.

of dissonance demands calling attention to them—not attempting to explain their discordance away or to smooth it over. To leave the clash as is demonstrates a fealty to the complicated texture of Luther's writings, and even confirms Louis Dupré's remark that what makes Luther distinctively "modern" as a thinker is the presence of irreconcilable tensions within his work.[129]

Compounding this intractable problem is this schizophrenia of the deity's double will, a positing that renders Luther's doctrine of salvation altogether frangible. If the Christian life is a story that ideally moves away from the *DA* and towards the *DR* by way of faith in the Son, it is also haunted by one in which the former always menaces the latter on account of its predestinating mandate. In other words, that God always controls and has the final say on the eternal fate and destination of one's soul, and that the judgment and the reason(s) informing it are *occulta* to the individual until after death, cannot but imply that, under the sign of eternity, the Father/*DA*/H_2 preponderate over the Son/*DR*/H_1, that "hiddenness" qua inscrutability outweighs "hiddenness" as the concealed-awaiting-revelation, and that a realized redemption effected through the power of the Son in the here and now is always already overshadowed by its unrealized and irrevocable complement overseen and dispensed by the Father. The trustful certainty that Luther hoped to inculcate within penitents was thus undermined by an uncertainty with regard to not only the meaningfulness of suffering and the essential goodness of the Father (since election works outside a logic of retributive justice), but also to one's personal standing with Him; on account of the unswayable damnation drive, man can be sure only of his love for God—not of God's love for him.[130] *That* can only be ascertained in the hereafter, when the

[129] Dupré, 209.

[130] The mystery of divine election [*Erwählungsratschluß*] also risks inverting the predications of alien and proper work, since even the grace conferred by the *DR* is perhaps merely an appearance covering up the reality of eternal damnation.

distinction between the *DA* and the *DR* is transcended and faith hopefully gives way to the *visione Dei*.[131]

IV. *Die Sohnsstreit*

There is one father-son dynamic playing itself out in the life and writings of the reformer that we have yet to consider, and that is between Judaism and Christianity, respectively. In contemporary discourse it is common to see these two faith traditions as brothers, capable of entering into dialogue with each other and of potentially collaborating as allies in the struggle against the philosophical-cultural forces of materialism, atheism, and anti-ideological reflection. Yet from Christianity's earliest attempts to differentiate itself from Judaism, their relationship was construed as a genetic, intergenerational one, crystallized in the binary distinction between the "old" and the "new" covenants and the supersessionist import of the latter. Luther carries on this self-understanding with the title of his first explicit work whose dominant subject is Judaism and the Jewish people: that "Jesus Christ was born a Jew" (1523) also implicitly means that Christianity, founded on the good news promulgated by Christ, is born of Judaism, that the son stands in the shadow of the father.

Consistent with the father-son relationships explored in this chapter, this kinship between Judaism and Christianity is an admixture of love and animosity, allure and resentment, the search for recognition and the unfortunate fact of mismeetings. Much ink has been spilled on the topic of Luther and the Jews, not infrequently labelled with the epithets "anti-Jewish" and/or "anti-Semitic." While these tags are commonly accepted, an appraisal would not be complete without

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[131] The happy replacement of faith by sight after death is mentioned, among other places, in Luther, *First Lectures on The Psalms I, Psalms 1-75* (1513), in *LW* 10:118-120, and "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15" (1532-1533), in *LW* 28:139-141.

first acknowledging the positive innovations in Luther's figurations of Judaism and the Jewish people.[132] Equally tectonic to "justification by faith" is the early Luther's rethinking of the medieval paradigm for understanding the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Hitherto guided by the logic of a *signum-res* binary, in which the Jewish faith, its people, and its book are all regarded as the incomplete shadow, symbol, or anticipation of something better and more real, nobody prior to Luther did more to render equivalent the two traditions. He claimed that both communities possessed trust or *fides* in the divine *promissio* of eternal life as encountered in Scripture, and thus were both in a state of *expectatio* for the divine to bring to fruition that which He promised. In other words, that both Judaism *and* Christianity (in the form of the Second Coming) were waiting for salvific fulfillment challenged a convenient understanding of the latter as the fulfillment of the former.[133]

Nevertheless, the gains achieved for the perception of Judaism through Luther's reconceptualization of the Hebrew Bible and its interpretive community are outweighed by the predominant tones of anti-Judaism and anti-Jewry; at one and the same time, he is a critical suture of these complementary antipathies and represents a *terminus a quo* for their expression in German intellectual history. After all, it was Luther who carried the myth of the death of Judaism, inherited from early orthodox Christianity, into the modern era, declaring that Christ's

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[132] We want to steer clear of the histroriographical tendency to construct a direct line from Luther to Hitler, yet we also want to assign Luther a formative role in the history of modern German anti-Judaism. Then again, it is wise to bear in mind Heiko Oberman's caveats regarding these characterizations. He reminds us that antisemitism *per se* did not exist prior to the emergence of race theory in the nineteenth century, and that Luther and his contemporaries thought in theological, not racial terms. Nevertheless, it is by now cliché to claim that the roots of antisemitism go back further than the sixteenth century, and that expressions of both anti-Judaism and anti-Jewry coexist within and across Luther's writings. See Oberman's *The Roots of Anti-Semitism: In The Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), xi, 50.

[133] Preus, *From Shadow to Promise*, 224-225.

Passion and resurrection effectively signified both the end of Judaism and its claim to a covenantal relationship with God and the birth of universal Christianity.[134] Breaking with tradition, moreover, he deprived Jewry of the political-theological status of "witness," the twisted Augustinian interpretation of Jewish suffering as a mirror reflecting the truth of Christianity but which nevertheless negatively guaranteed toleration under Christian dominion.[135] Even if Luther indeed rejected the medieval predication of Judaism as *figura*, he simultaneously asserted that the *sensus literalis* of the Old Testament (a rung of biblical sense that he sought to revalorize) *is* Christ—an iteration of supersessionism on the textual level that ironically functions to "redirect the flow of Judaism and Jewish history away from scripture altogether."[136]

Apart from and in addition to these specific instances, it is safe to say that, even when he is not explicitly targeting Judaism and/or Jews, the entire thrust of Luther's theology is an implicit rejection of *Judentum*. He is singled out for this claim because his primary contribution to theological reflection—the discovery of the doctrine of justification by faith— entails a challenge to (and victory over) what he understood as the animating impulse of Judaism as a religious system, even if he is sincere in seeking to provide a solution to the intractability that he discerned it as transmitting to posterity. For Luther, Judaism is reducible to the set of legal commands instituted by God for regulating the activity of human beings but which are

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[134] Amy Newman, "The Death of Judaism in German Protestant Thought from Luther to Hegel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61.3 (1993): 456. Newman identifies three competing versions of the myth in Luther's writings: as a metaphysical event of the past coinciding with the crucifixion; as an ongoing struggle in the present against one set of the Word's enemies; and an eschatological ideal to be realized in the future. These iterations differ in both aspect and tense, and are directed against both Jews and Judaism.

[135] Mark U. Edwards Jr., "Against The Jews," in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 347.

[136] Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 252.

impossible for them to fulfill and remain obedient towards on account of both their difficulty and of human physical, moral, and spiritual weakness. When one invariably sins against the divine rule, the Old Testament provides no avenue by which to firmly re-secure and thus remain confident of his salvation. In other words, to (attempt to) adhere to the law and thereby to gain the Father's approval through "works" is only to further reinscribe one's sin, heighten his despair over his fecklessness and eternal fate, and to intensify both his hatred of God as well as God's hatred of him. It is only with the proclamation of the Gospel, that is, the good news of justification and the forgiveness of sins by the grace of Christ through faith, that what Luther calls the "theological function" of the Law is divulged. As he explains in his Galatians commentary, the true purpose of the law is not to be fulfilled—as Judaism erroneously believes—but for sin and the awareness of it to grow in the soul, to the point at which human presumption in its own efforts to secure redemption through observance of the law is radically destroyed.[137]

Furthermore, it is through this theological function that the relationship between law and gospel, Old Testament and New Testament, Judaism and Christianity, is illuminated:

> Therefore the Law is a light that illumines and shows, not the grace of God or righteousness and life but the wrath of God, sin, death, our damnation in the sight of God, and hell…On the other hand, the Gospel is a light that illumines hearts and makes them alive. It discloses what grace and the mercy of God are; what the forgiveness of sins, blessing, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation are; and how we are to attain to these.[138]

All of Luther's enemies were personally and theologically vexing to him; but what sets apart his

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[137] "After the Law has humbled, terrified, and completely crushed you, so that you are on the brink of despair, then see to it that you know how to use the Law correctly; for its function and use is not only to disclose the sin and wrath of God but also to drive us to Christ" (Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1-4*, in *LW* 26:315).

[138] Ibid., in *LW* 26:313.

critique of Judaism, what gives it a particularly urgent tenor, rests on the belief that Judaism brings man *halfway* through the process of salvation but leaves him stuck in despair because it cannot abandon the Law, cannot perceive that its true function is to be overcome.

The most apposite metaphor for describing Luther's understanding of the dynamic between Judaism and Christianity is that of a father-son relationship and its accompanying tensions, a metaphor that exists on overlapping planes of meaning. Characteristically, a father's sovereignty coincides with the anxiety that he is destined to be replaced, whereas, conversely, the son's subjection coexists with the knowledge that he is ultimately his father's replacer. In the eyes of its proponents, the work of supersessionsim, therefore, is akin to praying that God's will be done: that is to say, it is to quicken and make explicit something that is already built into the nature of things, while to proclaim the death of Judaism is only to attempt to kill something that will invariably meet its demise. Over the course of time, the son seeks to rebel against and assert his independence over the father's paradigm, whether by simply negating it or constructively providing a rival framework. In Luther's view, Christianity (and its filial testament) accomplishes this by arguing that its father (Judaism) could not bring Father (God) and son (man) into communion because it believed that the latter was responsible for effecting it; any other way than the Son [*via filius*] meets human despair and the Father's wrath, for Christ alone has the power to liberate man from the Law. Indeed, the Son is endowed with a role in the drama of personal redemption that parallels if not overshadows His Father's: "Apart from Christ, there is no God."[139] Here Luther means not just that the Son provides sons with approval by their

[139] Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), in *LW* 37:218, cited in Paulson, "Luther's Doctrine of God," 189.

Father; it also means that it is He who transforms men into sons, and the Hidden God into the merciful, affirming Father.

At one and the same time the debt of sonhood engenders feelings of infinite gratitude and acerbity towards the father: the former, for the gifts of life, guardianship, and nurturing; the latter, for ever being reminded of these fortunes, and for ever being shaken of the illusion that he was responsible for or earned them. That Jesus Christ was born a Jew is a "historical" datum that has been conveniently obscured if not downright suppressed at many intervals in the history of Christian thought.[140] On the other hand, we can interpret Christians' sustained and sometimes well-intentioned attempts at converting Jews as an expression of the son's love for his father, as the desire on the part of the son to be recognized for who and what he is. Conversion is, in other words, the longing for communion and unpunctuated unity between father and son. The test of the resonance and durability of a myth lies in its ability to conform to the world out of which and into which it speaks. The myth of the death of Judaism had to confront the recalcitrant reality of Jewish survival, to which three dissonant yet complementary avenues were available: to wait until the eschaton, at which point the Jews will convert (Paul); to explain Jewish continuity theologically, as a divine curse for the crucifixion that shows itself in their persistent suffering (Augustine and the medievals); or to rev up efforts at conversion in the here and now—that is, to proclaim Judaism dead by effectively killing it.[141] Even Jewish toleration was not extended

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[140] We need only be reminded of the many and various attempts to "Aryanize" Jesus during the Third Reich: see for example Susannah Heschel, "Jesus the Aryan," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, October 13, 2017, https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/jesus-the-aryan/.

[141] Edwards, "Against the Jews," 347; Smith, "The Death of Judaism," 456.

without a proselytizing intention, for the prevailing hope was that a policy of forebearing hospitality would help reverse the parting of the ways.[142]

With regard to his early writings, Luther combines the putative inevitability of Jewish disappearance with its active, concerted hastening (just to be safe), and *Daß Jesus Christus ein geborner Jude sei* was composed with the explicit intention of recruiting Jews.[143] As Luther's career progressed and fame (or infamy) spread throughout the empire, his involvement with the Jewish question underwent two significant and related transformations: first, both his exclusive interest in Old Testament Judaism as well as his engagement with Scripture as the sole basis for his understanding of the Jewish faith shifted to dialogical disputes with contemporary Jewish authorities, who dismissed both his Christological interpretation of the Old Testament as well as his reading of particular messianic passages;[144] second, his writings on Judaism and Jewry became more acidulous, his policy recommendations for them more unaccepting and overtly hostile, the more resistance his missionary project encountered. In this failure Luther was blind to his own teaching that in the world of the spirit, works do not avail.

How do both Jewish refusal and Luther's acerbity in response to it map onto our multilayered family drama? He is no doubt motivated by what he perceives as Judaism's theological deficiencies, but his *animus* towards it stems from that which fundamentally divides it from Christianity: its repudiation of the Son, the steadfast denial that He is either salvifically propitious or onto-theologically equal to the Father. Luther may have proposed his five *solae*, but

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[142] Edwards, 347.

[143] Smith, 457; Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism*, 45.

[144] Smith, 457; Edwards, 353. Cf. Nirenberg, who claims that "Luther's opponents were never real Jews" (*Anti-Judaism*, 251).

he did not anticipate Judaism's cardinal creed: *sola vater*—even if that Father remains hidden from and wrathful towards His adherents. The Jewish eschewal of Christ's soteriological significance not only represents the assertion of the meaninglessness of the Incarnation and the denial that Christ is efficacious in securing redemption; it is a recursive recapitulation of the event of the Cross, for to spurn His sacrifice is to kill Him again and again.[145]

Yet on account of the genetic relationship, Judaism's rejection of Christianity by way of its rejection of the Son also subliminally amounts to the father's rejection of the son who sought paternal acceptance and to achieve some sort of intergenerational harmony. Put alternatively, the untwining of Father and Son and the assertion of the latter's impotence is mirrored in the son's inability to achieve oneness with the father. Indeed, Judaism turned out to be yet another hidden father, elusive of Christian comprehension and domination. Just as the *Deus absconditus* quietly haunts the *Deus revelatus* in Luther's writings, therefore, the father continues to menace his son by his sheer perdurance; to de-elevate the Son is to ensure the father's own irreplaceability and insusceptibility to elimination. In this condition of irreconcilability, Christ's final words on the Cross in the Gospel of Mark echo those that Christianity *qua son* continually albeit secretly asks of its father Judaism: *Lama sabbachtanu*, why do you forsake us by refusing the Son, He who is the ultimate gift? For Luther, the sadness underlaying this question was channeled into anger, for Judaism's vision of a hidden Father threatened the relations of presence he worked so hard to establish in both his personal and spiritual lives. The only way he could counteract this forsakenness, indeed a source of deep pain, was to reject in turn, intensifying the rift between Judaism and Christianity that would leave an indelible mark on the history of their relationship in

[145] Although Luther did not construe the plight of the Jews as the punishment for filicide, he did impute to them responsibility for the murder.

Germany.

With the divergence between these faiths, then, we are left with competing ideal images of the Father as well as of the relationship between Father and Son, Father and son. From here the dissertation turns to polemical ventures on the Jewish side; in varying levels of covertness and explicitness, the following authors of Jewish provenance were less concerned with presenting Judaism's distinct contribution than with exposing the powers and limits of Christianity. They did so in and through literary portrayals that depict the relationship between father and son as one of unmanageable hierarchization, a feature that will implicitly entail consequences for the understanding of the relationship between these two faith traditions.

CHAPTER 3-*ZÖGERN VOR DEM GEBURT*: KAFKA, FILIALITY, AND THE TIGHTROPE OF FAITH

"*The true way is along a rope that is not spanned high in the air, but only just above the ground. It seems intended more to cause stumbling [stolpern] than to be walked along.*"[1]

By now it has become something of the stuff of legend. And like many legends, the details are meager. In the lore it has not quite reached the level of the *shidduch* of Moses Mendelssohn and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in 1754, taking each other's pawns as they set off on a course to become the bishops of *Aufklärung.* Yet Franz Kafka's visit to the home of Martin Buber in Berlin during the winter of 1914—an encounter between two titans of German-Jewish culture—would prove to be consequential to both the parties involved as well as to the history of that culture, despite or perhaps because the meeting may have ultimately been what the latter occasionally referred to as a "mismeeting" [*Vergegnung*].[2]

The call to Buber is not without a degree of surprise, especially for the theologian himself: by that point the two had known each other for five years, extending back to when Kafka attended a lecture Buber delivered to a group of young Jewish intellectuals belonging to the Prague chapter of the Bar Kochba group.[3] Yet in a letter to his erstwhile fiancée Felice Bauer,

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[1] Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, ed. Max Brod (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1991), 87 [hereafter *BON*] / *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente*, ed. Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1992), II-:113. [Hereafter *NSF*.]

[2] Ritchie Robertson, "Introduction" to Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Mike Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xxii-xxiii. In a footnote that appears in "Guilt and Guilt Feelings" Buber confirms the existence of the meeting but mistakenly dates it to 1911 or 1912 (*The Knowledge of Man*, 135). *Vergegnung* is Buber's coinage designating "the failure of a real meeting between men," usually because of misperceptions in the situation ("Autobiographical Fragments," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. Paul Schilpp and Maurice Friedman [London: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 4, and Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews*, 109).

[3] Rivka Horwitz, "Kafka and the Crisis in Jewish Religious Thought," *Modern Judaism* 15.1 (1995): 29. The series of lectures Buber offered annually served to publicize his mystical-romantic conception of Jewish peoplehood, and would later crystallize into *On Judaism*.

Kafka admits that he was rather unimpressed with the presenter's remarks and stage presence, and no substantive correspondence flowered between them in the aftermath.[4] By that February, however, stylistic considerations and personal proclivities were outweighed by the spiritual urgencies of the moment, for Kafka had come to seek Buber's counsel on a rather light and uncomplicated subject: the problem of evil in the Bible. The object of Kafka's focus lay in Psalm 82, the meaning of which had apparently been vexing him for some time. What is certain is that he managed to finish *The Trial*—his only complete novel— shortly after this meeting, leading many to posit an intertextual relationship between the novel and the psalm. However, the exact cause of Kafka's bewilderment, the content of their discussion, and the inner connection between it and the novel, all remain mysterious.

The short psalm depicts a heavenly drama in which God stands amidst a juridical assembly comprising angelic beings. Befitting the context, what ensues is a severe indictment, directed against the divine entities for the failure to execute their mandate: to be guarantors of justice on earth. Echoing a prophetic topos, they are castigated for presiding over a reign of iniquity [*unrecht richten*], neglecting to provide for society's needy and vulnerable, and permitting the wicked to run amok.[5] As punishment for their poor oversight, the angels are stripped of their immortality [אכן כאדם תמותון]. The prayer concludes with a petition by the psalmist exhorting God to reinstate His undivided sovereignty over the nations. In the Hebrew Bible angelic beings appear as far back as Genesis, but nowhere else are they either entrusted with preservation of the temporal order or invested with a relative autonomy from God.

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[4] Kafka to Felice Bauer, January 16, 1913, in *Letters to Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born (New York: Schocken, 1973), 157. [Hereafter *LF*.]

[5] Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Die Deutsche Bibel* (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–1960), 10:375.

Buber's writings on the author from the 1950s lend the impression that Kafka was troubled by the psalm's ostensible conflict with Judaism's teaching of monotheism. Two of his three sustained readings of Kafka invoke Psalm 82, and suggest that its noteworthiness consists in its polytheism—a doctrinal problem requiring an exegetical solution. Just as Buber offered different explanations for the appearance of these angelic beings, so too did he arrive at conflicting conclusions regarding Kafka's status as a "Jewish" writer, a label predicated precisely of those who understand and affirm the theological message of the psalm.[6] At one point Buber declares that no other writer more accurately and poignantly expresses the essence and tension of the Jewish faith—the notion, encapsulated in the psalm, that God *is* but is not present—than Kafka; at another, he claims that *The Trial* demonstrates that Kafka has only understood the "presuppositions" [*Voraussetzungen*] of the psalm and not "the psalm itself," for the novel either mistakenly conflates God and his subordinates or simply does not perceive His just judgment operating behind the scenes and controlling the course of events.[7] Indeed, Buber returned time and again to Kafka in a way that he did with no other writer of fiction—a fascination that mirrors

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[6] His method in both instances is quasi-historical-critical: In "Guilt and Guilt Feelings" Buber explains that the content of the psalm is indebted to gnostic mythology involving man's attempt to liberate himself from the spirits who determine the destiny of the world and to return to the highest concealed light (*The Knowledge of Man*, 135). In "Judgment on the Judges," he argues that the presence of subservient deities in the psalm emerges out of a problem facing early Yahwistic religion. As it encountered other nations who not only possessed similar tribal narratives of wandering and settlement, but also worshipped a god as the primary agent and impetus of that narrative, the Israelites were compelled to negotiate both Yahweh's relationship vis-à-vis other tribal deities as well as their own status vis-à-vis other nations. This challenge acquires a particular urgency in the wake of Israel's various defeats, and, eventually, exile. These intermediary deities are thus predicated in order to answer the question, in times of covenantal obedience to the Torah, how does the supposedly supreme ruler of the universe allow misfortune—if not national dispersal—to be wrought upon His people? (*Good and Evil: Two Interpretations*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953], 20-30.

[7] Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith: A Study of the Interpretation of Judaism and Christianity*, trans. N.P. Goldhawk (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1961), 162-167; cf. Buber, *Good and Evil*, 30 / Martin Buber, "Gericht über die Richter," in *Recht und Unrecht: Deutung einiger Psalmen* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2010), 32.

the sincere perplexity with which Kafka knocked on his door four decades prior. But this recursive gesture reflects and stems from Buber's inability to definitively determine where the author stood vis-á-vis the religious tradition to which he belonged.

A closer reading of the psalm may help identify the source of Kafka's concern, and reveal how the postulation of polytheism belies more urgent theological preoccupations. The psalm's rhetorical and religious power derives from its juxtaposition of expectation, disappointment, the content of which the reader must be aware as well as feel himself if the poem is to resonate. The psalmist appeals to a socio-cosmological order governed by the rule of mercy and compassion, one an ideal that runs counter to the world he sees around him. Ingeniously this dynamic is sutured by the same root verb ש.פ.ט., "to judge," which here carries descriptive and normative connotations, as well as refers to present and future actions. That is, the judges judge "unjustly" [עול], but God is solicited to judge partially [s*chaffen recht*] to society's most vulnerable. The presence of God in the assembly is meant to betoken a redress or restoration to this ideal, supposed condition.

The simple characterization of the angels as unjust on the one hand and God as fair on the other goes hand in hand with a certain interpretation of who is speaking at what point in the psalm. The indictment that begins in verse 2 is commonly attributed to God, but it is equally plausible that it is the psalmist who speaks throughout, leveling the accusation against all the divine beings gathered. Such a reading is supported not just by their shared function of "judging," but also by the fact that God and His underlings are given the same denomination, so as to make no essential distinction between their natures [אלהים נצב בעדת אל בקרב אלהים ישפט]. This reading would then entail that the psalmist holds God equally responsible for the world's

prevailing lawlessness. If God permits the favoritism of the wicked, then what kind of God is He? If He is so akin to His subordinates, is it wrong to presuppose or hope for an alternate order? Is this a God who is worthy of human trust?

The work of the previous chapter culminated in the identification of a certain aporetic quality to Luther's exposition of God's janus-faced nature. The two-pronged caesura concerns Luther's oscillation between two schemes of construing the relation between the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus*: one in which the former is but a distorted guise of the latter, the other in which both attributes are proper and equal features of His character. The second option in this unresolved paradigmatic problem brings into view the more rudimentary tension regarding the ambiguity over just how to understand the relation between the divine predicates of hidden and revealed. Whereas the Revealed God fundamentally cares about human beings, seeking to bring them under the canopy of grace despite their bondage to sin, the Hidden God is altogether indifferent to them, and leaves them uncertain of their eternal destination. That this divine ambivalence is neither resolved nor sorted out is of premier consequence for the faithful, for it ultimately leaves their salvific status in a state of anxious suspension. Thereby, Luther's primary religious impulse, namely, to assuage and liberate the troubled conscience, is severely compromised.

Very similar questions resurface in the Kafka-Buber exchange: at the heart of Psalm 82 is both the question of the nature of the Jewish deity, as well as the manner of His relationship to His people. In his subsequent work of criticism on Kafka, Buber articulated the spiritual dimension of the former's writings in terms resembling Luther's. Depending on the particular iteration, Kafka either captured or failed to capture the appearance-reality logic constitutive of

Jewish theological sensibilities. Correctly apprehended, the psalm teaches a core tenet: behind the judges stands the Judge, behind the unfair judgment stands and is ultimately overcome by the merciful judgment. Yet given the literary product that is tied to their meeting, Buber may have projected this scheme onto Kafka, or at least did not employ the most accurate framework. For *The Trial* conveys nothing of the serene certainty by which Buber defines religious faith. Like the judges and human beings of its biblical precursor, Josef K.'s plight is characterized by radical *un*certainty, a wandering about in darkness as to the reason for his ordeal.[8] His situation is meant to metonymize the human standpoint, to whom nothing of the workings of the divine realm are revealed. After all, the Psalm concludes as if with an ellipsis: is anything altered in the heavens, or does the request of a faithful heart merely reverberate back to its suppliant? In terms of *The Trial,* then, Kafka does not misunderstand the psalmist but in fact inhabits his role and replicates his plea, speaking out of existence and searching for answers.

The Trial's echo of Psalm 82 is not without ironic perversion, in keeping with the author's characteristic exegetical practice. Kafka was habitually an "iconoclastic" reader of Scripture, wresting from it ideas that are antithetical both to its ostensible intentions as well as to the interpretive tradition on which it is based.[9] Throughout his corpus he seizes the imperative laid down by Ben Bag Bag in *Ethics of the Fathers* 5:21 to הפך the Bible, oftentimes innocuously rendered to "turn" in order to convey incessant poring over, but can just as well be translated as to "change," "flip," or "confuse." Indeed, Kafka did confuse surface scriptural meanings as fodder for his literary creativity; yet, as the Buber encounter demonstrates, the tendency was tied

[8] Verse 5 of the Psalm ("They neither know nor understand, they go about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth totter") leaves the referent of the plural pronoun unspecified.

[9] Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture*, 66.

to or perhaps on account of a confusion and hesitation about the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish tradition. Whatever interpretive or pastoral guidance Buber extended to Kafka during their meeting appears not to have left any deep impression, for some time after he entered the following into his diary: "Opened the Bible. The unjust Judges [*Von den ungerechten Richtern*]. Confirmed [*Finde*] in my own opinion, or at least in an opinion that I have already encountered [*vorgefunden habe*] in myself. But otherwise there is no significance to this, I am never visibly guided in such things, the pages of the Bible don't flutter in my presence."[10] The specter of the judges who unjustly guide the destiny of the world thus continued to haunt him, and symbolize his lifelong wariness about a religious tradition that offers them obeisance and sanctions their role. This reservation, and the alternative "opinion" that he encounters and is confirmed by, will be the subject of the first part of this chapter.

There is, however, another aspect to Psalm 82 that may have spoken to Kafka on an existential level and driven him to seek Buber out. The designation "sons of the Most High" [בני עליון; *Kinder des Höchsten*] is given to the unjust judges, metaphorizing the celestial hierarchy in a domestic register. By extension, we are invited to regard those in the temporal realm subject to the judgments of both the angelic sons and the Father as likewise sons. Family relations in the psalm, then, have an intra- and inter-spheric dimension, and the ambiguity over who voices the indictment is meant to underscore that discord in the former is correlated to discord in the latter. Employing a biographic hermeneutical circle, wherein the whole and its parts are mutually illuminating, it is not implausible that the psalm's invocation of unjust judges and sonship recalled to if not crystallized for Kafka how he perceived his relationship with his father—the

[10] Kafka, September 16, 1915, in *D.*:342 / *Tagebücher*, ed. Hans Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, and Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1990), 1:753. [Hereafter *T.*]

most formative and decisive figure for his life, writing, and spiritual temperament. The psalm's personal import for Kafka thus lies in its convergence of family and faith, the father and the Father.

In light of this intimate connection between the domestic and the theological realms, the proceeding investigation will explore Kafka's writings in order to draw out the intimate connection between his upbringing, his portrayal of father-son relations, and his singular religious outlook. It will advance three related claims: first, that the absence of a transmission of a strong religious foundation took Kafka beyond the confines of mere Judaism, and conditioned the unique theological perspective that he would later develop, one that situates him between the Jewish and Christian traditions insofar as he stands in both yet never fully in either. This spiritual *Zwischenbereich* in which he is located, this simultaneity of appropriation and rejection of discrete religious traditions, is also conditioned (but not determined) by his childhood.[11] The second claim is that the nuance of Kafka's unique religious identity, demonstrated in both his fiction and non-fiction, cannot be fully appreciated absent a consideration of his explicit ambivalence regarding Christianity. Third, as a means of verifying and concretizing that ambivalence, a hermeneutical analysis of the *Letter to the Father* will show that the world represented in that work demonstrates tropological parallels to Luther's vision of a world governed by the *Deus absconditus*. In other words, the paradigm most consonant with Kafka's portrayal of father-son relations on the one hand and divine-human relations on the other is Luther's depiction of man as he stands before and grapples with the Hidden God. Notwithstanding these striking thematic continuities, Kafka's works will exhibit an incapacity to

[11] This term is borrowed from Buber, who uses it to designate the space of inter-human meeting (*Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith [New York: Routledge, 2002], esp. 241-244).

embrace Luther's scheme *in toto* due to the intractable realities of his own experience as a son failing to solve the *Vaterfrage*. That is to say, the model that most incisively illustrates and diagnoses the father problem broadly construed is ultimately rejected on account of the solution it proposes.[12]

I. *Terra Infirma*

The title of this section echoes a phrase of Kafka that speaks of the "absence of any firm Jewish ground [*Mangel jedes festen jüdischen Bodens*] under my feet."[13] The section will work to advance the claim that this elision, the failure to receive the faith of the fathers from his father,

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[12] This approach attempts to chart course between the post-structuralist valorization on infinite "undecidability" on the one hand and the tyrannical impulse to secure univocal understanding on the other. Ritchie Robertson is encouraging in his opposition to two widespread tendencies in Kafka's reception: the view that "Kafka's writings form a code which could be easily cracked if only the right key could be found" has been "displaced by the equally depressing belief that Kafka's writings are insoluble riddles about which nothing can be known and therefore anything can be said ("Preface" to *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987], ix). We are also reminded of the priest's gnomic remark to Josef K. during the cathedral scene of *Der Prozeß* that "correct understanding of something and misunderstanding of the same thing are not entirely mutually exclusive" (Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Mike Mitchell [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 156).

As with any artist, one could read and appreciate Kafka's pieces without any consultation of or recourse to biography—oftentimes a prudent activity, to be sure, given the tendency to use historical data to explain away incongruities in fictional texts. However, few would admit that in this instance a truer and more comprehensive understanding of both author and work is not forfeited as a result. At the same time, it is crucial to avoid the temptation to reduce the text to the author, such that the former is merely and always an emanation of the latter, stripped of its integrity as a detached and autonomous document.

This tendency towards reduction appears in an otherwise illuminating piece by Frederick Hoffman, "Escape from Father," in *The Kafka Problem*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Octagon, 1963), 214-247, even as he explicitly warns against such reduction; and Josef Rattner, *Kafka und das Vater-Problem* (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt, 1964), who exhibits the trait less on account of a blindspot than by his commitment as a psychologist to see art as both a critical component of the biography of its creator, as well as the reflection of a idiosyncratic mental sickness (8). At certain points Kafka himself falls into this trap and invites this reading. In a letter to Felice Bauer, for example, he identifies certain elements in "Das Urteil" that possess autobiographical referents (June 2, 1913, in *LF:*265). Similarly, figuratively understood his desire to "pour" [*auszugießen*] himself into "The Metamorphosis" suggests a personal identification with the story (Kafka to Bauer, November 18, 1912, in *LF*:49 / *Briefe an Felice und andere Korrespondenz aus der Verlobungszeit*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born [New York: Schocken, 1967], 105). Hereafter *BaF*.

[13] Kafka to Max Brod, July 31, 1922, in *LFFE*:349 / *Briefe, 1902-1924*, ed. Max Brod (New York: Schocken, 1958), 404. The phrase occurs within the context of Kafka's response to a rumor that had been circulating that he was being considered to replace Buber as editor of *Der Jude*, a monthly German magazine founded by Buber and Salman Schocken (Iris Bruce, *Kafka and Cultural Zionism: Dates in Palestine* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007], 170).

transported Kafka into the spiritual universe of Christianity—an essential facet of his religious character evinced in both his fiction and non-fiction that many critics of the author have either overlooked, or have in fact identified but have not sufficiently thought through its implications.

A short time after he was first diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1917, an entry from Kafka's diaries reads: "I would put myself [*mich anvertrauen*] in death's hands, though. Remnant of a faith [*Rest eines Glaubens*]. Return [*Rückkehr*] to a father. Great day of atonement [*Grosser Versöhnungstag*]."[14] By means of a play on words Kafka seizes the recent occasion of *Yom Kippur* (in German, *Tag der Versöhnung*) to allude to wrongdoing vis-à-vis a paternal figure. The annual Jewish holiday devoted to soliciting the deity for forgiveness fell two days prior to this recording—was his petition heard or accepted? At bottom the need for atonement implies a discordance between two parties, because one has failed to meet the expectations and requirements established between them. In the religious context this category applies to the relationship between the sinner and his deity, required to account for and confess his transgressions with the hope that both the sinner and the sins will be absolved.

If so, then Kafka here anticipates and even longs for a return to the Father, which would coincide with, if not be contingent upon, the act of expiation. But for what exactly must Kafka ask forgiveness? An answer is offered in the following passage from Walter Sokel:

> The inner falseness of the westernized-assimilated Jew, as Kafka sees him, might be termed a *sinfulness without fault.* It is the sin of his fathers, the consequences of which he must bear. When the fathers broke away from the ghetto and left it behind to rise in the world of the Gentiles, they still had enough Jewish memories to sustain them and thought these could last for their children. However, the demands of assimilation imposed on their children an inner conflict and subtly concealed dishonesty. They lost their genuine natural roots without ever attaining the goal of true

[14] September 28, 1917, in *D*:387 / *T*:839.

> assimilation, which for Kafka not even baptism, but only the intercession of a Gentile mother could make possible.[15]

The writer here is referring to the gradual erosion of Jewish identity and observance as a result of emancipation [*Verbesserung*]. By both social pressure and voluntary decision, many Jews of Central Europe substituted a tribal for a national affiliation in the hopes of participating in and gaining access to the dominant culture, but in the process relinquished their commitment to a life grounded in Jewish forms of belonging. Channeling Kafka, the writer views this neglect as a sin that is transmitted downward, involuntarily inherited, by no wrongdoing on one's own part. Kafka must therefore be forgiven for something that he himself has not done but that he must suffer and in which he is deeply implicated, as the paternal sin shapes his (in)capacity to receive and embrace the religious tradition of his ancestors.

Confirmation for this sentiment is found in a sustained meditation on the family's religiosity in the *Brief an den Vater*. Kafka laments the dearth of spiritual nourishment he received as a child, complaining at one point about the shallowness of his father's Judaism and how he failed to convey any sense of its worth. He writes, "I could not understand how, with the insignificant scrap of Judaism you yourself possessed, you could reproach me for not making an effort…to cling to a similar, insignificant scrap. It was, indeed, so far as I could see, a mere nothing, a joke…"[16] As he indicates elsewhere, the farcical quality of Hermann's Judaism was not merely its perfunctory nature, but also because it was motivated by a desire for social conformity, for keeping up appearances according to the rules of the game of bourgeois

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[15] Walter Sokel, "Franz Kafka as a Jew," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 18.1 (1973): 237. [My italics.]

[16] Franz Kafka, *Letter to His Father/Brief an den Vater*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken, 1970), 77. Bilingual edition. [Hereafter *LTHF*.]

respectability, rather than driven by genuine internal religiosity. Yet from this passage it is clear that Kafka's attempt to reclaim an insignificant heap of Jewish observance exacerbated rather than attenuated the intergenerational struggle that was already taking place in his home. The primal force that historically served to bind the generations has now contributed to their disentanglement and disconnection. If Kafka falls heir to sin by abandonment of *torah*, he also takes on sin for the attempt to recapture some glimmer of it. The venture is ultimately unsuccessful, affirming that an absence of firm Jewish ground under his feet was due to this lack of spiritual foundation in childhood, and that, once deprived of it he was forever so. According to Kafka, the way to the Father is not through the Son (Jn. 14:6) but by the father; one cannot circumvent the law of the paternal hierarchy: "I should have to tell the children that owing to my origin, my education, disposition, and environment I have nothing tangible in common with their faith…"[17]

Without a strong Jewish foundation, other forms of religiosity could and in fact did more easily permeate Kafka's cultural orbit. For example, we learn in the *Tagebücher* that from a young age he read *Die christliche Welt* [*The Christian World*], one of the most formative journals of the time on Protestant life and culture.[18] (That Kafka reads a publication which speaks to issues concerning Protestant Christianity is not only probative for the claim of this chapter, but

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[17] September 16, 1916, in *LF*:502. Kafka is here alluding to the Jewish refugee children from Galicia who were absorbed by the *Jüdisches Volksheim* (founded in 1916), at which Felice worked. Kafka took an ardent interest in her work there, and encouraged her to commit herself to it (Lippman Bodoff, "Letters to Felice—Kafka's Quest for Jewish Identity," *Judaism* 40.3 [1991]: 276-277).

[18] December 30, 1911, in *D*:158-159.

also significant given the predominantly Catholic environment of greater Prague.[19]) As early as 1912 he read the New Testament in German translation, thereafter beginning to think of the concept of a "Bible."[20] As he matured, the content of that reading may have changed but not the form, as he shifted from popular literature and canonical scriptures to works by the masters of Christian existentialism: Augustine, Pascal, Tolstoy, and, perhaps most important to his spiritual development, Kierkegaard.[21] We also learn from the diaries that he had an impactful encounter with a Christian missionary on questions of salvation and grace during a short stay with Brod at the Jungborn spa of Stapelburg, Germany in 1912.[22] Far from the accustomed tendency to avoid proselytizers as if they were asking for spare change, the episode portrays Kafka as a sincere spiritual seeker, tempted by the invitation to conversion even as he ultimately rejects its offer.

This incident points to a larger fact of which we ought to be aware, namely, that in assessing the German-Jewish epoch, the case of Kafka bolsters the notion that "German" and "Jewish" as two ethnic, cultural, and national identity markers are not the only regulative oppositional categories, and are thus insufficient in describing the spiritual dilemma of Jews in

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[19] Notwithstanding Catholicism's predominance, the spirit of Protestantism was not altogether alien to cultural and spiritual life in Prague. A faction of Czech-Jewish intellectuals, for example, were attracted to the *Rozvoj* circle, which called for a return to the values of the Czech Reformation. For a discussion of this movement, see Hillel Kieval, "Nationalism and Anti-Semitism: Czech-Jewish Responses," *Living with Anti-Semitism: Modern Jewish Perspectives*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 221-230.

[20] Thorben Päthe, "Judentum und Christentum—Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede," *Franz Kafka zwischen Judentum und Christentum*, ed. Gernot Wimmer (Würzburg: Königshauses & Neumann, 2012), 98.

[21] Ritchie Robertson, "Kafka as Anti-Christian: 'Das Urteil,' 'Die Verwandlung,' and the Aphorisms," in *A Companion To The Works Of Franz Kafka*, ed. James Rolleston (New York: Camden House, 2002), 101.

[22] July 14, 1912, in *D:*480-481. The unidentified missionary is named "H., land surveyor" [*Landvermesser*], which also happens to be K.'s occupation in *Das Schloss*.

the epoch.[23] We must also consider the "Christian" and "Jewish" in their religious valences as making a certain claim upon individuals. As we know from the history of modern German Jewry, as far back as the cases of the poet Heinrich Heine and the community leader David Friedländer, to be German and to be Christian were often indistinguishable—or, at least, the one was perceived as the gateway to the other.[24]

The passage by Sokel quoted above suggests that Kafka himself was deeply aware that the line between assimilation (a socio-cultural phenomenon) and conversion (a religious phenomenon) was an intimate one indeed. Only the "intercession of a gentile mother"—that is, having not been born a Jew—guarantees the acceptance of the Jew in non-Jewish society; but, as we will see at the same time it is also the precondition for an unconditional embrace of Christianity from which Kafka is ultimately barred. In any event, such a division between these monotheistic forms of faith is refracted for Kafka in the nature of the German language:

> Yesterday it occurred to me that I did not always love my mother as she deserved, and as I could, only because the German language prevented it. The Jewish mother is no Mutter, to call her Mutter makes her a little comic…'Mutter' is peculiarly German for the Jew, it unconsciously contains, together with the Christian splendor [*Glanz*] Christian coldness [*Kälte*] also, the Jewish woman who is called 'Mutter' therefore becomes not only comic but strange… I believe that it is only the memories of the ghetto that still preserve [*erhalten*] the Jewish family, for even the word 'Vater' too is far from meaning the Jewish father.[25]

The appropriation of German-Christian terminology to designate Jewish domestic roles is here a

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[23] Under deconstruction's postulation of the artificiality of binary constructions, some scholars have been compelled to favor a model based on the interdependence and interpenetration of categories. See for example Steven Aschheim, "German History and German Jewry: Junctions, Boundaries, and Interdependencies," in *In Times of Crisis: Essays on European Culture, Germans, and Jews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 86-92.

[24] Discussions of these two different confrontations with conversion to Christianity may be found, respectively, in Jay Geller, *Bestiarium Judaicum: Unnatural Histories of the Jews* (New York; Fordham University Press, 2017), 98, and Michael Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749-1824* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), 57-84.

[25] October 24, 1911, in *D*:88 / *T*:115-116.

function of the post-emancipation era, part of a general collective effort to reduce cultural distinctions in the hopes of social integration. Yet Kafka demonstrates an alertness to the fact that this adoption belies a cultural, linguistic, and religious clash, that is, that German cannot adequately express the full gravity of the meaning of Jewish maternalism—ideally construed as affectionate in contrast to Christian dispassionateness. Kafka is thus faced with a situation in which he, on the one hand, cannot but speak German and yet, on the other, cannot but recognize its incapacity to capture the specificities and texture of Jewish experience.[26] The circumstances of his history, however, tip the scales towards Christian frigidity: that the 1919 letter is addressed to *der Vater* reflects the absence of Jewishness both in his upbringing and in his father's character.

That Kafka himself constructs a contrastive relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and even suggests that personality is to some extent determined by the religious mode to which one adheres, bears consequences for our understanding of just who exactly he is. Indeed, much thought has been given to the issue of Kafka's identity, both in terms of his own self-understanding as well as the overall direction to which his life and work point. The urgency of the question is due in part to the simple historical datum that his identity is overdetermined, a kind of tribute of various ethnic, religious, and cultural streams; and in part to the fact that the ethnic, racial, and national dimensions of artists and their work have over the last few decades acquired a stressed hermeneutical cache, especially with respect to discerning the meaning and

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[26] Sokel figures the division as one "between the official, assimilated Germanized surface consciousness and the true but merged psyche of Westernized Jews to which he and his family belong" ("Kafka as a Jew," *New Literary History* 30.4 [1999]: 848). While the distinction he draws is correct, the model is not. This "vertical" construction, with its binaries of latent-manifest and inauthentic-authentic, ought to be replaced with a horizontal one, which would do more justice to the oppositions between which Kafka must negotiate, and the ambivalence he feels toward them.

intention of an artwork.[27] Pertinent to this discussion, a significant body of Kafka reception is dedicated to locating the precise nature and extent of his Jewish identity, and the trend tends to claim that he was either affirming of such, or at least that he was on the way to doing so.[28] That Kafka's writings should be read within the continuum of Jewish literature was first ratified by Gershom Scholem, who at one time understood the author as taking up the Jobean inquiry into divine justice, at another time as formulating a new iteration of Kabbala.[29] Importantly, this identification of Kafka with Jewishness also includes what is in reality his all-too tentative and conflicted position on Zionism, either as a general principle of Jewish sovereignty or his own physical resettlement on which he vacillated throughout his adult years.[30] Along with these

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[27] These include German, Czech, and Austrian. For an interesting discussion of the last category, simply because it so infrequently associated with Kafka, see Julius Herz, "Franz Kafka and Austria: National Background and Ethnic Identity," *Modern Austrian Literature* 11.3/4 (1978): 301-318.

[28] Notable examples of this line of thought include Arnold Band, "The Margins of Assimilation," *Modern Judaism* 8.2 (1988): 139-155; Helen Milfull, "Franz Kafka—The Jewish Context," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 23.1 (1978): 227-238; Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron Feldman (Schocken: New York, 2007), 275-298; Iris Bruce, "Kafka and Jewish Folklore," *The Cambridge Companion to Franz Kafka*, ed. Julian Preece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 150-168; Scott Spector, *Modernism Without Jews? German-Jewish Subjects and Histories*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), chs. 7-9; Vivian Liska, *When Kafka Says We: Uncommon Communities in German-Jewish Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); and David Suchoff, *Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2011).

[29] "Ich finde den "Prozeß" von absoluter Großartigkeit, es ist die erste Rekonstruktion der Welt des Buches Hiob, die seitdem einem Menschen, und natürlich nur einem Juden, aufgegangen ist" (Gershom Scholem, *Briefe 1914-1947*, ed. Itta Shedletzky [Munich: Beck, 1994], 235, cited in Ritchie Robertson, "Kafka und das Christentum," *Der Deutschunterricht* 50 (1998): 60). For Scholem's linkage of Kafka with Jewish mysticism, see Horwitz, "Kafka and the Crisis in Jewish Religious Thought," 23. For a more recent attempt to track a literary tradition arising from the Book of Job, see Susan Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), ch. 5.

[30] A fascinating yet rather distorted example is Felix Weltsch, "The Rise and Fall of the Jewish-German Symbiosis," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 1.1 (1956): 255-276. It may be argued that Weltsch, a member of *Der Prager Kreis* who later emigrated to Palestine, projected his Zionist leanings onto the case of Kafka. In Kafka's own writings substantial and sustained reflections on the question of *Aliyah* may be found in *LF*:208, 501 and *LFFE*:373. On this question the evidence tips in favor of the claim that, for Kafka, moving to Palestine was the "stuff of dreams" (March 9, 1921, in *Letters to Ottla and the Family*, ed. N.N. Glatzer [New York: Schocken, 1982], 63).

unilateral predications, there have also been numerous attempts to situate Kafka between Judaism and some other force that made a claim on his being. For example, in different ways Harold Bloom and Walter Sokel figure Kafka as torn between the demands of Judaism and Gnostic theology, while Robert Alter, reading through the lens of two of Kafka's earliest readers, Scholem and Walter Benjamin, understands the author as negotiating between a reclaimed adherence to a Jewish tradition and the inexorable sweep of modern secularism threatening to relegate it to the dustbin of history.[31]

That *Judentum* broadly construed was one of Kafka's main preoccupations is indisputable. However, there are three limitations to the predication of Jewishness to his work: the first is that, excepting a few scattered allusions, there is hardly any invocation of anything pertinent to Judaism throughout the fictional corpus. If it is so important to him, so this logic goes, why is it not explicitly thematized? Working strictly within the confines of the text, then,

[31] Harold Bloom, *The Strong Light of the Canonical: Kafka, Freud, and Scholem as Revisionists of Jewish Culture and Thought* (New York: CUNY Press, 1987); Walter Sokel, "Between Gnosticism and Jehovah: The Dilemma in Kafka's Religious Attitude," *South Atlantic Review* 50.1 [1985]: 3-22; Robert Alter, *Necessary Angels: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Whereas Bloom's reading stresses Kafka's uninterpretability, Sokel is interested in Kafka's oscillation between worldly affirmation and negation (most concretely expressed in the conflict between the desire to wed and the need to write in isolation), as well as in his avowed theological positions. What both critics share in common is the conviction that readings of Kafka are not bound to what he himself read—that is, they do not need Kafka to be familiar with Jewish mystical texts in order to further their interpretive claims.

identifying authorial commitments on the basis of textual evidence may be a bridge too far.[32] A preferred and surer interpretive key would be that which the text indicates to us. Second, with respect to the circumscribed issue of tribal affiliation, Kafka is at best ambivalent; he does not in fact devote much time writing about it, nor does he anywhere emphatically express an unqualified sense of belonging to the Jewish people.[33] What he spends much more time on both quantitatively and qualitatively, and what the reader feels is of utmost urgency to him, is the sorting out of religious matters and where he stands on them.

Yet most importantly, the attempt to ensconce Kafka merely within the Jewish camp does not take into account the Christian strain evident throughout his corpus. An ironic feature of Kafka reception is that critics who are most eager to advance a Jewish reading of the author are oftentimes those who, in so doing, employ terminology borrowed from the Christian theological tradition. For example, Sokel speaks of both the "Fall" and of a "sinfulness without fault" to describe a feature of Kafka's religious outlook on the one hand and his critique of Western Jewry on the other.[34] Benjamin, the Jewish Marxist ostensibly de-theologizing Kafka over against

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[32] On this question Brod's remark begs the question: "Although the word Jew [*Jude*] never appears in his works, they belong to the most Jewish documents of our time" ("Unsere Literaten und die Gemeinschaft," *Der Jude* I,7 [1916]: 464, cited in Geller, *Bestiarium Judaicum*, 58). Tracing the impact of Kafka's writings on modern Hebrew literature, Gershon Shaked acknowledges the radical disjunction on the topic of Jewishness between the fiction and the non-fiction. He accounts for it by the genetic-structuralist method of Lucien Goldmann, which argues for a "homology" between the structure of fictional works with the mental structures of certain social groups. This hermeneutic assumes that because Jewish matters pervade the diaries and letters, they must also be operative in the fiction—albeit in hidden and transposed form. Apart from its deterministic and particularistic bent, the homological approach neither fully addresses the reason for why such a transposition is necessary in the first place, nor spells out the rules for revealing the latent ("Kafka, Jewish Heritage, and Hebrew Literature," in *The Shadows Within: Essays on Modern Jewish Writers* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987], 3-11).

[33] This reservation is perhaps best encapsulated in a diary entry after attending a lecture given by Martin Buber in Prague in 1914 to the Bar Kochba Group, a fraternity dedicated to promoting the aims of cultural Zionism: "What have I in common with Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself and should stand very quietly in a corner, content that I can breathe" (January 8, 1914, in *D*:252).

[34] Sokel, "Between Gnosticism and Jehovah," 13; Sokel, "Franz Kafka as a Jew," 237.

Scholem, writes that the accusation towards sons of original sin [*Erbsünde*] is a common theme of the stories.[35] Hans-Joachim Schoeps, meanwhile, depicts the world of Kafka's work as one in which guilt without the possibility of salvation is an inescapable reality—a conviction that aligns quite neatly with Luther's portrayal of the sinner's life under the constant threat of the Hidden God.[36] As part of her attempt to fit Kafka into a tradition of Jewish theodicean thinking extending back to Job, Margarete Susman even utilizes the term *Deus absconditus* to encapsulate the theological condition facing modern man out of which Kafka writes.[37]

Yet the blindness to these Christian categories by those who invoke them, and the avoidance of thinking through their ramifications for an understanding of Kafka, is also characteristic of critics who place the author's import beyond mere *Judentum*. While Alfred Kazin, for instance, identifies Kafka's singular literary achievement as tapping into and bluntly portraying the universal human condition of metaphysical alienation, not only does he characterize the narrative thrust of his work as a series of failures to achieve divine "grace," but also links Kafka's theological sensibility to Blaise Pascal.[38] Moreover, in an otherwise fascinating discussion of *Der Prozeß* as a parody of Austrian legal procedures and assumptions

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[35] Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 2007), 114 / "Franz Kafka: Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), II-2:412. Furthermore, Kafka's work for Benjamin represents a world in which life is declared guilty—a sentiment shared with Christianity (Michael Mack, "Between Kant and Kafka: Benjamin's Notion of Law," *Neophilologus* 85 [2001]: 258-262).

[36] Weltsch, 268. Schoeps perceives "sin without salvation" to be a Jewish theological concept. However, not only does the pairing evoke a Christian soteriological framework, but salvation is part and parcel of the Messianic longing expressed as far back as the prophetic writings.

[37] Margarete Susman, "Franz Kafka," *Jewish Frontier Anthology: 1956-1967* (New York: Shulsinger, 1967), 328.

[38] Alfred Kazin, "Kafka," in *The Inmost Leaf: A Selection of Essays* (New York: Noonday, 1959), 142-148.

of criminality, Theodore Ziolkowski neglects to connect the notion of "guilt without illegality" to Christian notions of original sin.[39]

These critical oversights thus beg the question of the degree to which Christian frameworks of meaning map onto Kafka's creations. Such an inquiry would not exactly be unprecedented, nor without its precursors: ironically, it was the Jewish theologian Martin Buber who first adopted this lens, claiming that Kafka's works dramatize the Pauline outlook of a damned, unredeemed world.[40] Buber is correct in pointing out that Kafka does not wholeheartedly adopt Paul's scheme due to his rejection of the Savior—indeed, to his rejection on spiritual grounds of a Savior in general—but he misses the literary and religious significance of the fact that it is the figure of the *Son* whom Kafka repudiates. More recently, Ritchie Robertson has been the most vocal proponent of reading Kafka in light of Christian thought, taking seriously and at face value not only the author's immersion in Christian sources, but also the Christian imagery that appears ubiquitously throughout his work.[41] The following analysis intends to build on Kafka's critique of Christianity of which Robertson's exposition laid the foundations, supplementing the latter's focus on the former's attitude towards the body—

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[39] Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Mirror of Justice: Literary Reflections of Legal Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 215-240. For a rather different approach to Kafka on the question of law, specifically with respect to contemporary continental philosophy, see Vivian Liska, *German-Jewish Thought and Its Afterlife* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), especially chs. 4-6.

[40] Mendes-Flohr, "Martin Buber and the Metaphysicians of Contempt," in *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and The Experience of Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 164. As Mendes-Flohr explains, Buber sees Kafka as reflective of the era's gnostic spirit of denying the fundamental goodness of creation—a temptation to which he claims Christianity is always in danger of succumbing on account of Paul's rejection of the God of the Jews. While Buber nevertheless maintains that Kafka is not shorn of trust or hope, thereby affirming however tentatively the God of creation, he does not delve into how these categories operate within the stories.

[41] Another recent reader of Kafka, Jill Robbins, is interested in Kafka's stance vis-à-vis Jewish and Christian hermeneutical models, but only to conclude that he privileges the midrashic over *figura* (*Prodigal Son/Elder Brother*, ch. 3).

especially vis-à-vis the spirit—with one that evinces the bearing of Christian theological lucubration on Kafka's depictions of father-son relations. Furthermore, it aims to underline a feature of Kafka's distinctive religious outlook that is at best muted in Robertson's accounts, namely, the ambivalence with which Kafka approaches the question of Christianity, his ability to both appropriate and reject elements of its spiritual vision.

II. *Paradoxe Theologie*

Kafka's religious sensibility is no exception to the rule of elusiveness that surrounds his writings, so any determination as to its substance must be cautious and circumscribed. It is Frank Möbus who steers us in the right direction, claiming that Kafka manages to formulate a "paradoxical theology" that creates out of both the Jewish and Christian traditions.[42] By the use of this modifier Möbus calls attention to Kafka's delicate achievement of constructing an idiosyncratic religious fabric out of dissonant strands of thought. Yet Kafka's theology is "paradoxical" in another sense, namely, in its simultaneous affirmation and rejection of key principles belonging to each thread. In other words, Kafka is no mild syncretist, cherry picking components that delight his fancy, but instead makes definitive resolutions about inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, only by incorporating this second meaning of the paradox does that of Möbus come into view, for oftentimes Kafka's embrace of a teaching from the one entails a rejection of that from the other, and vice versa.

It is the exclusive dimension of Kafka's outlook to which we must pay extra attention, for just as the mind is more bent on discovering similarity than difference, so too does it more easily

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[42] Frank Möbus, *Sünden-Fülle. Die Geschlechtlichkeit in Erzählungen Franz Kafkas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1994), 47, cited in Robertson, "Kafka und das Christentum," 61.

see adoption than eschewal. In fact, the repudiative tendency in Kafka's thought forces us to qualify the assertions by Möbus that Judaism and Christianity are the sources out of which his theology develops, and that such work should be deemed "creative." Such caution is based on the fact that, as he confesses in the *Oktavhefte* written between 1917 and 1919, Kafka outright rejected the belief in a personal God,[43] the reality of a Messianic figure,[44] and his personal incapacity for neighborly love[45]—all three of which strike at the doctrinal core of both monotheistic faiths. These examples thus serve to remind us that as much as Kafka distanced himself philosophically from both Judaism and Christianity, he just as much drew spiritual sustenance from their wells.[46]

The most striking point of contact between Kafka and Christianity lies with the stress placed on the hidden deity and its relationship to individuals. God's remoteness seems to be essential to Kafka's religious universe, the preoccupation with which extends as far back as the correspondence with Felice: "How devout [*Frömmigkeit*] are you? You go to the synagogue; but I dare say you have not been recently. And what is it that sustains you, the idea of Judaism or of God? Are you aware, and this is the most important thing, of a continuous relationship between yourself and a reassuringly, if possibly infinite height or depth [*unendlichen Höhe oder Tiefe*]."[47] Kafka's *Deus absconditus* is always remote from the affairs of man, metaphysically and

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[43] "Man cannot live without a permanent trust in something indestructible in himself, though both the indestructible element and the trust may remain permanently hidden from him. One of the ways in which this hiddenness can express itself is through faith in a personal God" (*BON*:29).

[44] "The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary…" (*BON*:28).

[45] "The distance to my fellow man [*Nebenmenschen*] is for me a very long one" (*BON*:59 / *NSF* II:112).

[46] Robertson, "Kafka as Anti-Christian," 102.

[47] February 9-10, 1913, in *LF*:185-186 / *BaF*:598.

emotionally out of reach. This theological feature appears in varying levels of literality across his major fiction: *Der Prozeß, Das Schloß*, "Das Urteil," and "Die Verwandlung." Interweaving itself throughout these works are failed attempts on the part of individuals to commune with distant figures of authority. Whether it be Josef K. in *The Trial* seeking the higher court of appeals or K. in *The Castle* demanding explanation for his purpose in the village, Kafka's characters stand in relation to a higher power that simultaneously maintains his remoteness from them, thus causing a deep sense of personal disorientation. Kafka's portrayals of these dynamics are founded on the idea that even though the character may be said to have a relationship with this entity and interact with him in crucial ways, the latter never stands in intimate communion with the former—is never "present" to him as a caring and understanding figure—a condition which makes psychological if not existential instability constitutive of the subordinate's life.

In these stories of Kafka's, the source of much of the strife between these hierarchical figures, and the emotional suffering attendant upon the inferior that comes in its wake, consists in the inability to fulfill and remain in accordance with the superior's law, defined in essence as the sum total of his expectations for how things ought to be and proceed on the pecking order. The superior's rule is a reign of justice untempered by mercy that engenders fear and guilt feelings on the one hand and the drive for approval on the other, both of which, in an ever exacerbating spiral, contribute to and result from the inevitable failure to be in compliance. Whether because of insurmountable features intrinsic to the relation, a characterological incompatibility, the impotence of the one or the oppressiveness of the other, the inferior never securely attains the favor of the superior. We see this in rather poignant fashion in the tales that portray the unraveling relationships between fathers and sons, the former of whom are endowed with divine-

like features or status. For example, Gregor Samsa's transformation and its consequent handicaps are a source of great disappointment to his father, who is repeatedly repulsed by his attempts at domestic intimacy. The wound inflicted by the apple core that Mr. Samsa chucks at his son is meant to symbolize the rotten and irremediable scar of rejection. "The Judgment" similarly ends with the pain and life-negating power of paternal abandonment, intensified by an unrequited affection that Georg Bendemann holds for his father and expresses right before his suicide: "'Dear parents, I have always loved you, all the same,' and let himself drop."[48]

The relationship between the law and the guilt that arises from its disobedience is a shared concern among Kafka and the Pauline tradition of thought. Romans 5:13 asks followers to adhere to the contradictory teaching that, irrespective of the law, sin is an anthropological inheritance transmitted from the fall, as well as to the idea that sin does not exist without the "law" (i.e., the set of divinely-revealed commandments)—that the law in its theological function makes sin known.[49] Through different rhetorical modes Kafka demonstrates a similar paradoxical avowal of both principles. With regard to his adherence to the essential priority of original sin, two lines from the *Oktavhefte* might as well have been excerpted from the epistolary canon:

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[48] Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1971), 88.

[49] The problem, in other words, is whether it is Eden or Sinai that is the decisive event for our understanding of the relationship between law and sin. One could attempt to resolve the aporia by arguing that the fall, too, was the result of disobeying a divine command, but Luther does not regard this particular and individual prohibition as part of the law eternally binding upon believers. Moreover, sin would lose both its explanatory and primary power and be relegated to the status of mere function or epiphenomenon. Alternatively, one could claim that the significance of Sinai consists in the disclosure of a pre-existing condition of sinfulness, rendering the event as much the revelation of divine law as it is the revelation of sin. The problem, however, is that Luther insists that sin is not eradicated even with justification (i.e., the pardoning for failure to observe the law). Sin thus remains even after the imputation of grace, implying that it exists outside the law.

> The state in which we are is sinful, irrespective of guilt. [*Sündig ist der Stand in dem wir uns befinden, unabhängig von Schuld*.]
>
> We are separated from God on two sides: the Fall separates us from Him, the Tree of Life separates Him from us.[50]

On the other hand, in Kafka's narratives the law has an originating function; guilt cannot be thought apart from or outside it, but only on its basis. The major stories always operate within this framework of law or its purported violation: Josef K. awakens to discover that he is under arrest, without knowing why and without having committed any discernible or concrete crime. Similarly, K. arrives to the village with a legal mandate from the castle, but the story never specifies what he has done in order to be unable to establish contact with it. If some kind of guilt is incurred in the process, it is by virtue of working within or against the originary law imposed from above—not on account of any prior and identifiable wrongdoing. This literary datum begs the question of the source of or reason for the protagonist's guilt, and thus the cause of the disconnect between the entities on the hierarchy that he attempts to overcome by his own efforts. Seeking to satisfy their desire for justice and intelligibility, a group of critics have taken this bait and offered untenable explanations: at least in the context of *The Trial*, they point to a supervening feature whereby Josef K.'s blunders and oversights in the body of the work somehow indicate or confirm guilt.[51] We cannot ascertain whether Kafka's universe is subject to a rational and logical order; what we *do* know is that the imposition of law in Kafka's narratives

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[50] *BON*:37 / *NSF* II:72.

[51] For Robertson, Schreiner, and Buber, Josef K.'s guilt lies in a kind of tragic hubris, an incapacity to seek repentance and forgiveness, and a blindness to his existential shortcomings (Robertson, *Judaism, Politics, Literature*, ch. 3; Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, ch. 5; Buber, *The Knowledge of Man,* 130-138). The problem with these rationalizations is that they assume a guilt that they cannot name. Alternatively, Nahum Glatzer posits that the denial and mistrust of the law is the shortcoming of Kafka's protagonists. The characters' defiance is certainly at play, but his claim misses the narrative dynamic that their desire to be in accord with the law is matched only by the law's rejection of their aspirations ("Franz Kafka and The Tree of Knowledge," in *Essays in Jewish Thought* [Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009], 184-191).

culminates in guilt (and ultimately, damnation), both of which prevent recognition and mutual acceptance between father and son, the divine and the human.

This is all to suggest that the world of Kafka's fiction is one governed indivisibly by the *Deus absconditus*. With the awareness that any immediate confrontation with such a deity will inevitably end with the sinner's damnation, Christianity resolves this theological intractability by the invocation of the *Deus revelatus* and the redemptive promise of justification by means of the Son, no such options exist within Kafka's ambit—a denial which, at least tentatively and negatively, reinstates him in the Jewish camp. Across his works appears the motif of irreconcilability, that is, that father and son are always in a state of disunity, which eschews Christianity's emphasis on the eternal unity of Father and Son, God and Christ, and thus by extension the possibility for the individual sinner to be redeemed and approved by the merciful gift of divine grace. As mentioned above, the divine figure in Kafka's stories never shows an alternative visage than that of remote and crushing power, but neither does it extend the possibility of recourse to a saving intercessor. In religious matters, Kafka despises the idea of a mediator who intervenes to remedy a situation.[52] Justification for him does not come from an external source outside the self; man must vindicate himself by way of his own sincere and dignified work in the world: "No one creates more here than his spiritual basis of life; the fact that it seems as though he were working for his food, clothing, and so on, is beside the point, for together with each visible morsel he receives also an invisible one, with each visible garment also an invisible garment, and so on. That is every human being's justification

[52] Robertson, "Kafka und das Christentum," 67.

[*Rechfertigung*]."[53] This wariness towards surrogates is insinuated rather forcefully during a pivotal scene in *The Trial,* during which a corn merchant named Block is depicted as sub-human due to his absolute dependence on his defense lawyer: "Such a person was no longer a client, he was the lawyer's dog. If the lawyer had ordered him to crawl under the bed, as if going into a kennel, and bark, he would have done so with pleasure."[54] The genuflecting Block is meant to deride those penitents who, in a kind of bad faith, outsource the work of exoneration to a third party.

If Kafka rejects the logic of justification, one might think that he rejects the Son *tout court.* After all, it is Christ who assumes the central role in the process of the imputation of grace, and who thereby reconciles son to Father. Like the *Brief*, Kafka's fiction certainly lends this impression: the sons of his stories are portrayed as powerless against their fathers, whether literal or metaphorical. And unlike Christ, their deaths or defeats are not construed as sacrifices, as compensations for some higher purpose or good. Kafka's non-fiction, however, tells a more ambivalent and perplexing story:

> The Messiah will come as soon as the most unbridled individualism is possible in faith—as soon as nobody destroys this possibility and nobody tolerates that destruction, that is, when the graves open. And this is perhaps the Christian doctrine, both in the actual demonstration of the example for emulation, an individualistic example, and also in the symbolic demonstration of the resurrection of the Mediator in the individual human being.[55]

On the one hand, this passage declares that the arrival of the Messiah is contingent not upon faith in Christ, but on the belief in one's self. In other words, that each person is his own redeemer obviates and obsoletes the need for and stress on a personal Redeemer. On the other hand, Kafka

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[53] *BON*:52 / *NSF* II:99.

[54] Kafka, *The Trial,* 139.

[55] *BON*:27.

acknowledges that this exhortation for unbridled individualism is most closely instantiated in Christianity and in the paradigmatic life of its central figure. Kafka is by no means the first to argue either for the superiority of Christianity as a mode of faith, or that Christ is that person most worthy of emulation. Instead, the radicality of the passage, aside from the fact these are the lines of a conscious Jew, lies in the claim that faith in self *is* the core truth of Christian teaching. Christ's message is not that we follow him, but that he followed himself so that we may follow ourselves. *Imitatio Christi*, the long-standing theological tenet, is only important as a propaedeutic to *imitatio sui*.

Christ's individualism is no doubt exemplary, but so too is his suffering:

> We too must suffer the suffering all around us. Christ suffered [*gelitten*] for mankind, but mankind must suffer [*leiden*] for Christ. We all have not *one* body, but we have *one* way of growing, and this leads us through all anguish, whether in this or in that form. Just as the child develops [*entwickelt*] through all the stages of life right into old age and to death…so also do we develop…through all the sufferings of this world. There is no justice in this context, but neither is there any room either for fear of suffering or for the interpretation of suffering as a merit [*Verdienstes*].[56]

Here Kafka heightens our relation to Christ by coupling the exemplar-emulator model with one of reciprocity: just as Christ suffered for us, so ought we to suffer for him. In so urging, Kafka advances a conception of meaningful suffering that is ostensibly absent from his fiction.[57] Kafka shares Christianity's identification of the reason for and object of suffering, adding that only through suffering does one's life truly *progress*. However, as the last sentence emphasizes,

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[56] *BON*:49 / *NSF* II:93-94.

[57] Robertson marks this passage as a departure from Christianity, but the relativization of Christ's suffering is wholly in keeping with Christian teaching ("Kafka as Anti-Christian," 119).

Kafka's meaningful suffering is dissociated from Christianity's proffering of a blessed afterlife; the suffering one endures in the here and now does not point to bliss in the hereafter.[58]

Given his penchant for irony, Kafka's own remarks on his religious identity must be taken seriously but not without a grain of salt. The following excerpt both confirms and distorts our findings: "I have not been guided into life by the hand of Christianity—admittedly now slack and failing—as Kierkegaard was, and have not caught the hem of the Jewish prayer shawl—now flying away from us—as the Zionists have. I am an end or a beginning [*Ich bin Ende oder Anfang*]."[59] It attests to a regnant impulse within Kafka's thought, namely, that it is much readier to define itself and its commitments by what it opposes.[60] With its resounding echo of Rev. 22:13, however, what this passage dissimulates is that he also drew from that which he purports to reject. After all, that he *is* an end or a beginning implies a positive, constructive product. Judaism and its treasury of sources was indeed for Kafka a point of departure, one from which, as his study of Hebrew in the last years of his life suggest, he never departed; but it is through the lens of Christian teaching, both for and against, that we see the whole gamut of his thought. For without a view towards Christianity, we would altogether miss or ignore the significance of the S/son in Kafka's writings.

Determining exactly what or where Kafka is can only be the fruit of speculation. Neither fitting in completely with Kierkegaard nor the Zionists, perhaps he is in between them; drawing from both yet unable to feel at home in either, he has come adrift in a theological no man's land.

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[58] See also *BON*:43: "Only here is suffering suffering. Not in such a way as if those who suffer here were because of this suffering to be elevated elsewhere, but in such a way that what in this world is called suffering in another world, unchanged and only liberated from its opposite, is bliss."

[59] *BON*:52 / *NSF* II:99.

[60] Robertson, "Kafka as Anti-Christian," 120.

Kafka, then, represents the *Ende* of unconditional allegiance to a religious and cultural tradition, and the *Anfang* of a new model of religious identity and formation, one which is double in both its sources (Jewish and Christian) and its postures (appropriation and refusal). To be an end *or* a beginning is to be a middle.

III. *Ewige Kinderzeit* [Eternal Childhood][61]

The previous sections plumbed Kafka's highly nuanced negotiation of Judaism and Christianity both in his life and in his writings. It attempted to show that his theological engagement with these discrete modes of faith center on their respective attitudes concerning the nature and function of Father and Son, and how they each relate both to each other and to human beings. The following section will suggest that these more philosophical explorations should not be thought apart from Kafka's trials with his own father.

One of life's most dispiriting mysteries consists in a certain blindness possessed by exceptional individuals. Often an ironic situation is encountered in which they either cannot recognize the gift with which they are endowed, or cannot internalize the recognition conferred upon them by others. The talent, which should be an invaluable source of pride and self-worth, is shrouded by a debilitating cover of insecurity and self-deprecation. Such an infirmity affects artists in particular, and is certainly the case with our present subject. His life curtailed at the age of forty, Kafka did not live long enough to see the formative impact he would have on subsequent twentieth-century literature (along with film, painting, television, and theater). But judging from the highly confessional letters and diary entries he bequeathed to us, we have every

[61] October 18, 1921, in *T*:866.

reason to believe that such influence would not have mattered in the slightest with regard to his self-esteem. Perhaps this self-disparagement inadvertently functioned to keep Kafka humble, even acted as the condition for the possibility of his writing. But it is indisputable that it was no rhetorical ploy in the service of an artistic persona—it genuinely existed, and crippled every aspect of his life: "[I]n all these relations I have not acquitted myself well, and moreover I have failed in such a fashion…as has no one else around me. At bottom it is only that child's idea: 'No one is as bad as I am,' which later, when corrected, only produces a new pain."[62]

That Kafka's troubled relationship with his father extending back to childhood may lie at the root of this self-understanding has become a standard line in the reception history, an acute connection first introduced by his close friend, confidante, and literary executor Max Brod. Justly and unjustly his reputation has been tarnished over time, due both on account of his understanding of the thrust of Kafka's work,[63] as well as for the legal debacle he set in motion over the proper inheritor of Kafka's literary estate.[64] Nevertheless, in addition to courageously betraying Kafka's dying wish to have his writings consigned to the flames, Brod also wrote the first biography on the author—an indispensable font of information not only because he is the only chronicler of Kafka's in the privileged position of contemporary, but also because he is

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[62] Kafka to Brod, mid-November 1917, in *LFFE*:166.

[63] Walter Benjamin is one of the earliest and harshest critics of Brod's biography of Kafka. His objection focuses on Brod's hagiographical presentation of his subject as well as his deafness in registering the tone of hopelessness in Kafka's fiction. The veneration of Benjamin in academic circles has virtually given him the last word on these issues. For his criticisms see *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*, *1932-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem (New York: Schocken, 1989), 220-226.

[64] The drawn-out legal battle between Germany and Israel over the rightful heir of the documents concluded in Israel's favor. The estate, which also includes the Brod archive, is now housed at the National Library in Israel. For a thorough albeit slightly skewed treatment of the trial, see Hilo Glazer, "A Final Note From Kafka, a Trove of Manuscripts, and a Trial That Left an Israeli Heiress 'Destitute,'" *Haaretz*, February 18, 2017.

someone who knew him intimately extending back to their shared years at the University of Prague (beginning in 1902).[65]

Brod was not simply a close observer of Kafka but someone who sensitively attempted to identify the cause of the latter's lack of self-confidence. The etiology he develops in the first chapter of his biography centers on Kafka's filial predicament and its fatefully demoralizing impact: "All his life Franz was overshadowed [*im Schatten*] by the figure of his powerful and extraordinarily imposing father…"[66] This "imposition" was registered most severely in Hermann's preternaturally stern temperament and regularly abrasive criticisms of his son, both of which came to be felt as an enormous burden and precipitated an excessive self-loathing.[67] To invert the common adage, we only *get hurt by* the ones we love: the onerous reaction to such paternal censure can only become intelligible by factoring in Franz's "*unendlich*" admiration for his father.[68] Indeed, driven by love Kafka undertook a series of ultimately unsuccessful attempts to win his father's recognition, for the approval of his deeds and his being was an existential necessity. Each failure resulted simultaneously in disappointment and a renewed longing for satisfaction, yet eventually spiraled downward in an ever vicious cycle. Brod believes that Hermann's inability to grant his son's primary wish emerged out of a fundamental inability to

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[65] More than once the case has been made that the *Tintenzettel* (the scrap of paper on which Kafka wrote his final testament) is either staged or insincere, the argument for which is rehearsed in a relatively recent biography by Nicholas Murray (*Kafka* [London: Little Brown, 2004], 347-349). Intention aside, Brod must be eternally thanked either for his disloyalty or for picking up on the hint.

[66] Max Brod, *Kafka: A Biography* (New York: Schocken, 1960), 4-5 / *Über Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt: Fischer Bücherei, 1966), 13.

[67] Brod, *Kafka*, 22.

[68] Brod, *Über Franz Kafka,* 13.

understand his individual character and its specific needs, the blindness to which constituted his son's deepest "wound."[69]

For Brod, Kafka's predicament is at one and the same time a test case and a parable supporting an incipient conception of human development. His theory is both descriptive and partly normative, both psychological and philosophical. Brod argues that life consists of a series of conflicts one encounters, a set of resistances one comes up against.[70] The first round, the bout with one's parents, is the most consequential because it exemplifies and is recapitulated by the others; in a kind of temporal recurrence of the same, the course and results of the first trial prefigure those of all subsequent ones. Kafka never grew out of the childhood phase insofar as its outcome left an indelible scarring imprint in him, thereby altogether affecting the perception of himself and the way he carried himself in the world. In order to avoid this permanent stagnation and successfully traverse the stages, Brod beautifully underscores the deep-seated need of human beings to be affirmed by their surroundings: "*Nur dann kann sich die Seele zu ihren sublimen und unalltäglichen Fähigkeiten entfalten, wenn sie Vertrauen spürt, das ihr entgegenbracht wird*."[71] Without a sense that the faith one has in others is not reciprocated, in the absence of a feeling that one is neither understood nor accepted in his innermost being, the soul breaks down, bereft of the power to confront life's challenges.

If one finds Brod's theory dubious on account of its monocausal thrust, there are still compelling examples from Kafka's own hand that testify to his attunement to the source of his

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[69] Ibid., 23.

[70] "[D]*ie Eltern das erste Problem sind, das dem Kinde entgegentritt, der erste Widerstand, mit dem es sich auseinandersetzen muß…*" (Brod, *Über Franz Kafka*, 36).

[71] Ibid., 38.

despondency. In a diary entry from the summer of 1916, for example, he attributes his indecisiveness to "childishness [*Knabenhaftigkeit*], a will broken [*gebrochener*] by your father."[72] Similarly, in the winter of 1921 he remarks that "as a child I had been defeated [*besiegt worden bin*] by my father."[73] It is perhaps not surprising that these asides were composed towards the end of his life, when his illness exacted a greater physical and emotional toll and the premonition intensified that it was insurmountable. As Kafka learned from reading Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, the whole of a life comes into view with greater visibility when death looms large; with greater visibility one comes to understand the forces that directed him, the law-like patterns that gave his life its meaningful unity.[74]

The onset of death appears to have brought Kafka epistemic clarity, yet so too did it induce a greater desire to speak about the roots of his forlornness. With the exception of the final years of his life Kafka's personal writings are curiously marked by a continuous expression of such crippling emotions as terror, guilt, loneliness, restlessness and indecision, yet bear little trace of sustained inquiry into whence they derive. Compounding this mystery, it remains unclear whether he could draw a straight line from effect to cause only at the end, or whether he was attuned to the connection much earlier but simply could not communicate his findings out of fear or shame. A text that highlights the significance of this question is found in a 1913 letter to his publisher at Rowohlt Verlag regarding the proper title of a new volume of his writings: '"The Stoker,' *The Metamorphosis*...and 'The Judgment' belong together, both inwardly and outwardly.

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[72] August 27, 1916, in *D*:369 / *T*:802. This entry is written within the context of the end of the protracted affair with Felice Bauer, which began back in 1912.

[73] *D*:397; *T*:875.

[74] *D*:398.

There is an obvious connection among the three, and, even more important, a secret one, for which reason I would be reluctant to forgo the chance of having them published together in a book, which might be called *The Sons*."[75] Notwithstanding the fact that the "obvious" connection is far from it (insofar as it is left unstated), the meaning of this passage hinges on the meaning(s) of *Geheimnis*: if the "secret" connection between the three stories is that they all draw on and pertain to Kafka's experience at the hands of his father (which is indexed by the title he insists on using), why must it remain unsaid? After all, to go with "*Die Söhne*" reinscribes as much as it reveals the secret, because what has been announced is merely that a secret exists, and is being intentionally withheld.

It was not until the fall of 1919 that the secret source of Kafka's wound was disclosed in a long letter addressed to his father, in which his domestic situation and the intergenerational dynamics characteristic of it surface.[76] Whenever we deal with materials of a purportedly autobiographic nature, the question inevitably arises as to their historicity. According to the logic of this suspicion, the attempt to construct a literary persona overrides the responsibility to tell the truth about one's life. To be sure, critics have called attention to the rhetorical dimensions of the letter, and even Kafka himself betrays an awareness of its appropriation of certain generic conventions.[77] However, it is important to keep in mind that rhetoric and fiction are not the same

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[75] Kafka to Kurt Wolff, April 11, 1913, in *LFFE*:96.

[76] Much of the letter was written during a period of convalescence at Olga Stüdl's boarding house in Schelesen. The critical context of its composition is Hermann's dual resistance to Kafka's engagement to the Prague Jewess Julie Wohryzek, and his younger sister Ottla's engagement to Josef David, a Catholic doctor (Reiner Stach, *Kafka: The Years of Insight*, trans. Shelley Frisch [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013], 287-293).

[77] In a letter to Milena Pollak, Kafka referred to the letter as a "legal brief" (cited in Stach, *Kafka,* 295). Also, I thank Liliane Weissberg for the insight that letters to one's father was becoming a genre in and of itself around this time.

thing, and that literary devices can just as easily augment veracity as mendacity. Furthermore, even if historical distortions in the account could somehow be proved beyond all reasonable doubt, its sincerity is less important than its authenticity, its truth qua correspondence to reality less urgent than its truth qua self-expression.[78] Granted that it meets this classification, the letter merits consideration to the extent that it rehearses the course of a relationship as it was experienced from his perspective, and thus offers the reader a glimpse into the tortured soul of the writer.

If the letter represents a zone of emotional and psychological authenticity, then it is as much a confession as it is a letter. What that letter confesses is that Kafka's self-definition is bound up with sonship. What is meant here goes beyond the obvious biological relation and into the spiritual; it designates a condition in which the son's essence and self-understanding is bound up with the father who stands over and against him. Furthermore, this identity makes an ultimate claim upon him: it affects every aspect of his life, provides a lens through which to view reality, and determines his earthly destiny. Although this situation is initially imposed by the father, it is, for good and for ill, self-sustained and in the end insurmountable given the dynamics and pressure of the relationship. The subordination that filiality naturally entails does not automatically prevent flourishing. As the letter relates, however, sonship here takes a deleterious turn, such that it prevents the development of a normal sense of self, and manifests itself over a lifetime as a general load of fear, weakness, and self-contempt.

The weight of Hermann's influence upon the son may be glimpsed from the following passage:

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[78] Here I am borrowing Lionel Trilling's operational definitions of these terms as elusively defined in *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

> As the child's life had been spared only by your mercy…it was to be duly lived out as an undeserved present from you. The same can be said of your threats concerning the consequences of disobedience [*Ungehorsams*]. Whenever I embarked on something that you disapproved of and you threatened me with failure, my respect for your opinion was such that my failure became inevitable [*unaufhaltsam*]…The older I grew, the more I provided you with evidence of my worthlessness [*Wertlosigkeit*], gradually you really came, in certain respects, to be right about me. Here I must be careful not to claim that I only became like this because of you; you merely intensified what was already there, but you intensified it greatly, simply because you had so much power over me and used this power to its full extent.[79]

Kafka recapitulates his childhood as marked by an inescapable law in which the elevation of the father invariably entails the diminution of the son; for the father to become everything the son must become nothing. The father's grace and love, rather than freely bestowed, is perceived as a debt beyond compensation; the fact that it is vouchsafed confirms his magnanimity, and the fact that it must be given in the first place confirms the son's sense of his own contemptibility. Furthermore, the need for the father's approval is conditioned by a logic that is not only self-destructive, but is also governed by a self-fulfilling prophecy. The mentioned possibility of failure in the son's endeavors serves to bring them about, in turn both verifying the father's prejudgment and the son's inability to succeed. The son's destiny can be radically altered by the slightest sign of discontentment and disapproval.

Kafka's paternal orientation is also indexed by his regard for his father as a centering figure, a yardstick by which to gauge and make sense of himself and of reality: "Even inside the hut I felt a miserable specimen [*jämmerlich*], and what's more, not only in your eyes but in the eyes of the whole world, for you were for me the measure of all things" [*das Mass aller Dinge*].[80] This anchor is purchased at the expense of self-deprecation: the father is placed at an

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[79] *LTHF*:36-37.

[80] *LTHF*:18-19.

unreachable height, and the height of the father is then unreachable because he is there.[81] Using a similar metaphor, a passage that appears shortly after attests not to the orienting but to the *dis*orienting power that the father possesses: "[T]hese disappointments of the child were not the ordinary disappointments of life but, since they involved you, the all important personage [*alles massgebende Person*], they struck to the very core. Courage, resolution, confidence, delight in this and that, could not last when you were against it, or even if your opposition was merely to be assumed…"[82] Only because the father is involved does he have capacity to amplify the significance of situations that otherwise should not be brooded over, or should simply be treated as stumblings part and parcel of human existence.

With the power to ground the life of his son, it should come as little surprise that the father of the letter is invested with divine-like proportions.[83] The construction of the deity therein is fixed on his legislative functions and potencies. At one point Kafka figures his father sitting in his armchair ruling the world, a basic yet remarkable naturalization of a scriptural trope: the Holy One sitting at his throne of judgment.[84] Yet the father's authority is not merely symbolic: he is the supreme lawgiver, whose rules for the home have the status, gravity, and strictness of commandments: "But for me as a child everything you called out at me was positively a heavenly commandment [*Himmelsgebot*], I never forgot it, it remained for me the most important means of forming a judgment of the world…"[85]

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[81] Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 288.

[82] *LTHF*:22-23.

[83] Heinz Politzer, "Kafka's Letter to His Father," *Germanic Review* 28.3 (1953): 170.

[84] "*In Deinem Lehnstuhl regiertest Du die Welt*" (*LTHF*:20).

[85] *LTHF*:26-27.

Divinely-revealed legislation is generally conceived in positive terms, as a code by which to conduct one's worldly affairs and to judge the behavior of others. Quickly, however, does a legal system of any kind lose its constructive force when it is perceived as overbearing, impossible to execute despite the most willing intentions, and ultimately serving to confirm the wretchedness of the subjected by blurring the line between doing wrong and being wrong. Kafka admits that he never could completely "comply" [*entsprechen*] with the laws under which he was forced to live, the recursive disobedience of which could only be met with a judge's wrathful gaze and give rise to a profound sense of shame: "I was continually in disgrace [*Schande*]; either I obeyed your orders, and that was a disgrace, for they applied, after all, only to me; or I was defiant [*trotzig*], and that was a disgrace too, for how could I presume to defy you; or I could not obey because I did not, for instance, have your strength, your appetite, your skill, although you expected it of me as a matter of course; this was the greatest disgrace of all."[86] To find the approval of the lawgiver was impracticable either because the demand was too exacting, or because he was incapable of satisfaction. In other words, even to fulfill the father's will does not guarantee favor. To make things worse, that the father himself was not bound by his own code did not attenuate Kafka's guilt feelings; it only managed to introduce a measure of hypocrisy and arbitrariness into an already burdensome arrangement.[87]

In his psychological study of Kafka, Josef Rattner develops the concept of the *Ur-situation*, namely, the notion that every individual undergoes an experience in childhood that

[86] *LTHF*:28-29.

[87] *LTHF*:27.

determines the course of his subsequent development.[88] It is the momentous and formative event around which a certain image of the world is fixed and a burgeoning character receives definitive direction. Kafka appears to have located such a primal situation in the following episode:

> There is only one episode in the early years of which I have a direct memory. You may remember it, too. One night I kept on whimpering for water, not, I am certain, because I was thirsty, but probably partly to be annoying, partly to amuse myself. After several vigorous threats had failed to have any effect, you took me out of bed, carried me out onto the *pavlatche*, and left me there alone for a while in my nightshirt, outside the shut door. I am not going to say that this was wrong—perhaps there was really no other way of getting peace and quiet that night—but I mention it as typical of your methods of bringing up a child [*Erziehungsmittel*] and their effect [*Wirkung*] on me. I dare say I was quite obedient afterwards at that period, but it did me inner harm [*inneren Schaden*]. What was for me a matter of course, that senseless asking for water, and the extraordinary terror of being carried outside were two things that I, my nature being what it was, could never properly connect with each other. Even years afterwards I suffered from the tormenting fancy [*quälenden Vorstellung*] that the huge man, my father, the ultimate authority [*die letzte Instanz*], would come almost for no reason at all and take me out of bed in the night and carry me out onto the *pavlatche,* and that meant I was a mere nothing [*ein solches Nichts*] for him.[89]

The son is cast out onto the balcony, itself a place of elevation and remove, and is forced to suffer in quiet desperation. He cannot fully understand the reason and meaning behind such disproportionate cruelty and abandonment, this *Erziehungsmittel* suggesting no such edifying purpose other than draconian brutality. The son perhaps even senses that this punishment is a direct consequence of violation of his father's law, but has no inkling of which stipulation he has violated. Indeed, the *pavlatche* episode has synecdochical significance insofar as it is a concrete instantiation of a life-long pattern of forsakenness and neglect. That is to say, Kafka's suffering is caused less by his father than by the persistent experience of his father's "hiddenness." It is not meant here in its literal sense, but instead conveys a general attitude of emotional distance and

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[88] Rattner was influenced by the "depth psychology" of Alfred Adler, and thus has a relationship of both convergence and divergence to Freudian psychoanalysis. His discussion of *Schlüssel-Erlebnisse* can be found in *Kafka und das Vater-Problem*, 21-24.

[89] *LTHF*:16-17.

cruelty.[90] What is crucial to comprehend is that this paternal distance is not simply related to but is registered most perceptibly in and through the son's incapacity to conform to his father's elusive, nebulous standard for acceptance.

IV. *Der Wirkliche Vater* [The Real Father]

As the letter attests, the father's realm is governed by an austere order of justice and retributive punishment, creating a situation in which the lawgiver and the law-receiver can hardly meet on sympathetic and affectionate terms. In recounting a life endured under a domestic yoke Kafka simultaneously offers the reader a view of "positive hiddenness" and "negative presence." By these terms I mean that, on the one hand, his various recollections are subtended by a perception of paternal indifference and abandonment, and, on the other hand, a faint suggestion of what recognition and existential affirmation *would* look like if it had not been denied. In other words, a disjunction emerges between the descriptive and the subjunctive, between what he suffered and what he felt he needed.

In the following passage from the letter Kafka intimates to the reader the connotations of presence and hiddenness not as physical or even metaphysical categories, but instead as they play out in the relationship between individuals. They are set up as contrasts of one another, and we can glean their meaning by a grammar of presence and privation:

> That was only a small beginning, but this sense of nothingness that often dominates me…comes largely from your influence. What I would have needed was a little encouragement [*Aufmunterung*], a little friendliness, a little keeping open of my road [*Offenhalten meines Wegs*],

[90] For many years all the members of the Kafka family lived together in tight quarters, well into Franz's adult years. Suffocating domestic circumstances were replicated in his stories (notably in "Die Verwandlung"), confirmed by Ottla's remark that the house Kafka created in "Das Urteil" is "very like ours" (September 24, 1913, in *D*:214).

> instead of which you blocked it for me, though of course with the good intention of making me go another road. But I was not fit [*taugte*] for that.[91]

Looking back over a lifetime, Kafka concludes that his father has been hidden in so far as he has neglected his duties as a loving parent, the result of which is a self-esteem damaged by thoughts of insecurity, impotence, and worthlessness. Kindness, encouragement, friendliness, and assistance are all forms of presence because they connote the act of being responsive to another. They are existential needs that the individual cannot satisfy by himself, thus leaving him entirely dependent on the other's ability to respond and provide them. It is only with the surety of the other's support that the individual can flourish. To the extent that it is given at all, the help that Kafka does receive is not of the sort he requires; thus a longed-for relationship founded on presence remains only a possibility—an alternative that can never happen.

The letter as a whole, then, testifies to a lifelong struggle between Kafka and his father, and a major component of its energies is dedicated to recalling scenes that have contributed to the former's antagonistic attitude and sense of estrangement. Yet its etiological nature is in the service of a trans-diagnostic goal: détente with the combatant. The emotional scars from childhood are thus recapitulated if not re-endured in the hopes of achieving some kind of reconciliation between father and son. That Hermann ultimately never received the letter seems to confirm the unattainability of such a reconciliation, the fatalist resignation to an unbridgeable rupture.[92] The letter's fate thus mirrors that of the relationship between father and son: its fulfillment as being sent and delivered to the recipient does not come to pass. By remaining

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[91] *LTHF*:16-17.

[92] The accent on *reception* is due to an inconsistency in the chain of events. Stach relates that, on the one hand, Kafka did not hand the letter directly to his father but instead gave it to his mother to pass along. On the other hand, his later statements about the letter express a fundamental reluctance about handing it over at all (*Kafka*, 309).

silent, Kafka both imitates his father's alleged inability to commune and completes the cycle of hiddenness and disconnectedness that has pervaded and ultimately consumes a primal relationship. For what is silence if not the lack of voice, the reassuring certainty sought by Kafka, that the one whom they address is present and near?

From their earliest uses, letters were written in order to be read and to both bridge and compensate for the distance between communicators (viz., to make the absent seem present).[93] Despite the intention of setting the record straight, between the lines of Kafka's letter hides the insinuation that both the end (reunion) and the means (writing) are futile. His avowed expectations of the efficacy in composition are modest: he eliminates at the outset the chance of renewal in favor of "peace; no cessation, but still, a diminution of your unceasing reproaches" [*unaufhörlichen Vorwürfe*].[94] By the end the letter's impotence is prefigured (if not sealed) in a self-reflexive, meta-epistolary moment, as Kafka assumes his father's voice and imagines what he *would* say if he had responded to its accusatory content. The fantasy of and hope for a present father is here indexed, for what is conjured up is a father who emerges from his withdrawal and quits his silence to resolve the son's disquietude. Beyond the pages of the letter the present father is he who would receive, read, and respond to the letter's cries, in the attempt to work towards the relationship's regeneration. Yet ventriloquization cannot substitute for the vital reality of a genuine Other; literary speech cannot compensate for and redress the scars of actual silence.[95]

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[93] On the latter function, see Kathy Eden, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[94] *LTHF*:8-9.

[95] The silence between father and son is no mere rhetorical trope, since it is also noted in the correspondence with Felice Bauer; for instance, see *LF:*293.

What both the impersonation gesture and the letter's failed delivery insinuate is Kafka's complete inability to effect, by his own willpower, any significant change in the tone and texture of the intergenerational dynamic. This limitation is also reflected poignantly in a letter during his sojourn at Zürau, thanking him for his intervention with Wolff regarding a particular aspect of the publication of eleven stories gathered under the title *Ein Landarzt*: "Ever since I decided to dedicate the book to my father, I am deeply concerned to have it appear soon. Not that I could appease [*versöhnen*] my father this way; the roots of our antagonism [*Feindschaft*] are too deep, but I would at least have done something…"[96] More than a year before the letter's composition Kafka expresses the intuition that the overcoming of animosity is altogether beyond his control; even signs of gratitude—perhaps admixed with a measure of contrition—are ineffectual and do not entail symmetrical recognition. Genuine reconciliation thus has to originate on the father's side and be implemented on his terms.

Moving away from the non-fiction, we quickly notice that the animating *topoi* of the letter—presence and hiddenness as categories of interpersonal behavior, intergenerational disharmony, and the invocation of an alternative father—feature equally within Kafka's fictional writings. The scholarly literature published on these themes in his more famous works ("Das Urteil," *Amerika, Das Schloß,* "Die Verwandlung," and *Der Prozeß*) fill library shelves, yet often overlooked is the fact that their manifestation actually antedates what is called the "*Durchbruch"* of September 22-23, 1912, that is, the night on which he composed "The Judgment" in one sitting, and which is often regarded as marking the *fons et origo* of his creative

[96] Kafka to Brod, March 1918, in *LFFE*:201 / *Briefe, 1902-1924*, 33. For Brod's account of this episode see *Kafka*, 169. The inscription is the simple *Meinem Vater*, in contrast to the de-possessed form of the letter's title.

maturation. Instead, these motifs must be traced back to the composition of a narrative fragment called *Die städtische Welt* recorded in his diaries on February 21, 1911.[97] Its neglect is due in part to the story's incomplete nature, but it is filled in sufficiency to certify that it constitutes an early instance of experimentation with these concerns, thereby establishing greater thematic coherence to his corpus. Furthermore, the story's early placement on the timeline of the corpus automatically renders it worthy of exceptional consideration, not in order to ascertain its autobiographical reference but to glimpse what is on Kafka's mind in the nascent stage of his creative endeavors.[98]

Comprised of two scenes, the majority and dramatic axis of the fragment revolves around a hostile confrontation between the main character Oscar M. and his unnamed father. After acquiring some unidentified insight in the midst of a snowy day, the student returns home excitedly to relay the good news, only to meet the furiousness of his parent. It is unclear whether the father's rage is spontaneous, the continuation of a previous confrontation, or the effect of a long-suppressed rage; what *is* clear is that he expresses a cutting condemnation of his son: "I simply won't put up with your good-for-nothing existence any longer. I'm an old man. I hoped you would be the comfort [*Trost*] of my old age, instead you are worse than all my illnesses. Shame [*Pfui*] on such a son, who through laziness, extravagance, wickedness [*Bosheit*], and—why shouldn't I say so to your face—stupidity, drives his old father to the grave."[99] The father

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[97] This need is confirmed by Kafka himself: on the heels of completing "Das Urteil" he notes that "The Urban World" was one of several currents that carried him along [*mitgeführte*] during the writing process (September 23, 1912, in *D*:213 / *T*:461).

[98] The placement of "The Urban World" in what is otherwise a personal record of events and reflections would lend greater credence to this claim, yet we know that his diaries are as much a locus of artistic trial (even including drawings) as a straightforward journal.

[99] *D:*41 / *T*:152.

here speaks of a callous vision of retributive justice: because the son's vices have worked towards killing the father, it is the son whose life must now be taken. Such a sentence is doubly castigatory precisely because Oscar thought the day's revelation would finally "*zu einem tätigen Menschen machen wird, wie Du es Dir nur wünschen kannst*."[100] Yet this sign of advancement cannot seem to satisfy his father's expectations—if anything, within the logic of the narrative it seems to be that which precipitates the intergenerational clash. The father has so rejected his son's attempts at living up to his standard, to the degree that he concedes being "*aus der Übung gekommen, Dich überhaupt anzusehn*"—which the reader can only understand in its figurative, metaphorical sense as the inability to *recognize* his son, to acknowledge him in his very being.[101]

The argument proceeds under the same tenor, replete with indictments, confessions, and misunderstandings of intention. Oscar's reassurance that he speaks only out of consideration [*Rücksichtnahme*] for his father's feelings falls upon deaf ears, only met with impatience and indifference. At the climactic moment of the story the following exchange takes place:

> 'This can't be my father speaking to me,' cried Oscar, who already had his arm on the door latch. 'Something has happened to you since noon, or I'm meeting a stranger [*ein fremder Mensc*h] now for the first time in my father's room. My real [*wirklicher*] father—Oscar was silent for a moment with his mouth open—he would certainly have had to embrace [*umarmen*] me, he would have called my mother. What is wrong with you, Father?'
>
> 'Then you ought to have supper with your real [*wirklichen*] father, I think. It would be more fun.'
>
> 'He will come, you can be sure of that. In the end he can't stay away.'[102]

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[100] *T*:152.

[101] *T*:152-153.

[102] *D*:43 / *T*:156.

Immediately hereafter Oscar departs the scene and walks over to the home of his friend Franz, but his anxious behavior, undoubtedly caused by the previous interaction, colors their own.[103] Just as with the "Letter to the Father" Kafka distinguishes between an extant, hidden father and an ideal, present one. That is to say, the hypothetical father would embrace his child as a symbol of unconditional acceptance, while the actual one just vents his disappointment. This *wirklicher Vater* is again invoked and even hoped for, but never arrives to institute a proper state of affairs. He remains the phantasm of a forsaken son, who despite or perhaps because of his efforts is out of sync with the father's Way. The path to accord with this "stranger" is hidden from the son, yet, rather paradoxically, he is nevertheless firmly in this figure's grasp insofar as the search for this route constitutes his primal aim, the failure to find it his most paralyzing frustration.

The 1917 diary entry mentioned above assumed that the paternal figure invoked therein was divine, yet the passage could just as easily refer to another another father, the biological one.[104] Significantly the word used in the 1918 letter to Brod to denote what the dedication hopes to yet cannot achieve, *versöhnen*, returns to proleptically anticipate a time when either the dedication *would* in fact appease or would be otiose altogether. On this reading, Kafka seizes the sacred day to secularize, customize, eternalize, and domesticize its meaning. In Augustinian-like fashion Kafka posits a radical divide between the finite and infinite realms, not so much separated by the legislative principle of temporality but by their respective capacities to mend

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[103]Walter Sokel understands Oscar as more defiant than the evidence permits, for he wants to map this instance onto a more general pattern of obedience and rebellion that he sees as operating across the stances of Kafka's protagonists towards authority. For his discussion see "Freedom and Authority in The Fiction of Franz Kafka," in *The Myth of Power and The Self: Essays on Franz Kafka* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 312-314.

[104] The German *Vater* connotes both registers, while the definite article of *Brief an den Vater* allows for both meanings.

that which has been torn asunder. *Grosser Versöhnungstag*—to wit, the time at which atonement is not just feasible but truly effective—can only happen after death, for life in the here and now is governed by the actual father, the distant one for whom expiation is impossible. The afterlife, so Kafka's belief fragmentarily declares, is one in which the *wirklicher Vater* is regnant, the one to whom he can return and draw near under the consoling banner of forgiveness in such a way that has been decisively foreclosed in life. The "day" of reconciliation with the father not only marks the purpose for which the letter was written, but also the unfulfilled goal of a lifetime.[105] *Glauben*, after all, is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen; the real father is never encountered but merely invoked in restless anticipation. This diary entry, then, professes that true reconciliation with the father can only occur after death, the precondition of which entails the relinquishment of personal agency and the attendant submission to something beyond the self. That Kafka wished to be buried in the same grave as Hermann paradoxically means that true union can only be wished for in death—the final separation.[106]

V. Thoughts About Luther, Of Course[107]

We break from our exposition of Kafka's writings in order to identify unignorable thematic similarities and differences between his construal of father-son relations on the one hand and Luther's construal of divine-human relations on the other. As demonstrated above, traces of an unacknowledged kindred theological sensibility reveal themselves in the *Blue Octavo Notebooks* on such topics as the *Deus absconditus*, the vicious cyclicality of law and guilt, and the

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[105] *Versöhnung* is translated as both "atonement" and "reconciliation."

[106] Brod, *Kafka*, 209.

[107] An illusion to the entry from September 23, 1912 in *D*:213.

possibility for meaningful suffering. Yet the full lineaments of their affiliation can only be borne out by means of a comparative analytic of their respective portrayals of father-son relationships. It is important to underscore at the outset that this exercise does not consist of measuring the extent of genetic influence or conscious appropriation, for the explicit references to Luther in Kafka's corpus can be counted on one hand and do not indicate either indebtedness to or engagement with his works.[108] Instead, what makes this juxtaposition not just apposite but hermeneutically fruitful is a common world that they portray, as well as a certain matrix of shared themes that animate their work.[109] By focusing in particular on the representation of father-son relations in Luther's and Kafka's writings, this section will advance the idea that the theological world Luther paints in his texts constitutes the most valuable heuristic for understanding Kafka's conception of the domestic realm. Yet light always participates in the object on which it casts its glare: by virtue of this juxtaposition Kafka's portrayals both entail theological positions and may be construed as responding to Luther's schema.

On the basis of the preceding analysis, it is justifiable to claim that in crucial respects Kafka's reconstruction of his intergenerational difficulties in the "Letter to the Father" replicates on the domestic-biological plane the religious circumstances Luther dramatizes of the individual who stands under the sign of the formidable and oppressive *Deus absconditus*. For both Kafka

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[108] The Protestant thinker whom Kafka *did* read extensively was Søren Kierkegaard, whom he began to read in 1913 during the Bauer affair and about whom he wrote that "he bears me out like a friend" (*D*:230). For an examination of Kierkegaard's impact on Kafka see Arnold Heidsieck, *The Intellectual Contexts of Kafka's Fiction: Philosophy, Law, Religion* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), ch. 7.

[109] In his discussion of Kafka's relationship to Gnostic faith, Sokel gave the mandate for this kind of reading: "Much more decisive than external 'influences,' however, are the *kinship and parallelism in patterns of interpreting life and the world* that link Kafka to Gnosticism from the beginning of his writing, and long before we can detect any evidence of his acquaintance with the historic phenomenon of Gnosticism" ("Between Gnosticism and Jehovah," 8). [My italics].

the son and Luther's sinning son of God, experience is at its core a condition of always being in disgrace with the one whose approval would satisfy an existential necessity, the most pressing need of the heart. This struggle is lent a particular poignance due not simply to the fact that paternal favor is eternally deferred, but because the son is all but incapable of effecting the reconciliation by his own efforts. If anything, words, works, or gestures done with proper intention exacerbate rather than assuage the tension, and thus do more harm than good. The ironic effect of sincere intentions and actions is a recursive theme in Kafka's fictional works, particularly *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß*, where, respectively, Josef K.'s attempts to advocate for himself by intervening in the trial's proceedings serve only to intensify his condemnation, while K.'s active strivings to penetrate the heart of the castle's operations leave him no further along the path than when he embarked.

Furthermore, for both Luther and Kafka the most immediate obstacle to bridging the emotional and relational distance that divides father and son is the law imposed by the former onto the latter. In the case of Kafka we are not, as with Luther, dealing *stricto sensu* with the violation of divine legislation, but we nevertheless come into contact with a domestic code and rule that has the function, authority, and validity for the son that revealed law has for Luther's Christian. Given the primal love for their nurturers and protectors, it is natural for sons to seek their fathers' approval, and with a spirit of heartfelt gratitude, to attempt to answer the call of their deepest expectations and hopes. At times the laws Kafka invoke seem but a reflection and concretion of a more fundamental law, namely, to become the person his father wants him to be, the ideal image into which he wishes to mold his son. That for both Luther and Kafka the realm of the absconded father is governed by justice and law and not by mercy and grace, all but

ensures that the generations remain separated from each other. Here the law and its laws not only serve to further alienate the son from a father who is already preternaturally stern and standoffish, but also intensifies the son's desire to be in a state of communing favor even as it simultaneously complicates that very objective—insofar as he is guilty of a failure to carry out the demands placed on him. This incapacity yields ever greater wrath on the father's side and an ever greater feeling of guilt on the son's, mutually informing and inflecting one another while their relationship spirals downward continually in a dialectical torrent of offense and condemnation.[110]

In a way analogous to Luther's hidden deity, Kafka's father is a remote figure both independently and because of the law. The two authors conceive hiddenness as relational categories, predications that bear on how characters interact with, experience, and impact one another over the course of a life. The predominant tones around which Luther and Kafka compose the piece of paternal distance revolve around his tenacity, elusiveness, callousness, and emotional detachment. Kafka's father is one who is always beyond and resistant to conceptual grasp, only in part due to the magnitude with which he is invested; his rules are as firm as they are utterly arbitrary and capricious. Here there is in fact an intergenerational symmetry, since the son's bemusement is matched by the father's inability and unwillingness to understand him.[111] To reverse this trend would involve a fundamental conversion on his part, a move away from indifference and towards a concerted effort to discern who his son might be as a unique

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[110] Perhaps this condition is the historical correlative to what is *ad nauseam* denominated the "Kafkaesque," to wit, the unique feature of Kafka's writing wherein actions often have effects contrary to their intentions, initial adverse conditions are only exacerbated, and characters' attempts to progress into a future merely create retrograde motions.

[111] On the father's irreducibility, see Jennifer Geddes, *Kafka's Ethics of Interpretation: Between Tyranny and Despair* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), ch. 1.

individual, to discover what he most needs to meet the world confidently and trustingly. Absent such a turn, we confront another cyclically vicious mismeeting, in which paternal hiddenness fosters filial yearning to be in communion, yet the attempt to draw near him reasserts if not further augments the distance. In this situation, the son is caught in between the desire for acceptance and the inevitability of rejection. Therefore, like Luther's Christian, Kafka's son finds himself in a state of ambivalence between repulsion and longing; with the twin motivations of self-protection and fulfillment he both recoils and draws near the father despite and on account of the wound he suffers at his hand.

With Luther, the phenomenological perception of the father's hiddenness is best crystallized in the event of the Passion, that is, the moment of Christ's sense of abandonment by the One on whom he risked his faith. (On this score we have moved from human sons to the Son, yet Luther always insists that Christ is both a model and a metonymy for the human experience. The *theologia crucis* proclaims that life is but a prolonged experience of crucifixion that we must suffer embracingly.) Like Christ on the Cross, Kafka represents himself as *der Angefochtene*, the forsaken one, whose reconstruction of sonship culminates with a recollection of a suffering and humiliated son punished on the family balcony.[112] Without a jeering crowd and the imminence of death, he, like his literary precursor, nevertheless asks "*lama sabbachthani*?"[113] It is this instance of paternal neglect and filial loneliness that underscores for Kafka the impossibility of reconciliation between father and son. Little surprise, then, that Kafka entertained the idea of

[112] This denomination for Christ is taken from B.A. Gerrish, "To the Unknown God," 149.

[113] Mk. 34:15.

naming the compendium of his works, "An attempt to escape the paternal sphere."[114] Yet, like many aspects of Kafka's life, the title remained but a possibility, for life under his *pater absconditus* was too consuming, too urgent to resolve, to be considered somehow avoidable or surmountable.[115] He can rhetorically demand an explanation for abandonment, he can even imagine another father of whom the interrogation is unnecessary, but he, like Luther's Christian, is ineluctably in the grasp of the hidden father with whom he must contend.

The notion of forsakenness is, metaphorically speaking, the suture at which Kafka and Luther at once converge and diverge, for it is at this juncture that their affinities have reached their limit. Recall that for Luther, the course of salvation for an individual consisted of a gradual transition from inexorable damnation under the Hidden God to guaranteed salvation under the Revealed God. More specifically, capitulation to the full magnitude and weight of the *Deus absconditus* is the necessary precondition for being brought into the merciful bosom of the *Deus revelatus*. There is no way around this process, and there are no shortcuts. But at the nadir of spiritual development, when by means of a sinful concatenation of guilt, fear, anxiety, and abhorrence the individual stands at the furthest remove from his God, surrender to and admission of his failure almost magically transforms the character of the deity into one of gracious acceptance.

Contrastively, Kafka's domestic and literary worlds reject the actuality of a Revealed God as portrayed by Luther. The hidden father they depict never transmogrifies into its opposite, so both Kafka and his characters find themselves under his control without the possibility of

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[114] Marthe Robert, *As Lonely as Franz Kafka*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1986), 123.

[115] A letter that clearly expresses Kafka's ambivalence between the desire for independence and his domestically circumscribed-identity may be found in *LF*:524-526.

transcending it. Those worlds oftentimes open up a horizon that allows the reader to glimpse the contours of a *Deus revelatus*, but neither the artist nor his creations ever securely reach or come into contact with it, and are therefore left in a state of abandonment and rejection. As we saw in *Die städtische Welt*, the revealed father not only never comes into view, but he is merely the discursively expressed and promptly mocked longing of a son. In other words, this father never rises beyond the realm of wishful fantasy to that of existential actuality.

With this eschewal, many other elements of the Lutheran outlook are discarded. Illustrating the inability to overcome the filial condition of forsakenness, Kafka insinuates that Luther's proclamation of the reconciliation between father and son is untenable. According to the reformer, the relationship between the first two persons of the Trinity (that is, between Father and Son) constitutes the exception to the rule of intergenerational friction (that is, between heavenly Father qua *Deus absconditus* and earthly son). It is their metaphysical harmony and unity that both serve as a model for the relationship between God and man under the gift of faith, as well as the transcendental condition of the individual's justification. With its universalization of strife as the touchstone for portraying intergenerational relations, Kafka's world by contrast calls the existence of the theological anomaly of Father and Son into question. In other words, Christ becomes yet another abandoned son if domestic reconciliation is rendered impossible. Furthermore, the redemptive edifice built on the anomaly's foundation also unravels: if there is no paradigmatic outlier, no aberration outside the normal, the promise of salvation for the distressed but hopeful individual altogether evaporates.

Furthermore, if there is no exceptional state for Kafka, the son loses not only the unbreakable link to the father that Luther aimed to solidify (with respect to the Father); he also

loses the powers with which he was endowed to justify and to mediate.[116] Luther advanced the notion that the Christian could not satisfy the deity by his own efforts, needing instead to solicit Christ to intervene with God and to advocate on his behalf. The Father-son dilemma, in other words, could only be resolved by the benevolent intrusion of the Son (*via filius*), by the conferral of his righteousness onto the sinner. Similar to the logic of exception that governs the relation between Father and Son, the underlying assumption of the process of justification is that there is a Son who constitutes a deviation from the rule of divine disapproval, and who therefore merits the bestowal of merit on others. The sons of Kafka's work, conversely, are marked precisely by their relative impotence, particularly with respect to the fathers who stand over them. A zero-sum pattern is discernible in which the attenuation or destruction of the son is paired with the elevation or, at minimum, the impregnability of the father. Implied, therefore, in Kafka's portrayal of filial life is the denudation of Christ's privileged status. In the shadow of paternal figures who are impenetrable, intolerant of defiance, or unconsciously directing the course of affairs, the sons cannot be said to have much in the way of agency, control, or influence—let alone the power to vindicate.

Invoked above, the data of Christ's Passion and His question *de profundis* on God's abandonment during His most debasing trial might lead one to conclude that His unexceptional status is in fact confirmed by Scripture itself, and that the Gospels' representation of a Christ forsaken is a literary precursor to the sons of Kafka's writings. Yet sacred works cannot be considered apart from their readers—especially when those exegetes are as world-historical as

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[116] Kafka's major works appear to reject the efficacy of mediation: the supplicant corn merchant Block is derided by the lawyer Herr Huld and his nurse Leni (*Der Prozeß*), and sleep comes upon K. before Bürgel, who pretends to possess the secret to entering the castle, can aid him with ingress to it (*Das Schloß*).

Luther. As explored in the preceding chapter, faith for Luther is precisely the infusion of depth vision, a transformation of sight whereby meaning is not fully contained within the given. In other words, under the logic of a contrary, faith opens up a disjunction between appearance and reality, a double vision wherein the former always supplants the latter. This postulation lent the certainty that the ignominy of the Cross was not in vain; rather, both Christ and his faithful followers knew not only that God did not forsake his Son, but also that the shame of the event actually was divinely sanctioned and approved. On the basis of this double vision and the discrepancy between the seen and the unseen, Luther constructed an elaborate theological edifice that included the theological function of the law (viz., the purpose of the law is not *really* to damn but to redeem); the distinction between the alien/ostensible and proper/hidden work of the deity; the concept of *Anfechtung*, premised on the notion that tests of faith are in fact signs of divine approbation; and the counter-intuitive position that just as the glory of God is revealed in Christ's humiliation, so too does God disclose Himself to man amidst his sufferings.

The thrust of Kafka's world appears to discount this depth dimension and its attendant optimistic outlook, instead articulates a view of meaning*less* suffering. As recounted in the letter, the lifelong mismeeting with the father bespeaks no hidden message, nor does the fiction tend to point towards an underlying significance for the ordeals it narrates—at least not one that can be registered by the characters searching for it. If so, Kafka's conception of life might be best characterized as a Passion without redemption. It can be considered, moreover, as an outgrowth or logical exploitation of Luther's unresolved dilemma of the deity's true nature, as well as the reluctant intimation that the *Deus absconditus* ultimately remains the regnant visage of the deity. With his distinctive portrayals of the father and the absence of an affirming presence that he

mercifully extends to the son, Kafka goes a step further than Luther and proposes that the hidden father is the *only* face presented to the son. As attested, love certainly travels upwards, but there is no guarantee of a symmetrical downward movement. Indeed, what is particularly poignant about the letter is, pace Luther, the asymmetry between faith and grace that it paints. The son's love and trust in the father neither compels nor is reciprocated by him.

In conclusion, Kafka's depiction of father-son relations and his complicated stance on the Jewish-Christian option are mutually illuminating; what Milena Jesenská in her moving obituary to the author calls the "secret misunderstandings" of intimates pervading the world of his work has as much religious as biographical import.[117] Kafka shares Luther's identification of the fundamental *problem* of human existence (the hiddenness of the father vis-à-vis the son), but resists and demurs from the solution the latter offered (the solution of the Son)—to the point of altogether denying the *possibility* of a solution (viz., some kind of redemptive force). The meaning of this fragile compromise for theology is clear: the devotees of Christ name the wrong answer to the right question.

[117] Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 272.

CHAPTER 4-"PHANTOMS OF THE PAST"[1]: FREUD'S RELIGIO-DOMESTIC AMBIVALENCES

"*What you have inherited from your fathers / acquire it, so as to possess it*."[2]

For Oskar Pfister, the Protestant pastor from Zurich who assumed the same vocation as his father, the discovery of the writings of Doctor Sigmund Freud in 1908 surely had the force of a validating revelation. During the early years of his ministry Pfister wrote a paper protesting against theology's sins of omission towards psychology, guided by the moral and religious conviction that clergymen should avail themselves of resources to address the needs of parishioners who required more than mere theological aid.[3] To truly live up to the designation of *Seelsorger*, "caretaker of the soul," the minister must familiarize himself with, and respond attentively and sympathetically to, a greater range of its components, yearnings, and expressions. (The kindred word *Geist* means both "mind" and "spirit.") The following year marked the beginning of a correspondence, indeed an affectionate and productive relationship, between the two men that would last until Freud's death in 1939.

The friendship was as intimate as it was unexpected. At home socially and intellectually in Vienna's secular scientific world, Freud was unaccustomed to such sustained and intense contact with a man of God. Anna Freud, who also followed her father's professional footsteps, described Pfister's presence in the Freud home as "like a visitor from another planet [*eine*

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[1] Lou Andreas-Salomé to Freud, mid-January 1935, in *Letters* (New York: W.W. Norton 1972), 206-207, cited in Richard Bernstein, "Why [the Jews] Have Attracted This Undying Hatred," in *Freud and Monotheism: Moses and The Violent Origins of Religion*, ed. Gilad Sharvit and Karen Feldman (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 30.

[2] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Faust*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Anchor, 1963), 114, ln. 682-683. [My translation.]

[3] Heinrich Meng, "Introduction" to *Psychoanalysis and Faith: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister*, ed. Heinrich Meng and Ernst Freud (London: Hogarth, 1963), 8. [Hereafter *PaF*.]

Erscheinung aus einer fremden Welt]."[4] It is Freud himself, however, who alerts his reader to narcissism's penchant for foregrounding distinction in the face of perceived similarities.[5] Despite the difference in training and in *Weltanschauung* both were unorthodox and marginal figures, rejecting the conventions and consensuses of their respective disciplines. Their resistance to the obstinate prescriptions of compact majorities was guided less by a preternatural pugilism or contrarianism than by a common "love of truth…as the central factor in obtaining an understanding of mankind."[6] Freud's avowed animus towards religion, of which he made no secret and apology to Pfister, did not extend to religious *people*; both men in fact possessed a capacity to recognize and cherish the human being behind and underneath his adopted commitments.

Blessed with the architect's reassurance that psychoanalytic therapy was not restricted to medical practitioners, Pfister was now emboldened by the enhanced arsenal at his disposal to confront the spiritual concerns of his flock. For him, Freud's innovative theory and method was not just a supplementary but a *complementary* technique to traditional pastoral care: psychoanalysis and Protestantism in particular shared the mission of mitigating guilt, understood as punishment for defying authority; the utilization of regression as a method of healing; and the attempt to replace a stern with a kindly father. Yet more broadly, Christianity and psychoanalysis were allied in the preoccupation with humanity's great and most urgent problems, regarded the

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[4] Anna Freud, "Introduction" to *PaF*:8 / *Sigmund Freud, Oskar Pfister: Briefe 1909-1939*, ed. Ernst Freud and Heinrich Meng (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1980), 10. [Hereafter *FP*.] Freud's relationship with Pfister endured longer than with many individuals from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, and he also breaks a key pattern of Freud's social life: estrangement on the basis of fundamental disagreement (Fliess, Breuer, Jung, Rank).

[5] On the "narcissism of small differences," see *CD*, in *SE* XXI:114.

[6] Meng, *PaF*:9.

liberation of suffering as their central aim and value, and designated love as life's most meaningful force.[7] There is no reason to diagnose these detected elective affinities as Pfister's wishful projections: in a rather remarkable statement the nonbeliever Freud described the function of the analyst as "secular pastoral care [*Weltliche Seelsorge*]," and even told Pfister that psychoanalysis is a tool to be used "in the service of the sufferer."[8] Three years earlier, in a letter to his prodigy Carl Jung, another Protestant from Zurich whose father was a pastor, Freud wrote that his brand of therapy is a "cure effected by love [*Heilung durch Liebe*]," in the interest of heightening man's ability to love both himself and others.[9]

Notwithstanding Freud's unabashed hostility towards Christianity, the combined force of these parallels compelled Pfister to ask whether psychoanalysis as construed by Freud was not simply a new kind of religion, but a recasting of *doctrina Christiana*, the "good news" affirmed underneath the veil of a secular science of the mind. Settling a unanimous definition for "religion" remains a futile task, but a movement organized around a set of incontrovertible doctrines, canonical texts, and fixed practices is redolent of a religious system—even if psychoanalysis, especially in its scientific investigation of religious belief, "presupposes unbelief" [*den Unglauben zur Voraussetzung hat*].[10] Freud, too, was thinking about the

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[7] Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and The Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 82-83. For Pfister, these parallels did not extend to Catholicism, given its imperative to increase rather than decrease instinctual renunciation (Gay, 85).

[8] Freud, "Nachwort zur *Frage der Laienanalyse*" (1926), in *GW* XIV:293 [my translation]; Freud to Pfister, February 9, 1909, in *PaF*:17.

[9] Freud to Jung, December 6, 1906, letter 8F in *The Freud/Jung Letters*, ed. William McGuire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 10, cited in Scott Spector, *Modernism Without Jews*, 94 / The notion that psychoanalysis frees us to pursue love (and work) is from Bruno Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 102.

[10] Freud to Charles Singer, October 31, 1938, in *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, *1873-1939*, trans. Tania and James Stern (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 448 / *Sigmund Freud: Briefe, 1873-1939*, ed. Ernst and Lucie Freud, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1968), 469.

relationship between religion, religion*s*, and his discoveries, when he asked Pfister why the world had to wait for a godless Jew to invent psychoanalysis. Pfister's answer is as convoluted as it is evasive:

> [I]n the first place you are no Jew, which to me, in view of my unbounded admiration for Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the author of Job and Ecclesiastes is a matter of profound regret, and in the second place you are not godless, for he who lives the truth lives in God, and he who strives for the freeing of love 'dwelleth in God' [1 John 4:16]. If you raised to your consciousness and fully felt your place in the grand design, which to me is as necessary as the synthesis of notes is to a Beethoven symphony I should say of you: A better Christian there never was…[11]

Charles Horton Cooley's notion of the "looking-glass self" (viz., I am who I think you think I am) may have some sociological validity; but, irrespective of the truth, people are instinctively repelled by the idea that the determination of their own identity lies in someone else's hands. This aversion is felt acutely by the Jew, who for millennia has been subject to characterization from without—and not without catastrophic consequences. Yet the problem is compounded in this instance by Pfister's obscurity in thinking and in terms. He altogether avoids Freud's question of the connection between the creation of psychoanalysis and the background of its founder, and his "regret" seems forced in light of the counterintuitive removal of Freud from the chain of his tribal predecessors. It begs the question, in what does Pfister's admiration for these biblical Jews consist? Given the logic of the passage, it cannot be their zeal for dwelling in the

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[11] Pfister to Freud, October 29, 1918, in *PaF*:63. "Ein besserer Christ war nie" (*FP*:64) is a citation from Act IV, Scene 7 of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, a line spoken by the *Klosterbruder* to Nathan, a Jew (ln. 690). What is interesting about the invocation is that Pfister and the Brother have different understandings of the essence of Christianity. For the Brother, what makes Nathan the consummate Christian is his rational submission to the will of God in the face of woe—in this case, over the atrocities committed on his family by Crusaders.

In a later letter Freud made explicit reference to the play, withstanding Pfister's own attempt at co-opting him into the Christian camp by means of distancing himself from Nathan: "Ich bin lange nicht Nathan…" (Freud to Pfister, February 16, 1929, in *FP*:140). If anything, as this chapter will explore, Freud is closest to Nathan just before the latter's purported "Christian" moment, that is, when at the height of his suffering he has "Der Christenheit den unversöhnlichsten Haß zugeschworen" (ln. 672-673). On the other hand, Freud rejects the association with Nathan, but not with "durchaus einen Christen" (*FP*:140), and does not address if the Brother is correct in any sense in his estimation of Nathan.

truth and their valorization of love, for these virtues are the property of Christians alone. But who, then, is the Jew, either literally or figurally? In spite of these ambiguities, Pfister's intention is clear. In the attempt to control the reception of Freud and situate him within the appropriate spiritual tradition, Pfister plucks him from his primal community and inserts him into an opposing line. Freud is not only an anonymous Christian, to use Karl Rahner's label, but the superlative one at that. It was a designation to which Freud never directly responded, remarking cryptically after a few months that the explanation of his failure to answer "is very complicated [*eine sehr komplizierte Ableitung*]."[12]

Silence and complexity are crucial categories of psychoanalytic theory: as known from the latency period of traumatic experiences, quiet points to subterranean conflict; and, apart from the relationship between mother and son, everything in the inter-human world is marked by complication.[13] Freud's defiant personality welcomed confrontation, correcting falsehood wherever found, so his resistance here is as suggestive as it is atypical. After all, analysis justifies its mandate on the premise that "the self may not know the self, the subject not be its own object."[14] Had the first analyst thus been outed, shocked by the recognition of a truth that had surfaced up to consciousness?

Freud's answer was in fact complicated, in no small measure by the weight of the Jewish tradition crystallized by Pfister's invocations. And consistent with psychoanalytic teaching, the pressure was inflected and intensified by the domestic situation of his early life, for the stories of

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[12] Freud to Pfister, January 2, 1919, in *PAF*:64 / *FP*:65.

[13] Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of The Ego* (1921), in *SE* XVIII:101.

[14] Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of The Moralist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 65.

those biblical authors, and the religious tradition from which they draw and to which they contribute, had seeped into his imagination from childhood. There is reason to believe that even in infancy Freud received some kind of Jewish education at the hands of his father Jacob, the son of a tradesman from Tysmenitz in eastern Galicia.[15] When Freud was seven years old Jacob gifted him Rabbi Ludwig Philippson's *Die israelitische Bibel*, the basis for an "early familiarity [*Vertiefung*] with the Bible story (at a time almost before I had learnt the art of reading)" and "an enduring effect upon the direction of my interest."[16] In 1891, on the occasion of Freud's thirty-fifth birthday, Jacob presented him with the same Bible from which they had studied together twenty years prior, rebound in leather and included with both a *melitzah* (a mosaic of fragments and phrases from the Jewish textual tradition) and a *Gedenkblatt* (a customary commemorative page) upon which he had marked the death of his father, his son Sigmund's birth and circumcision, and the third tooth of his grandson Jean Martin.[17]

For both giftor and giftee, the choice of Bible translation among the plethora of available options at the time was not accidental. Although Jacob was raised in a traditional household, he had discarded most Jewish religious observance by the time he reached adulthood. *Die israelitische Bibel,* the bilingual (German and Hebrew) rendition of the Hebrew Bible published

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[15] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 64. Biographical information on Freud's ancestors can be found in the first chapter of Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Freud: In His Time and Ours*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[16] Freud, *An Autobiographical Study* (1925), in *SE* XX:7. (This sentence and the following one were added in 1935. They were by mistake omitted from the German edition of 1948, although one cannot help but wonder how accidental the elision is.) In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud recollects an anxiety dream from the age of 7 or 8 whose "tall figures with birds' beaks" were traced back to illustrations from the Philippson Bible (*SE* V:583). *Vertiefung* is better rendered as "immersion," given the etymological root of "depth" [*Tiefe*].

[17] Abigail Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 195. As Gillman mentions, for unknown reasons and at an unspecified time Freud repurchased the three-volume Philippson Bible as an adult.

throughout the 1840s and 1850s by an educated Jewish reformer who encouraged his fellow tribesman to balance civic duty with religious commitment, symbolized Jacob's own process of spiritual liberalization.[18] We do not have to accept Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's speculative thesis that underneath the evocation of love expressed in the *melitzah*, Jacob's birthday gift was a passive aggressive gesture subtly aimed at reprimanding his son for falling off the *derech*, and a subtle appeal to return to the fold that would, in turn, effect a rapprochement between them.[19] More plausible and less ambitious is the claim that Jacob wanted to reaffirm to his son the conviction that even if absorption in the predominantly Gentile world of German life and culture tends to erode the force of ceremonial law, it does not necessarily require a denial of Jewishness or a disdain for the Book of Books. (But are we reading the wrong kind of significance into these presents? Devoid of any religious considerations or unspoken hopes, perhaps the rebounded edition was meant simply a sentimental gesture from a father to his son, a nostalgic memento evoking emotions that overwhelm verbal expression, and recalling a bygone, joyous, and simpler times. Sometimes a gift is just a gift.)

Just as Jacob's intention with the bestowal remains unknown, so too do Sigmund's feelings about receiving it. Yet Jacob, having passed away five years later in 1896, would not live

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[18] Roudinesco, *Freud*, 12. For an interesting discussion of the Philippson Bible, its editor, and its impact on Freud's writings, see "Freud, Psychoanalysis, and The Philippson Bible," YouTube, posted by The Philoctetes Center, November 15, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6702&v=GBy2mOMM1hE&feature=emb_logo.

[19] Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 74. Yerushalmi's claim stands as flimsy because the manner and extent of Jacob Freud's religious observance remains inconclusive. If it had indeed dwindled to a few observances, as Peter Gay suggests, paternal rebuke might be an example of the pot calling the kettle black (*A Godless Jew*, 125). By the early 1890s Freud's scientistic outlook was resolutely cemented, but he had not published any of his writings on religion that would alarm or insult a more pious father.

long enough to see the *use* to which his son put the gift, directing his interest over the course of a lifetime. As constant throughout Freud's writings as the discussion of the conflicted psyche is the trope of the Torah and the ethnos, ethos, and ethic to which it is bound, stretching from the breakthrough and groundbreaking *Interpretation of Dreams* to the final testament of *Moses and Monotheism*. In a circumscribed respect did Freud honor the exhortation that Jacob, channeling the Spirit of the Lord voiced in the Pentateuch, included in the *melitzah*: "Go, read in my Book that I have written and there will burst open for you the wellsprings of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom."[20] In keeping with Kafka and the larger Central European Jewish modernist approach to Scripture, however, Freud combined a reverential fascination with an inversive impulse: "They [Jewish modernists] don't 'shatter' it—the Bible remains their most important interlocutor. They do turn it on its head."[21] In its posture Freud's recursive and probing examination of the biblical text demonstrates continuity with the long rabbinic exegetical tradition, but the scrutiny results in a radical and heretical rethinking of Judaism and of religious faith itself.[22] In applying psychoanalytic findings to cultural phenomena, Freud perhaps followed the manifest letter of the paternal injunction (that of rigorous reading), but not its spirit (to uphold the prescribed Way found therein). He most certainly did not abide by its Spirit.

That Freud's reticence and deferred action in the aftermath of reading Pfister's baiting remark may be explained by the sudden remembrance of his father's present and its possible

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[20] Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 105.

[21] Abigail Gillman, "Freud's Moses and Viennese Jewish Modernism," in *Freud's Jewish World,* ed. Arnold Richards (New York: McFarland Press, 2010), 131.

[22] For a recent treatment of Freud as contributing to a heretical tradition of modern Jewish thought, see Gilad Sharvit, "The Dialectics of Heresy: Trauma and History in Freud," in *Canonization and Alterity: Heresy in Jewish History, Thought, and Literature*, ed. Gilad Sharvit and Willi Goetschel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 216-229.

significance would rest on a bedrock of conjecture. The argument could be tempered with the circumspection that Pfister's honorific elicited a series of reminiscences: of his father, of his ancestral lineage, of his inescapable belonging to the Jewish people, and the ways in which these forces interpenetrate. Just like Elohim during the biblical deluge, Freud remembered the Old covenant, domestic and religious in its dimensions, and declined Pfister's invitation to join the New. Yet this chapter does wager that, despite the temporal interval and the shifting *dramatis personae*, these two discrete events have something to do with each other. On the thematic level, these episodes are abstracted from protracted father-son relationships, with Freud in the role of the metaphorical father in the one and of the literal son in the other.[23] Both scenes represent an intimate extending an alluring present to him, whether it be a venerable status or a venerable book; in both cases the offering signifies or is in the service of a larger bid on the part of the counterpart to lodge Freud firmly within a clearly defined religious paradigm and legacy; and both culminate in Freud's taciturnity, motivated either by inability, resistance, or indifference, suggesting neither complete acceptance nor rejection of those efforts and their terms of agreement. Transplantation to the Christian side would entail abandoning both the father and *Judentum,* the two tributaries of the past flowing into his soul and staking a claim on it—a prospect to which he could not assent. But in his personal life as well as in his writings Freud

[23] Freudian psychoanalysis replaces the literal-metaphorical binary with that of the primary-substitute. For example, the effects of familial relations in the child's psyche dictate and delimit subsequent social dynamics: "All of his later choices of friendship and love follow upon the basis of the memory-traces left behind by these first prototypes" (Freud, "Some Reflections On Schoolboy Psychology" (1914), in *SE* XIII:243). For the argument that the names of Freud's children evoke his surrogate paternal figures, the unconscious significance of which in turn can be traced back to his real father, see Peter Gay, "Six Names in Search of an Interpretation: A Contribution to the Debate Over Sigmund Freud's Jewishness," *Hebrew Union College Annual* LII (1982): 295-307.

raised the suspicion among external observers that he was entertaining the idea of dispensing with them.

The juxtaposition is also heuristically and rhetorically valuable, to the extent that it enables greater insight into Freud's view on religion (a *sui generis* mode of being) and religions (the concrete, historical forms it assumes), as well as the ways in which religious categories and frameworks penetrate his writing—even and especially outside his recognition and design. These episodes, in other words, encapsulate the duplet of religious systems that Freud interrogated and rethought, as well as metonymize the stance he would ultimately adopt with respect to them. Employing the concept coined by the psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler but identified and popularized by Freud himself, the proceeding analysis will explore Freud's "ambivalence"—defined as the simultaneous and inseparable "development of contrary instincts"—towards Judaism and Christianity.[24] Typologizing Freud as a "border figure" is not an unprecedented scholarly endeavor, nor is the delineation of his theorizations of the Mosaic faiths. What is new is the position that Freud's writings, situated at a *Grenzland*, betray a *conscious and unconscious* process of retrieval and suspicion of Judaism and Christianity, the advancement of which is contingent on defining these traditions in their literal and figural registers. In accord with the project's larger objectives, special consideration will be given to the bearing of the motif of father-son relations on these ambivalences; yet these themes will converge in the final section, in which Luther's theology of the generations is utilized hermeneutically as a barometer measuring

[24] Freud's first definition for "ambivalence" appears in the "Wolf Man" (1918) case history (*SE* XVII:26). The acknowledgment of Bleuler is from Freud, *Autobiographical Study*, in *SE* XX:51.

the nature and degree of Freud's appropriation and rejection of the "Christian option."[25] At the end of this process, we will confirm and modify the trenchant intuition of Peter Homans that "the origins of psychoanalysis lie deep in the cultural traditions of the West and in its relationship to the religious symbols and values which inform these traditions."[26]

I. The Weight of Phylogeny

In the inaugural volume of the Hebrew monthly periodical *Bitzaron* the renowned Orientalist Abraham Shalom Yahuda penned a critique of the recently published *Moses and Monotheism*. Appearing in print weeks before Freud's death, the article had the force of a prospective necrology. Appalled by its blasphemous and revisionary theses, Yahuda seized the opportunity to

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[25] A word should be said on this chapter's avoidance of the feminine and its male-centered focus. It does not insinuate that the role of woman in Freudian psychoanalysis is neither pivotal nor worthy of study; nor does it hope to discredit feminist critiques of Freud's writings. After all, it was Freud himself who grew dissatisfied with the movement's tenuous theories of female sexuality, and urged greater research to be conducted in the field (Gay, *A Godless Jew*, 151). We do not have to take Freud at face value—on the contrary, my argument ferrets out blindspots—but proper understanding does require that we take him on his own terms, which are obstinately centered on the elucidation of father-son relations and the psychodynamics of the son. Freud writes that a person's identification with his father is the "first and most important" of his life (*The Ego and The Id* (1923), in *SE* XIX:31). [Hereafter *EI*.] Even when Freud speaks of parents as a unit, he assumes the primacy of the father (*CD*, in *SE* XXI:125). This concentration has a self-referential foundation, since Freud admits in the second preface to *The Interpretation of Dreams* that his self-analysis was a "reaction to his father's death—that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life [*im Leben eines Manne*s]" (*SE* IV:xxvi / *Die Traumdeutung*, in *GW* II/III:x). That he does not use the more gender inclusive *Menschen* indicates that he is referring exclusively to men. The passage's universalization of a personal experience should not lead one to mistakenly think the later formulation and development of the Oedipus complex was erected on the basis of the self-analysis—in fact, the opposite is true (George Mahl, "Father-Son Themes in Freud's Self-Analysis," in *Father and Child*, 46. A subjective basis for the complex cannot explain its incorrigible hold on Freud: when challenged by his disciple Otto Rank's mother-centered "trauma of birth" thesis, he remained committed to the phallic oriented, male-centered Oedipus complex (Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* [New York: Norton, 2006], 474-480).

[26] Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and The Social Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3. With his thesis that psychoanalysis arose as a creative response to the irreversible loss of Western culture's most meaningful values and symbolic constructions, Homans challenges those who assume the movement's total break with the past. (He evades the question of whether Freud himself falls into this category.) My interest goes a step beyond that of Homans, claiming not that psychoanalysis emerges out of and creatively responds to the process of secularization, or that its theory of culture replaces the religious past by way of interpreting it, but that psychoanalysis *draws* on that religious past even as it pretends to have supplanted it.

discredit the book along with its author, disparaging the former on the basis of the latter. Such a product, he implies, could only be contrived by someone who has proudly "assimilated with non-Jews," gives primacy to "their teaching and the merits of their morality over our Torah and our morality," and "took no part in our intellectual life or in anything to do with Jewry and its teaching." Still, in Yahuda's appraisal of Freud is not entirely to blame for his repudiation of all things Jewish. Freud, he asserts, grew up in an era of the Enlightenment that in Catholic Vienna was hostile to religion, the environment of which conditioned his unsympathetic receptions to religion in general and to Judaism in particular.[27]

Through extensive research on the Austro-Hungarian Empire we have learned that, even if pervaded for a period by the spirit of liberalism, the Austria of Freud's life was a far cry from the aggressive secularity of Yahuda's portrayal.[28] However much the picture has been complicated and moderated over the ensuing decades, Yahuda's sketch remains significant insofar as it initiates a veritable reception history seeking to fix the contours of Freud's relationship to *Judentum,* or to subsume him, however uneasily, under this affiliation. As alluded to above, the most cited instance of this approach is Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses*, which

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[27] Abraham Shalom Yahuda, "Critique of Freud's Moses and Monotheism," *Bitzaron* 1 (1939), cited in *The Jew in The Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 470-471.

[28] See, for example, Judith Wolfe, "A Christian Crisis of Modernity: Intellectual Confrontations With and Within Christianity at the Time of Kafka," in *Kafka und die Religion in der Moderne*, ed. Manfred Engel and Ritchie Robertson (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014), 31-40, which adumbrates the Catholic Church's negotiation of tradition and modernity as competing claims; Jay Geller, "The Psychopathology of Everyday Vienna: Psychoanalysis and Freud's Familiars," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 85 (2004): 1209-1223, which stresses that the Gentile Viennese opposition to Jewish assimilation mobilizes theological resources; and Ritchie Robertson, "'My True Enemy:' Freud and The Catholic Church 1927-1939," in *Austria in The Thirties: Culture and Politics*, ed. Kenneth Segar and John Warren (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1991), 328-344, reminds us that the Austrian Corporate State of the postwar period was closely allied with religious institutions, and that Freud hesitated to publish *Moses and Monotheism* precisely on account of the imagined backlash by the Catholic Church.

advances the dual thesis that Freud downplayed both the intensity of his Jewish identity as well as the breadth of his knowledge about his ancestral tradition (including a covert knowledge of Hebrew), and that, despite his proclamations and intentions to the contrary, *Moses and Monotheism* all but proves that psychoanalysis is in truth a "Jewish national affair."[29] That is to say, the book's psycho-historial account of the Jewish people is emplotted to conform to Freud's self-stylization as a "Psychological Jew," that is, one who does not embrace any visible form of Jewish commitment but nevertheless feels irreducibly Jewish nonetheless.[30] Mitigating the "violent" implications of Yerushalmi's suppositions yet still pursuing this line of thought are those who see in Freud's writings a fecundity for constructive and combative Jewish reflection.[31] Although sympathetic to Yerushalmi, Ken Koltun-Fromm, for example, instead sees the enduring value of Freud's *Moses* in its status as a primer for thinking about cultural memory, namely, how a group remembers, imagines, and forgets its history.[32] And Michael Mack creatively locates

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[29] Freud to Karl Abraham, May 3, 1908, in *A Psycho-Analytic Dialogue: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham (1907-1926),* ed. Hilda Abraham and Ernst Freud (London: Hogarth, 1965), 34. On this score Yerushalmi is assisted by Freud himself, who wrote to Professor Enrico Morselli that he would not feel ashamed if psychoanalysis turned out to be "a product of the Jewish spirit" (February 18, 1926, in *The Letters of Sigmund Freud, 1873-1939*, trans. Tania and James Stern [New York: Basic, 1975], 380, cited in Gay, *A Godless Jew*, 127).

[30] Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 10. What Yerushalmi sees as Freud's self-reflexive project may apply as well to Yerushalmi himself. Just as he saw Freud reading Jewish history like a mirror, so too might Yerushalmi be projecting his own ambivalences toward the Jewish tradition onto Freud. For one treatment of Yerushalmi's see Steven Aschheim, "History, Memory, and The Fallen Jew," Review of *The Faith of Fallen Jews: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and The Writing of Jewish History*, ed. David Myers and Alexander Kaye, *The Jewish Review of Books* 5.2 (Spring 2014), https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/791/history-memory-and-the-fallen-jew/.

[31] Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* is perhaps the most famous response to Yerushalmi's book, faulting him for forcibly prodding Freud to publicly confess to a Judaism about which the latter is reluctant. In this respect Yerushalmi resembles Jacob, who also has high Jewish hopes for his son. For an extended reading of Derrida's critique see Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 210-216.

[32] Ken Koltun-Fromm, "Imagining Moses: The Burden and Blessing of Reading Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*," *Jewish Book Annual* 55/56 (1997-1999): 62-87.

Freud within a German-Jewish philosophical and theological tradition, arguing that several key psychoanalytic categories can be read as "turning the tables" on Kant's critical project and its anti-Jewish bent.[33]

In a remark targeted specifically at Yerushalmi yet indirectly to this coterie as a whole, Edward Said averred that the nature of Freud's Jewishness was hardly an "open-and-shut matter."[34] Heeding this counsel, another group of readers stress a "bifurcated Freud," a figure caught between and drawing on competing cultural sources of meaning. The work of Susan Handelman, whose interests concentrate on the Western hermeneutic tradition, constitutes a slight shift in this direction, for she ultimately vacillates between an open and a shut Freud. Her contention that Freud's work amounts to a compromise formation between an interpretation scientific in its procedures and a methodology Talmudic in its sensibility, cross-cuts with her conviction that psychoanalysis, qua modern art of interpretation, is grounded in and indebted to the rabbinic exegetical mode over against the German school of philosophical hermeneutics derived from Protestant scriptural reading practices. In other words, the work of dream analysis in particular reveals that psychoanalysis is in fact a "Jewish science" inasmuch as it shares with the rabbis the presupposition that the task of interpretation is to uncover hidden textual meaning, along with that of the infinite plurality of readings.[35]

Less hesitant depictions of Freud at the crossroads have been put forward by the likes of Marthe Robert and Peter Gay. Albeit with different accents, both portray the founder as a

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[33] Michael Mack, *German Idealism and The Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 136-154.

[34] Edward Said, *Freud and The Non-European* (London: Verso, 2003), 32.

[35] Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 123-152.

Zweistromland, an embodied nexus of German and Jewish currents.[36] As part of her main claim that Freud's conflicts with and ambivalence towards his father are the key to the origin of psychoanalysis and the central motif of all of Freud's work, Robert's version of this strand proposes that Freud's divided existence was conditioned by Jacob's incomplete break with Judaism and the latter's failure to transmit authentic Judaism to his children.[37] Only in *Moses and Monotheism*, furthermore, does Freud's conflict between loyalty to his Jewish origins and his desire for success in a preponderantly Gentile world fully surface, for there he dissociates himself from both the Jews (by declaring Moses an Egyptian) and the Germans (by identifying with Moses, who breaks away from the Egyptians just as Freud wished to break away from the Germans).[38]

As much as he is amenable to Robert's project and in agreement with its conclusions, the historically-oriented Gay avoids her psycho-biographical approach, perhaps wary of the attempt to turn the tables on Freud by using the categories of psychoanalysis against their progenitor. He instead errs on the side of restricting his analysis to what Freud explicitly says about himself, and, pace Robert, emphasizes the positive, affirmative dimension of his dissonant cultural

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[36] Rendered literally as "two-rivered land," the term was employed metaphorically by Franz Rosenzweig to connote the German Jew's dual allegiance to Judaism and German culture (Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews*, 43-44).

[37] Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses*, 135. With this claim Robert adopts Kafka's insight into the domestic complex of German-Jewish writers of his generation, revolting against the desiccated spirituality of their fathers (*From Oedipus to Moses: Freud's Jewish Identity*, trans. Ralph Manheim [Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976], 7-11).

[38] Ritchie Robertson, "Freud's Testament," in *Freud in Exile: Psychoanalysis and its Vicissitudes*, ed. Edward Timms and Naomi Segal (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 83, alluding to Robert, *From Oedipus to Moses*, 167.

attachments.[39] This reversal serves to remind us that detachment from one force does not automatically entail movement towards another. With his bounded technique, however, Gay's erudition gives rise to two unresolved issues. First, he oscillates between the characterization of Freud as a Jew and as a *Trotzjuden*, that is, one who defiantly affirms his Jewish identity in the face of antisemitism.[40] The tension stems from Freud himself, who speaks of his own Jewishness both vis-à-vis and independently of anti-Jewish hostility. His evasion allows him to write both that he has "yet never repudiated his people, who feels that he is in his essential nature a Jew [*seine Eigenart als jüdisch*] and who has no desire to alter that nature," but also to say that, "My language is German. My culture, my attainments are German. I considered myself German intellectually, until I noticed the growth of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany and German Austria. Since that time, I prefer to call myself a Jew."[41] Declarations like these sound straightforward enough, but they lure Gay into a second trap: the conflation of culture and identity. In light of the grammar of Freud's semantic construction one expects that, with the rise of German anti-Semitic prejudice, it is Jewish *culture* and its attendant features in which Freud now participates. But the last statement is one of predication and denomination ("I prefer to call myself a Jew"), devoid of any indication of a prior adherence to a specific *Kultur*. Gay knows

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[39] In "Six Names in Search of An Interpretation" Gay argues that the names of Freud's children reflect this split. The girls are named after Jewish intimates from Freud's life, whereas the boys are named after Gentiles who influenced Freud's thinking.

[40] This alternation leads Gay to write both that Freud's Jewishness was simply a "self-respecting response to antisemitism" ("Six Names," 298), and that Freud unequivocally identified with Jews ("Freud's Jewish Identity," *Illif Review* 38 [1981]: 42). These postures are not contrary, but they are contradictory to each other. For a discussion on the origins and significance of the concept of *Trotzjudentum*, see Jehuda Reinharz, *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of The German Jew, 1893-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 79.

[41] Freud, "Preface" to the Hebrew translation of *Totem and Taboo* (1914), in *SE* XIII:xv [hereafter *TT*] / "Vorrede zur hebräischen Ausgabe," in *GW* XIV:569; George Sylvester Viereck, *Glimpses of the Great* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1930), 34, cited in Gay, "Freud's Jewish Identity," 47.

this, but his language slips between the two categories, not without consequences for the possibility of grasping Freud's animating identifications. At one point Germanness and Jewishness are conceived as components of a "complex identity," which is to say, cannot be simplified to one underlying and fully encompassing element; at another, Freud's Jewish identity is seen as subsisting in a "larger mental world: that of the European scientific, most specifically materialist mind."[42] Mental worlds bespeak cultural nurturing, and Freud has not disavowed the possession of an intellect suffused by a German spirit.

The question of Freud's Jewishness, therefore, is best interrogated without the culture-identity heuristic. Because these categories are neither contrary nor contradictory to each other, to use Aristotelian terminology, they can co-exist in relative harmony.[43] This lesson is well-known from the course of modern Jewish thought: from Moses Mendelssohn and Samson Raphael Hirsch through Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig, Jewish intellectuals sought to persuade an incredulous Gentile country and a dubious Jewish community that *Deutschtum* and *Judentum* were not only compatible but in fact mutually enhancing. More fruitful, then, is analyzing the concept of *Judentum* itself, which is a condensation of ethos [Judaism], ethnos [Jewry], and ethic [Jewishness].[44] Using these ingredients as a guide, we find that, respectively, Freud *rejected* Jewish religion, *embraced* Jewish peoplehood, and was convinced to have *inherited* Jewish character.

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[42] Gay, "Freud's Jewish Identity," 47; Gay, "Six Names," 28.

[43] Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, 17b.

[44] For the pithy formulation of *Judentum*'s components see Geller, "The Psychopathology of Everyday Vienna," 1210. Condensation is an apt metaphor because Freud would adopt the term [*Verdichtung*] in the service of his theory of dreams, describing that unconscious process whereby disparate images fuse to form a compound.

With regard to the question of Freud's religious sensibilities, there is little ambiguity. If he, under the tutelage of the philosopher Franz Brentano, entertained theistic inclinations at the beginning of his university years, they were certainly extirpated by the end of them (along with any regard for philosophy). Under the twin influences of the writings of left-wing Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach in the mid-1870s and the scientific materialists in whose labs he researched throughout the 1880s, Freud sedimented his disdain for the actuality of, and the value of belief in, the supernatural.[45] His critique of Judaism, then, is part and parcel of his larger exposé of religion, which in his view is grounded in the infantile longing of mankind for paternal protection and security in the face of an indifferent world. As he reassured the German-Jewish writer Arnold Zweig, Jews are not exempt from "religions, sacred frenzies [*heiligen Wahnwitz*], presumptuous attempts to overcome the outer world of appearance by means of the inner world of wishful thinking."[46] Awarding himself the honorific of "infidel Jew," he once explained that his apostasy could be traced back to his father's negligence in transmitting the teachings of the faith.[47] Unlike the case of Kafka, however, his account is intended less as an accusation than as a presentation of fact, and this absence did not create a spiritual hunger that could be satisfied either by the acquisition of Hebrew or the observance of festivals and ceremonies. Complacent in

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[45] Gay, *A Godless Jew*, 53-60.

[46] Freud to Arnold Zweig, May 8, 1932, in *The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Arnold Zweig*, ed. Ernst Freud (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 40 / *Sigmund Freud Arnold Zweig: Briefwechsel*, ed. Ernst Freud (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1968), 51.

[47] Freud to J. Dwossis, Jerusalem, December 15, 1930, typed transcription, Freud Museum, London, cited in Gay, *Freud*, 600. The phrase "infidel Jew" appears (in English) in Freud, "A Religious Experience" (1927), in *SE* XXI:170.

his alienation from the life of faith, he styles himself as one "der väterlichen Religion—wie jeder anderen—völlig entfremdet ist."[48]

Freud's tribal consciousness is equally unequivocal. Throughout his life, especially at times when to do so was perilous both for himself and for the psychoanalytic movement he founded, Freud proudly affirmed his Jewish identity, his strong sense of intimate belonging to his primordial community. His ethnic affections are expressed most touchingly in his 1926 address to the Bnai Brit Society of Vienna commemorating his seventieth birthday.[49] Of the *Verein*'s personal and social appeal he writes, "That you were Jews could only be agreeable [*erwünscht*] to me; for I was myself a Jew, and it had always seemed to me not only unworthy but positively senseless to deny the fact."[50] Freud had joined the Society back in 1897, when he was working through the synchronous pangs of his father's death, the formulation of dream interpretation, professional opprobrium by the Viennese medical class due to his radical reconceptualization of the psyche, and the rise of political antisemitism symbolized in the election of Karl Lueger as Vienna's mayor in the same year.[51] These pressures engendered the yearning for brotherly companionship; but his membership and its choice of timing may also have had a political

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[48] Freud, "Vorrede" to *TT*, in *GW* XIV:569.

[49] As Shulamit Volkov explains, Bnai Brit was conceived as a Jewish counterpart to the Freemasons and intended to form a response to the antisemitism prevalent among its members. The founding reflected a larger "collective dissimilatory response of German Jewry on the organization and communal level" ("The Dynamics of Dissimilation: *Ostjuden* and German Jews," in *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to The Second World War*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg [Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985], 198-199).

[50] Freud, "Address to the Society of B'nai B'rith" (1941), in *SE* 20:273 / "*Ansprache an die Mitglieder des Vereins B'nai B'rith*," in *GW* XVII:51.

[51] Responding to Carl Schorske, who presents a picture of *fin de siècle* Freud as virtually apolitical, William Olmsted argues that contemporary antisemitism in Vienna had more of an influence on psychoanalysis and its early theories than has hitherto been acknowledged ("Turning The Tables: Freud's Response to Antisemitism in *The Interpretation of Dreams*," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 [2009]: 191-216).

aspect, for his defiant personality and streak of *Trotzjudentum* caused him to feel "most Jewish when times were hardest for Jews."[52] In Freud's case, this visceral need to boldly confront racial opposition with ethnic solidarity was informed by and juxtaposed with a rather "lachrymose" understanding of the course of Jewish history, continuous with that historiographical approach beginning with Ephraim of Bonn in the twelfth century that discerns in the Jewish past an unbroken succession of suffering and misery.[53] Upon the opening of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1924, for which he served on the first Board of Governors, Freud composed in English a brief but forceful paean to the historical significance of the event for "*our* small nation," "*our* people" who have been subjected to "two thousand years of unhappy fortune."[54]

In conjunction with *ethnos*, it is important to mention a cognate component, that of race, if only because Freud, unable to fully transcend his historical moment, participates in its discourse as a means of sorting out diverse social groups. Although he primarily takes up the language of *Volk*, particularly in order to name the object of his instinctive affiliation, he

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[52] Gay, *A Godless Jew*, 138.

[53] Norman Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5. The label of "lachrymose" for this interpretation of Jewish history comes from Salo Wittmayer Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," *The Menorah Journal* 14 (1928): 526.

[54] Freud, "On the Occasion of the Opening of the Hebrew University" (1925), in *GW* XIV:556-557. [My italics.] The occasion for these words compels us to say something about Freud's relationship to Jewish sovereignty. In theory Freud distinguished between ethnicity and nationality—nay, between nationality and nationalism, professing that he "cannot take a share in nationalist ideals" ("Preface" to *TT*, in *SE* XIII:xv). On the question of Zionism, however, his statements fluctuate between censure and support. He told his brethren at Bnai Brit that if he "felt an inclination to national enthusiasm [*Ein nationales Hochgefühl*], I strove to suppress it as being harmful and wrong, alarmed by the warning examples of the peoples among whom we Jews live" ("Address," in *SE* XX:273 / *GW* XVII:52). He never *publicly* endorsed the push for Jewish immigration to Mandate Palestine, nor did he believe it to be a sustainable site for the future state (*Freudiana: From the Collections of The Jewish National and University Library,* Jerusalem: Jewish National and University Library, 1973.19, cited in Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 13). Yet he did recall that the Zionist cause "awakened my strongest sympathies, which are still faithfully attached to it today" (Freud to J. Dwossis, Jerusalem, December 15, 1930, cited in Gay, *A Godless Jew*, 123).

occasionally speaks of *Judentum* as a discrete and effectively impermeable *Rasse*. Fittingly, the notable invocations of this category appear within the context of the "Jung question," that is, the unsettling incorporation of an Aryan into the inchoate and thus fragile psychoanalytic movement composed entirely of Jews. Aside from Jung's virtues as a therapist in the vein of the new science, the invitation to join the circle was predominantly strategic, intended to assure potential detractors (and Freud himself) that psychoanalysis was not merely "a Jewish national affair" [*eine jüdisch nationale Angelegenheit*], and that its pretensions to the status of an objective science was reflected in the heterogenous backgrounds of its practitioners.[55] While Freud believed the term "Jewish science" to be oxymoronic—the particularism implied in the adjective compromising the universal truth pursued by the noun—he did believe in the existence of racial differences, particularly and starkly between Jews and Gentiles.[56] In the effort to make sense of his ostensibly theoretical conflict with Jung, Freud granted to disciple Sándor Ferenczi in 1913 that "great differences with the Aryan spirit" could account for "different *Weltanschauungen* here and there."[57] Moreover, when Freud detected in his protégé Karl Abraham a bitterness towards Jung owing to the latter's resistance to psychoanalysis, he reminded Abraham that amenability to the new teachings was not equivalent across racial lines: whereas Jung had to overcome "great

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[55] Freud to Abraham, May 3, 1908, in *Sigmund Freud Karl Abraham: Briefe 1907-1926*, ed. Hilda Abraham and Ernst Freud (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1980), 47. [My translation.]

[56] Ironically, it was Jung who, years after his personal and theoretical break with Freud around 1913, would conclude that Freudian psychoanalysis is in fact a Jewish psychology, an inference presuming racial discrepancies between Jews and Germanic peoples (Carl Jung, "A Rejoinder to Dr. Bally" (1934), in *Civilization in Transition*, vol. 10 of *The Collected Works of Carl Jung*, ed. and trans. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970], 539-543).

[57] Freud to Ferenczi, June 8, 1913, Freud-Ferenczi Correspondence, Freud Collection, Library of Congress, cited in Gay, *Freud*, 239.

inner resistances," Abraham, as a Jew, could easily find his way to them "because you stand closer to my intellectual constitution through racial kinship [*Rassenverwandtschaft*]."[58]

Freud did not think that nationality carried determinative and isolatable qualia, as much as he believed that belonging to a people pointed towards or served as the substratum of a palpable ethic. As he proclaims to Abraham in 1908, it is not their common ethnicity, but "kindred Jewish *traits* that attract me to you [*verwandte, jüdische Züge, die mich in Ihnen anziehen*]."[59] Freud's inkling that the Jew constituted a certain type of character, definable in terms of a series of temperamental features, became an anthropological preoccupation in the second half of the 1920s and throughout the 1930s. The inquiry into the meaning of Jewishness was perhaps precipitated by the *Selbstdarstellung*, in which he was commissioned to offer an autobiographical portrayal, quite literally to "represent himself." Indeed, Freud pursued a characterological answer to the essence of *Judentum* even if the totality of its constitutive elements remained elusive. He seemed to be making progress when he addressed his brothers at Bnai Brit the following year. As a way of accounting for his irresistible attraction to fellow Jews, using the language of *Anziehung* as he did with Abraham, he cited "many obscure emotional forces, which were the more powerful the less they could be expressed in words, as well as a clear consciousness of inner identity, the safe intimacy of a common mental construction [*die*

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[58] Freud to Abraham, May 3, 1908, in *Freud Abraham Briefe*, 47. [My translation.] Freud does not always neatly distinguish religion and race as determining categories, for Jung's reluctance is, in his view, due to being a Christian as well as the son of a pastor. With this conflation Freud mirrors a certain type of antisemitic discourse that justifies the exclusion of Jews on theological grounds, a strand endorsed by a man with whom Freud would later have a hostile history, Father Wilhelm Schmidt. Ritchie Robertson shows that Freud feared *Moses and Monotheism* would be censored by Schmidt, fueled by a preexisting repugnance to psychoanalytic ideas, and argues that Freud's last book may be seen as a response to Schmidt's anti-Jewish theory of monotheism ("My True Enemy," 328-344).

[59] Freud to Abraham, July 23, 1908, in *Freud Abraham Briefe*, 57. [My translation and italics.]

Heimlichkeit der gleichen seelischen Konstruktion].” Two characteristics of this psychological edifice include a liberation from prejudices that poison the intellects of others, as well as a preternatural readiness to uphold dissenting opinions.[60] In the ensuing years, however, Freud became dissatisfied with his hypotheses on the Jewish mind, seemingly retracting their validity. In 1930 he maintained that, stripped of all the conventional forms of tribal and religious attachment, the quiddity [*Hauptsache*] of Jewishness yet remained with him. This essence [*Wesentliche*] could not be communicated linguistically, but one day, he hopes, it will become accessible to scientific insight.[61]

It is only with *Moses and Monotheism*—that is, at the very end of his life—that Freud found an answer to his “Jewish question.”[62] Scholarly reception of this “historical novel” often neglects to point out the misleading nature of the title: in keeping with both his repudiation of faith and the functionalist orientation of his theory of religion, Freud is in the final analysis less interested in the origin and development of monotheism per se than he is in tracing its effects on the souls of its adherents.[63] After all, according to the sacred scriptures of the Hebrews aniconism [*Bilderverbot*] is a religious and arguably amoral injunction, the third divinely revealed commandment at Mount Sinai. At one and the same time Freud could deny the prohibition

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[60] Freud, “Address,” in *SE* XX:274 / “*Ansprache*,” in *GW* XVII:52.

[61] Freud, “Vorrede” to *TT*, in *GW* XIV:569. [My translation.]

[62] Richard Bernstein’s formulation is that *Moses and Monotheism* is the answer to the question Freud poses to himself in the preface to *Totem and Taboo* (“Why [the Jews] Have Attracted This Undying Hatred,” 30).

[63] The phrase “historical novel” appears in Freud to Lou Andreas-Salomé, January 6, 1935, in *Sigmund Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé, Letters*, trans. Elaine and William Robson Scott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 204, cited in Gay, *Freud*, 605. For the categorization of Freud’s theory as functionalist, see Daniel Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 72. Pals’s label is too reductive, since Freud, like many of his nineteenth century predecessors, is concerned with explaining the origins of religion. For a more balanced approach see J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion*: *Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 178-204.

against images any theological validity yet regard it as the Rosetta stone to understanding the Jewish character, insofar as it promotes "progress in spiritualicity [*der Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit*]."[64] That is to say, the demotion of perceptible representation of the deity is one indication of a superior mind, one that has transcended the material realm to concentrate on intellectual, abstract concerns.[65] On a dissonant yet cooperative foundation of a heightened pride and an acute sense of guilt Freud posits a Jewish character with an exalted moral consciousness and an ardent commitment to ethical rectitude; a devotion to rationality, legalism, austerity, tenacity, and a will to separateness; the cultivation of intellectual prowess; and an augmented capacity for instinctual renunciation.[66] Guided by what Yerushalmi calls "psycho-Lamarckism,"

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[64] Freud, *Der Mann Moses*, in GW XVI:219. "Spiritualicity" is my coinage for *Geistigkeit*, in order to account for the difficulty of translating the complex word *Geist* into English, and to honor Freud's connotation. "Intellectuality" is sometimes used, but it neither encompasses the semantic rage of *Geist* nor covers the non-intellectual aspect of the Jewish character. In her translation Katherine Jones uses "spirituality," but I avoid it because of its association with religious sentiment—which Freud does not at all intend. Bernstein acknowledges the inadequacy of these renderings but does not provide an alternative ("Undying Hatred," 30).

[65] Several scholars see Freud as linking the Jewish character to the facilitation of a scientific consciousness. For Bernstein, psychoanalysis stands in the lineage of *Geistigkeit*, the secular successor to the tradition of pure monotheism inaugurated by Moses (*Freud and The Legacy of Moses* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 83; "Undying Hatred," 35). Robertson goes as far as to claim not simply that Freud "associated Jewishness with scientific rationality," but also that he believed Judaism "offers a better starting-point from which to advance into the scientific age" (*The 'Jewish Question' in German Literature, 1749-1939: Emancipation and Its Discontents* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], 129; "Freud's Testament," 86. These positions indirectly challenge Gay's thesis of a composite Freud, instead suggesting that the latter's Jewish identity on the one hand and scientific outlook on the other are in fact mutually reinforcing if not identical forces.

Furthermore, in Freud's assertion of the superiority of the Jewish character Sander Gilman identifies an attempt to reverse the antisemitic stereotype of the "savage Jew" (*The Jew's Body* [New York: Routledge, 1991]). If Freud is at once turning the tables on yet mirroring the logic of this trope, then Jan Assmann's thesis of a Freud deconstructing exclusivist counter-religions must be rethought. In other words, Freud is not looking to resuscitate the Enlightenment's spirit of religious toleration by abolishing the Mosaic distinction between true and false forms of belief; he is, rather, establishing a hierarchical counter-opposition. For a lucid summary of Assmann's position see Koltun-Fromm, "Imagining Moses," 66-74.

[66] Robert Wistrich, "The Last Testament of Sigmund Freud," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 49.1 (2004): 98-99. On Freud's ascription of guilt and pride see Lawrence Kaplan, "Moses, Murder, and the Jewish Psyche," *Jewish Review of Books* 9.2 (Spring 2018), https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/3051/moses-murder-jewish-psyche/.

according to which psychological (not biological, per Jean Baptiste) traits are inherited as part of a phylogenic endowment, Freud believed that these Jewish characteristics were acquired and transmitted across the generations.[67]

Having adumbrated Freud's disparate attitudes on the modules of *Judentum*, we are now in a better position to grasp the sense and import of an apparently banal remark from his autobiographical study: "My parents were Jews, and I have remained a Jew myself [*ich bin Jude geblieben*]."[68] If according to Freud both ethnos and ethic are obstinate realities of one's makeup, the only way in which one can meaningfully be said to "remain" a Jew is to affirm these accidental inheritances, and to appreciate their value in the face of socio-theological temptations. Conversion, therefore, an embrace of a rival faith tradition, was in his view illusory because of the ineluctability of Jewishness, and contemptible because it betrays one's people just as it capitulates to the viewpoint of the religious "compact majority."[69] Yet Freud's investigation of the Jewish character impressed upon him that the renunciation of one's primal affiliation was also lamentable, because that essence was a source of pride, a unique achievement among the nations. A finer psyche, not nationalist sentiment, was a worthy justification for *Hochgefühl.*

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[67] Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 30-31; cf. Rieff, *Freud*, 199-203. Yerushalmi and Rieff's labelling of Freud as a "Psychological Jew," the Jew as a unique character, is grounded on Freud's appropriation of Lamarck's iteration of evolutionary theory. However, given Freud's conclusions about this character, with its combination of intellectual and spiritual dimensions, the modifier feels misleading. Using Freud's own language, then, *ein geistiger Jude* hits closer to the mark.

[68] Freud, *Autobiographical Study*, in *SE* XX:7 / *Selbstdarstellung*, in *GW* XIV:34.

[69] For Freud's thoughts on conversion see Gay, *A Godless Jew,* 124. His contempt for the decision reflects a late nineteenth-century shift in attitude among German Jews, who with a century of evidence induced that it was a "false route" to material success and social integration (Volkov, "Dynamics of Dissimilation," 199). Freud uses the term "*kompakten Majorität*" (*GW* XVII: 52), borrowed from Henrik Ibsen's play *An Enemy of The People* (1882), in his Bnai Brit address (*The Jew in The Modern World*, 834).

II. The Eclipse of The Posterior

The aforementioned self-representation is also significant because it bridges explicit and implied, literal and figural, meanings of Jewishness as conveyed through Freud's correspondence and writings. Although he does not confess that he remained loyal to his Jewish provenance either from a sense of filial piety or out of deferred obedience, the superfluous yet deliberate invocation of his parents intimates that he thought of *Judentum* and his relationship to it as bearing some nebulous connection to his immediate progenitors. Indeed, the yoking of parents and son underscores that Jewishness qua phylogenetic endowment does not simply originate in a remote past, but passes intimately between the generations like a treasured heirloom. Passively inheriting an ethos in which one has no say, then, points to the past's determination of the present, its ability to circumscribe the horizon of an individual and collective future, and its power to keep one subject to its imposing dictates.[70] The difficulty a successor faces in overcoming the controlling influence of a predecessor is a ubiquitous theme in the Freudian corpus, and, insofar as Jewishness constitutes one such force in it, may be named a "Jewish" dimension of his writings.

It is most fitting to begin with the father-son relationship itself. It is with the father figure that anteriority is most immediately embodied and metonymized, and impinges upon the son most forcefully, since fathers literally precede their spawn, and because, according to Freud, the set of affects a son holds towards his father throughout his life have their (unconscious) source in

[70] By incorporating this figural dimension of Jewishness, we can now revise Mack's thesis that the concept of memory "relates Freud's understanding of Judaism to psychoanalytic theory and practice," insofar as both stress the conscious remembrance of the past (*German Idealism and The Jew*, 154). It is, rather, the "Jewish" trope of anteriority that activates memory; the most adequate response to the discernment of the past's shadow over the present is to remember.

the past of his childhood.[71] Freud's various representations of this relation will be analyzed later; for now an autobiographical essay amounting to a self-analysis will illustrate that this figurally Jewish aspect applies as well to the founder himself. In 1936 Freud sent seventieth birthday greetings in the form of a letter to the Nobel Prize winning French novelist Romain Rolland, with whom he had maintained a genial correspondence since 1923.[72] To his friend Freud recounted an experience of de-realization while visiting the Acropolis with his brother Alexander for the first time thirty-two years earlier. The spontaneous rejection of a piece of phenomenal reality upon standing at that ancient monument, captured in the thought, "'so this all really does exist, just as we learnt at school!'" was neither reducible to an ordinary feeling of incredulity nor to a previous delusional denial of the site's existence.[73] Recalling that these sudden "disturbances of memory [*Erinnerungsstörungen*]" depend on the repression of earlier painful experiences, along with serving the purpose of defense in barring objectionable elements access to consciousness, Freud concluded that this instance of estrangement [*Entfremdung*] had both domestic and boyhood roots:

> There must be a feeling of guilt associated with the satisfaction of having come such a long way; there is something involved in it that is wrong, something that has for a long time been forbidden. It has to do with criticism of our father in childhood, with the undervaluation that had replaced that overvaluation of his character which had prevailed in early childhood. It seems as though the essential aspect of success lies in getting further [*weiter zu bringen*] than one's father, as though wishing to outdo [*übertreffen*] one's father were forbidden…
> [T]he very subject of Athens and the Acropolis contains a reference to the superiority of sons. Our father had been a businessman, he had no grammar-school education, Athens would not have

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[71] Freud, "Schoolboy Psychology," in *SE* XIII:243.

[72] Homans argues that Freud's relationship with Rolland repeats the pattern established with Jung: both were regarded as representatives of a European and Christian culture from which he sought recognition, and propelled a dialectic of idealization and augmented self-understanding through their theoretical disputes (*The Ability to Mourn*, 88-95). The crucial difference is that in the case of Rolland, disagreement did not lead to a parting of the ways.

[73] Freud, "A Disturbance of Memory on The Acropolis" (1936), in *SE* XXII:241 / *Brief an Romain Rolland (Eine Erinnerungsstörung auf der Akropolis*), in *GW* XVI:251.

> meant much to him. What disturbed our enjoyment of the trip to Athens, then, was an impulse of *piety* [*eine Regung der Pietät*].[74]

Despite his achievements neither the ripe Freud of seventy-nine nor the mature one at forty-eight whom he recalls has entirely overcome his filial position. Surprised by guilt, his memory is here disturbed by a re-cognition that transcends valuations of the father, but he nevertheless sees himself as bound to and up with him. Yet as much as memory and the pleasure of the excursion are interrupted by reverential instincts, it is ultimately Freud's illusion of total liberation from sonship that is disturbed. If guilt is the cost of surpassing an elder, then one can never overshadow the father even if he outdoes him.

Although the manifest subject of Freud's letter is the inextinguishable impulse of filial piety, the related subtext is clearly the origins of and animating drives to religion, continuing a theme that preoccupied his correspondence with Rolland from its inception. As a branch of the natural sciences psychoanalysis isolates the genuine (domestic) object of piety and distinguishes it from its "idolatrous" manifestations, chief among which is religion itself.[75] In the vein of the Enlightenment philosophes Freud construed science and religion as locked in an irreconcilable struggle for intellectual ascendancy.[76] To be sure the scientific orientation to reality was less an offspring of the religious than an antithetical successor, but both are, *stricto sensu*,

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[74] Freud, "A Disturbance of Memory," in *SE* XXII:247-248 / *Eine Erinnerungsstörung*, in *GW* XVI:256- 257. [Author's italics.]

[75] Freud sent Rolland a copy of *The Future of an Illusion* upon its publication in 1927. Although Rolland was amenable to its findings he wondered whether the true source of religious sentiment was instead a *sui generis* sensation of eternity, of a boundless entity in which one feels enveloped (Gay, *Freud*, 544). Freud's response to this "oceanic feeling" would become the gambit of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, arguing that this fundamental source of religious energy merely expresses a return to a primal psychic stage wherein self and world were not yet individuated (*SE* XXI:66-68). The end of the Acropolis letter could be read as doubling down on the thesis of the paternal origin of religion laid out in *Future of an Illusion*, since piety, generally construed as a theological category with the divine as its object, is primarily and properly the son's feeling towards the father.

[76] Gay, *A Godless Jew,* 1-34.

Weltanschauungen in their shared provision of an "intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis…"[77] As much as Freud believed that on account of its truth value science would ultimately be the victor in this long-standing battle, his writings evince the Sisyphean suspicion that religious impulses are a permanent feature of human expression. Even in the last decade of his life Freud had to confront the stubborn perdurance of the religious spirit despite the cumulative force of its scientistic antagonist—a fact that he could and was constrained to explicate on psychological grounds. The deck was indeed stacked against science not only because of its belatedness to the evolution of human understanding, but also because its combatant was "prized as the most precious possession of civilization [*der kostbarste Besitz der Kultur*], as the most precious thing it has to offer its participants."[78] Furthermore, Freud's invocation of piety in the Rolland letter points to another reason to doubt the disappearance of religion, namely, that the necessary conditions of its appearance—illusion, wish fulfillment, the sense of helplessness, the need for protection, and longing for the father—are universal psychical processes.[79] If the predisposition to religious thinking is ever present in the mind, then the "illusion" might be thinking that it could ever be eradicated.

If religion is unlikely to be sublated in its protracted conflict with science, it is also because its appeal and power derive from unconscious roots. That is to say, religious beliefs and

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[77] Freud, "The Question of A *Weltanschauung*" (1933), in *SE* XXII:158. Freud proceeds to clarify that psychoanalysis does not possess a worldview apart from the scientific.

[78] *The Future of An Illusion* (1927), in *SE* XXI:20 [Hereafter *FI*] / *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, in *GW* XIV:342.

[79] Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 159.

activities are the vehicles through which unconscious needs, emotions, and wishes find an outlet for expression.[80] The id is the mental agency that encourages the satisfaction of religious impulses, while the ego is fittingly the locus of scientific investigation, insofar as both seek to bring the influence of the external world to bear on the id by substituting the reality principle for the pleasure principle.[81] However, Freud's principle discovery, and the irony at the heart of the third blow [*Kränkung*] to man's narcissism inflicted by scientific endeavor, is that "*the ego is not master in its own house* [*das Ich nicht Herr sei in seinem eigenen Haus*]."[82] Debunking the fantasies of self-transparency and complete self-control, psychoanalysis uncovers that the ego is largely the servant of unconscious, uncontrollable forces in the human mind, not only because the id is the driving psychic force, always in advance of the necessity and ability to be contained, but also because the ego gradually develops out of it.[83] For Freud, a baby is initially purely id, and the ego begins its differentiation from it in infancy. As the "son" of the id, then, the ego is subordinate to its father, overwhelmed by the insatiability of its demands, ever in the position of attempting to harness a superior might, and oftentimes even obliged to capitulate to its drives. The id, after all, never loses stamina, while the transcendental condition for the emergence of a pathology is an attrition of the ego's capacity to restrain the id's urges.[84]

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[80] Preus, *Explaining Religion*, 183; cf. Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, 70.

[81] Freud, *EI*, in *SE* XIX:25.

[82] Freud, "A Difficulty in The Path of Psychoanalysis" (1917), in *SE* XVII:143 / "*Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse*," in *GW* XII:11.

[83] Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1938), in *SE* XXIII:186. One sign of this genesis is the unconscious part of the ego (*EI*, in *SE* XIX:18).

[84] Freud, *An Outline*, in *SE* XXIII:172.

Despite granting his people's keen faculty for instinctual renunciation, Freud maintains that the primacy of unconscious forces applies equally to the history of the Jews. In *Moses and Monotheism* he argues that the grip of its religious tradition in the minds of its adherents lies neither in its putatively divine origins nor in the authority conferred on any administrative legal body but in the return of the repressed, that is, in the triggering of hitherto unconscious memories of real events from the remote past. That the Jewish tradition was for a time transmitted subliminally, in what is called an intervening "latency period," explains its compulsive as well as its inveterate character when challenged by Christianity, which Freud sees as a continuation [*Fortsetzung*] of and response to Judaism's unresolved dilemmas.[85] Similar to the portrayal of religion and faith, *Moses and Monotheism* depicts Judaism and Christianity, with the former in the role of the father and the latter in that of son, as locked in an *agon* for the prize of the monotheistic psyche. The unconsciously rooted solidity of pure, Mosaic monotheism carried on by Judaism, combined with an irrepressible and unassimilable *Volksgeist*, all but ensures that the Judaic will perennially hover over its son.[86]

To Rabbi Tarfon the saying is attributed in *Ethics of the Fathers* 2:16 that it is not incumbent upon one to finish a task, but neither is he free to absolve himself from it. This Jewish and pessimistic attestation to incompleteness is also a motif pervading Freud's writings, from the idea of interminable analysis, through the definition of neurosis as unfinished childhood conflicts, through the incessant conflict between the parts of the psychic apparatus, to the work

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[85] Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 33, 78; Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, in *SE* XXIII:190 / *Der Mann Moses*, in *GW* XVI:190.

[86] The concept of *Volksgeist* ("national spirit") was developed by Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal to describe a nation's shared psychological structure, molded by history and manifested in cultural phenomena. For a brief description of the term and its connection with Lamarck see Robertson, *The 'Jewish Question' in German Literature*, 139.

of psychoanalytic research, at that point in its infancy, yet, like scientific investigation itself, everlasting. It is the past's overshadowing of the present that destroys the un-Jewish illusion of fulfillment; as soon as we anticipate a pleromatic future, emancipated from that which has come before, the weight of the past obdurately insists on its controlling influence.

III. An Unlikelier Christian There Never Was

Freud succeeded in articulating the irreducible essence of the Jewish character, yet he also identified the reason for the "unhappy fortune" of the Jews to which he referred in his Hebrew University address. The answers were for him related, an apprehension impinged upon him during the early stages of research for his historical novel. With the Nazi party securely in power and the socio-cultural policy of *Entjüdung* [de-Judaization] gaining momentum, Freud apprised Zweig in the autumn of 1934 of his latest project: "Faced with the new persecution, one asks oneself again how the Jews have come to be what they are [*wie der Jude geworden ist*] and why they have attracted [*hat zugezogen*] this undying hatred [*diesen unsterblichen Haß*]. I soon discovered the formula: Moses created the Jews."[87] His formulation is awkward, but *Moses and Monotheism* would underline that something endemic to the Jewish character generates hostility towards it.[88] Along with its reactive character Freud discovered three things about antisemitism: that it is an overdetermined symptom, with both conscious and unconscious motivations; that its animosity directed at a racial class in fact has religious underpinnings; and that it is exclusively a Christian phenomenon.

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[87] Freud to Zweig, September 30, 1934, in *The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Arnold Zweig*, 91 / *Briefwechsel*, 102. Zweig fled Germany and emigrated to Palestine a year prior.

[88] Bernstein, "Undying Hatred," 31.

In its portrayal of an unconscious battle for psycho-theological truth, *Moses and Monotheism* confirmed a lifelong intuition of Freud's, one which was thrown into relief during and after the Jung affair: the conflict between the Judaic and Aryan-Christian spirits. With his pugnacious personality, Freud stood on guard on behalf of the cause, affirming in his published works and private correspondence both an unqualified support for the Jewish side and a vehement opposition to the Christian. This dual posture is an undeniable facet of Freud's thought; but an examination beyond his last book and the cursory references to Christianity throughout the corpus will indicate something closer to an ambivalence. It should be stated at the outset that, whereas Freud's Janus-faced position on *Judentum* consists in different attitudes towards its constitutive components, his ambivalence towards Christianity is modeled on his discrimination of mental qualities or states: conscious eschewal as well as unconscious identification on the basis of morphological homologies, shared controlling categories, and

unintended logical affinities.[89] Such an approach is well familiar to Freud himself: the subtitle of *Totem and Taboo* announces to its reader that it is concerned with ferreting out the correspondences [*Übereinstimmungen*] between the mental lives of savages and neurotics, while the relationship between obsessive actions and religious practices is drawn by analogical inferences [*Analogieschlüsse*].[90]

Like Freud's sense of Jewishness, his enmity towards Christianity is intimately connected (although not reducible) to his father. When Freud was a youngster Jacob recounted an incident during his own youth in Freiburg, when a "Christian" came up to him, knocked his new *Streimel* into the mud and shouted, "Jew! Get off the pavement!" To this antisemitic provocation Jacob

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[89] Some scholarly inquiries into Freud's "Christian question" should be cited here. Most vociferously opposed to the notion that psychoanalysis and religion(s) possess any likeness or comity is Gay, mirroring Freud's own constructed contrast and its indebtedness to the counter-clerical strand of Enlightenment thought. Although Gay admits that parallels between psychoanalysis and religion in general and Christianity in particular exist, he is all too quick to brush them aside because they do not bear on Freud's "cast of mind and the making of psychoanalysis" (*A Godless Jew*, 34). The number and strikingness of the resemblances alone are worthy of our consideration, yet the task of bringing them to light is made all the more urgent by the fact that the Christian perception of an alliance with Freud's ideas and the consequent attempt to think with them far outweighs the Jewish. This phenomenon is ironic both because of Freud's public anti-Christian stance, and because it is one to which Gay himself refers.

Others have been unwilling to entirely disregard an affinity between psychoanalysis and Christianity but fail to adequately interrogate the extent and limits of it. In referring to the "original sin" of murdering the primal father, Lawrence Kaplan falls into the same trap as those readers of Kafka exposed in the previous chapter: employing terminology borrowed from the Christian theological tradition to advance a Jewish reading, without mediating on the implications of doing so ("Moses, Murder, and the Jewish Psyche"). Avoiding the blindspot, Mack and Wistrich refer to an "ambivalence" within Freud's thought towards the Christian tradition but do not specify in what it consists (*German Idealism and The Jew*, 138; "The Last Testament," 98).

The most recent and thoughtful foray into this subject was undertaken by Gil Anidjar, for whom reception has elided "not so much the general religious import of Freud's work, but rather the *exorbitant* centrality in it of Jesus Christ, the acutely *singular* question of Christianity and its founder" (*Blood: A Critique of Christianity* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2014], 240). [Author's italics.] According to Anidjar, what Freud discerns in Christian teaching is the advancement of an anthropological claim, a new and revisionist conception of humanity as founded on moral innocence. While Freud regards this theory as illusory, a futile attempt to rewrite the psycho-history of humanity, Anidjar correctly points out that Christianity at the same time provides Freud's own myth all of its paradigmatic elements. My analysis understands itself as building and elaborating on this ambivalence, even if Anidjar does not utilize the locution.

[90] Freud, "Zwangshandlungen und Religionsübungen" (1908), in *GW* VII:129.

responded simply by walking in the roadway and picking up his fur hat. Whether Jacob's conduct was in fact "unheroic [*nicht heldenhaft*]" can be disputed—depending on the circumstance, fortitude and composure are spiritual virtues as much as they are vices. What is certain is that this *Urszene* evoked a counter-image in Freud's mind, one of Hamilcar Barca urging his son Hannibal to swear to take vengeance on the Romans.[91] On the one hand, Freud's subsequent response to antisemitism by means of *Trotzjudentum* and concomitant anti-Christianity is undertaken out of love for and protection of his father. On the other hand, Freud identifies not with his "cowardly" father but with the anonymous Christian, who is unafraid to confront his nemesis. The antisemitic Christian who merges the racial with the religious finds his counterpart in the doctor who would come to expose antisemitism's Christian foundations.[92]

The juxtaposition of "Christian" and "Roman" in Freud's reaction to his father's story begs the question as to who exactly constitutes the object of the son's revenge. In 1937, a few months before the *Anschluß* and a year before his escape to England, Freud told his guest René Laforgue that he was not afraid of the Nazis. "Help me rather to combat my true enemy," he said. When Laforgue asked him who this 'enemy' was, Freud responded, "religion, the Roman Catholic Church."[93] Putting aside whether Freud's answer connotes equation or addition, Freud's *immediate* adversary was the institution of the Church. In preponderantly Catholic Vienna, he viewed the Church of Rome and its Austrian underlings as the leading obstacles to full Jewish

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[91] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *SE* IV:197 / *Die Traumdeutung*, *GW* II/III:203.

[92] For Bernstein, Freud's concern for Christian antisemitism "set the problematic that he wanted to address in his *Moses* book" (*Freud and The Legacy of Moses*, 75).

[93] René Laforgue, "Personal Memories of Freud," in *Freud As We Knew Him*, ed., Hendrik Ruitenbeek (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), 344, cited in Robertson, "My True Enemy," 328.

integration into Austrian society.[94] Nevertheless, he almost always speaks of Christianity *in toto*, rarely of any of its wings or denominations, and even more seldom of any theological issue over which there is internecine strife. Combining this construal of a Christian monolith with the aforementioned quote to Laforgue permits a significant aspect of Freud's writings to come into view, namely, that when he is talking about "religion" he is *really* talking about Christianity.

The claim that Freud's critique of religion in general is in fact a *camera obscura* for a critique of Christianity in particular is warranted on three grounds: on account of their rhetorical proximity, axial categories, and the absence of Judaism. First, a survey of religious phenomena is usually followed by a Christian qualification or exemplum. In *The Future of an Illusion*, for example, he informs his reader that the religious ideas he has summarized—viz., the ideas he will proceed to expose as illusory—have been singled out from one phase of their evolution, "which roughly corresponds to the final form taken by our present-day white Christian civilization."[95] Freud provides no rationale for the decision to spotlight the contemporary stage. Similarly, in "A Religious Experience" that psychoanalyzes a letter sent to Freud in 1927, the American physician's sudden incredulity towards the doctrines of Christianity and his equally sudden reaffirmation of them are explained as a regression to Oedipal dynamics. When explaining away religious impulses as fanciful disguises, Freud's default hobby horse is Christian.

The title of this short paper bears on the second justification, which is more contextual than textual: the central categories undergirding Freud's theory of religion echo and are most

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[94] Gay, *Freud*, 17.

[95] Freud, *FI*, in *SE* XXI:19.

closely aligned with those of modern Protestant theology. The discourse of religious experience immediately evokes Williams James, for whom the intuition of an "unseen order" is not only varied but irreducible to either moral apperception or neurological disturbance.[96] Yet the source behind James and behind the Protestant Rolland's "oceanic feeling" is Friedrich Schleiermacher, who inaugurated a shift to the affective foundations of religious consciousness. The late eighteenth-century turn to religious experience was in large part motivated by the need to rescue religious doctrine and practice from dependence on metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical institutions—rendered untenable by the rationalist and empiricist traditions of continental philosophy—now planted anew on the putatively firmer soil of human experience.[97] Whether defined either as the "sensibility and taste for the infinite [*Sinn und Geschmack für das Unendliche*]" or as the "consciousness of being absolutely dependent [*ein Bewußtsein schlechthinniger Abhängigkeit*]" on God, Schleiermacher sought to restore the integrity of religion on the inviolable foundation of the individual.[98] Therefore, when Freud claims that religion originates in the desire for protection, he effectively invokes this subjectivist liberal tradition precisely in order to reveal its illusory and regressive grounding. Dependence is the mark of infantile feebleness, not of piety.

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[96] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 53.

[97] Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), xii-xii. The centrality of experience to Christian theological discourse is supported by the antisemitic gesture identifying Jewishness with hyper-rationality and dogmatic attention to laws, and Christianity with mysticism and spirituality, that is, with interiority (Spector, *Modernism without Jews*, 91). Freud himself participates in this trope, explaining to Abraham that the absence of a "mystical element" in the Jews explains their gift for psychoanalysis (July 20, 1908, in *A Psycho-Analytic Dialogue*, 46).

[98] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23 / *Schleiermachers Reden über die Religion* (Gotha: F.A. Perthes, 1888), 107; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), paragraph 4 / *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche: im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1861), 20.

Even if Freud had no personal music for the beliefs and practices of Judaism, he sought to distance it as much as possible from his puncturing views on religion.[99] When he finally traces the development of Judaism in *Moses and Monotheism,* the language of illusion, wish fulfillment, and infantile helplessness applied to religion/Christianity are muted if not altogether absent. Moreover, the account of the origin of the totemic institution in *Totem and Taboo*, and its attendant formulation of religion as a hopeless "longing for the father [*der Vatersehnsucht*]" culminate in a discussion of Christianity and the ritual of the Eucharist, altogether passing over the presence of Judaism and its distinctive place in the psycho-historical formation of Western culture.[100] Such elision can in part be explained by Freud's impression that Christianity does not possess a distinctive ethic; but the deeper reason is Freud's desire, to the extent possible, to shield Judaism from psychoanalytic aspersions. For instance, the Catholic Church, not the synagogue, is set as the paradigmatic example of the defects of group psychology, with its similarities to the mental life of primitives and children, its restriction of freedom (especially intellectual), and its rancor towards those outside it.[101] While the Jews are technically a group, they are, by virtue of their sociological status as outsiders, "free from many prejudices which restricted others in the use of their intellect."[102] A stranger example of this sheltering impulse occurs during Freud's scrutiny of Leviticus 19:18, the Jewish iteration of the golden rule: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." With his conviction of the indestructible presence of human

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[99] Robertson's remark that "Freud virtually never makes disparaging references to other Jews" can be extended to their faith ("Freud's Testament," 83-84).

[100] Freud, *TT*, in SE XIII:148 / *GW* IX:178.

[101] Freud, *Group Psychology*, in *SE* XVIII:77, 95, 98.

[102] Freud, "Address," in *SE* XX:274.

aggression and its subtending death drive, Freud had to conclude that nothing more than this commandment runs so strongly counter to the original nature of man."[103] Yet when introducing the precept he says that it is "known throughout the world and is undoubtedly older than Christianity, which puts it forward as its proudest claim."[104] Freud keeps this impossible moral illusion *Judenrein* and robs it of its Jewish origins, but in the effort to re-direct criticism to its heir and ardent champion.

This strained assignation illustrates that Christianity is often the *clear and explicit* target of Freud's rapier. Its attempt to recreate human nature alone would merit impugnment, but Christianity exacerbates the problem by failing to literally practice what it preaches. As the most vocal proponent of brotherly love, it is ironically the greatest violator of the precept. Not surprisingly, the usual victim of this hypocrisy is the Jew. When Freud elucidates the phenomenon of the "narcissism of small differences," which refers to the strategy of fostering collective cohesion by exerting aggression on those outside it, the example provided is the medieval Crusades, which not only betrayed a group useful to the civilizations of its hosts' countries, but also failed to make life more peaceful and secure for fellow Christians.[105] Similarly, in one of his very last pieces, which calls for a transformation of the Christian perception of Jews as an inferior species, Freud mocks the "religion of love" for its

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[103] Freud, *CD*, in *SE* XXI:112.

[104] Ibid., 109.

[105] Ibid., 114.

theologically-grounded condescension, and for the subtle ways Christians tolerate and justify the unequal treatment of Jews even as they pretend to denounce it.[106]

The Christian's inclination to subjugating the Jew may be symptomatic of its hostile stance towards existence itself, of the "low estimation [*Entwertung*] put upon earthly life by the Christian doctrine."[107] Apathetic towards the mundane realm, Christian believers may be less scrupulous regarding their moral conduct in it. Without saying so explicitly, the promise of eternal life is most plausibly the teaching that Freud thinks contributes to this devaluation. Indeed, the compensation of an afterlife is an essential element in Freud's theory of "religion"; yet his virtual equation of religion with its Christian concretization, combined with the peripheral status of immortality to normative Judaism (especially to modern Jewish theology), compels us once again to conclude that he has Christianity specifically in mind here when evaluating the cardinal teachings of religion writ large.[108] Freud saw one of his primary tasks as denuding man of his existential consolations, of which religion and the heavenly reward maintain principal rank.[109] Aside from its illusory status, for Freud the guarantee of immortality is worrisome on pragmatic grounds because it fosters an indifference to human flourishing in the here and now. By contrast, the irreligious standpoint withdraws its expectations from the other world, and

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[106] Freud, "A Comment on Anti-Semitism" (1938), in *SE* XIII:289-293. The article, published in a Parisian periodical headed by Arthur Koestler, is mainly a *précis* of an essay in response to Jewish persecution. Freud asks his reader for help in identifying the author, whose name he cannot remember on account of his old age. His editor James Strachey surmises that this frame is entirely Freud's invention.

[107] Freud, *CD*, in *SE* XXI:87 / *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, in *GW* XIV:445.

[108] See Freud, *FI*, in *SE* XXI:18-19, and *CD*, in *SE* XXI:74.

[109] The word Freud uses to highlight religion's solacing function in *The Future of Illusion,* consolation [*Trost*] (*SE* XXI:16 / *Die Zukunft*, in *GW* XIV:336), is the same as that which he humbly confesses he cannot provide his reader (*CD*, in *SE* XXI:145 / *Das Unbehagen*, in *GW* XIV:505).

concentrates its liberated energies into making life on earth more tolerable and less oppressive for the people in it.[110]

The confidence in a future beatitude cultivates a conversion away from earthly life, but, as discussed above, it also hopelessly strives to negate the past's determining sway over the present. Indeed, the spirit of futurity strikes at the heart of Christian self-understanding. One of the most pressing challenges facing the early church was how to reconcile the novelty of the Gospel and its messenger with their unmistakable emergence from Judaism. The problem was often posed in exegetical terms, that is, how to construe the relation between the older and newer testaments, and how to interpret homological events depicted therein. As discussed in Chapter 1, until the Reformation the regnant understanding was that the Hebrew Bible was a herald (*figura*) of the Christian; the significance of events depicted in the former, incomplete and merely anticipatory in themselves, could only totally be grasped vis-à-vis their future fulfillment in the latter. Appropriating the idea from Justin Martyr, Irenæus of Lyons referred to the New Testament as a "recapitulation," a crescendo summation of prefigurations in the Old.[111] Freud's insistence on the prior, then, implicitly works to stem the tide of and turn the tables on this patristic notion, substituting *Wiederholung* for *anakephalaiôsis*. Once Freud asserted that history always iterates prototypical prehistoric events, he could deduce that Christianity repeats the prehistorical drama with the primal father, and that Christ's Passion conforms to a Judaic precedent with the murder of Moses.[112] With Christianity's double remove from the archetype, it

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[110] Freud, *FI*, in *SE* XXI:50.

[111] Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, 4.6.2, 5.21.1.

[112] Freud, *TT*, in *SE* XIII:155; Jesus is Moses's "substitute and successor [*Ersatzmann und Nachfolger*]" (*MM*, in *SE* XXIII:89 / *Der Mann Moses, GW* XVI:195).

is thereby deprived of any claim to essential uniqueness. Given history's mimetic and recursive nature, furthermore, we are in a better position to understand Freud's passing characterization of the Atonement as a "phantasie," and to discern an additional unconscious source of the Christian's hatred of the Jew.[113] Christ's redemptive work on the Cross is an illusion because it thinks it can undo the primal crime against the father and be liberated from the guilt incurred on man as a result, effectively escaping the cycle of time. It is the Jew who denies both that such a foundational misdeed occurred, and that any penitential measure could break the spell of the pattern set in motion by the prototype.

Freud teases out the worrisome implications of Christianity's devaluation of earthly existence, but he also suggests that this low estimation taps into something true about the human situation and its destiny within civilization. In the latter half of the 1920s he discovered that the instinctual privations society imposes upon individuals so as to make communal life possible form the kernel of hostility they feel towards it.[114] As their protections against the vicissitudes of fate increase, so too does their enmity towards the project that instituted them. Christianity's hostility to life, then, is a doctrinal expression of *Unbehagen*, of man's abiding malaise and dissatisfaction within and on account of collective life.[115] With this example we begin to see not simply that Freud's writings utilize categories shared with Christian thought, but that Freud effectively universalizes Christian teaching by applying its theological insights to the course of human history, to Jewish history, and to man's psychological constitution. Because of his acceptance of Ernst Haeckel's biological law that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, we see these

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[113] Freud, *MM*, in *SE* XXIII:86.

[114] Freud, *FI*, in *SE* XXI:10.

[115] Freud, *CD*, in *SE* XXI:136.

resemblances on both the historic levels of the species and the group, as well as on the psychological level of the individual.

With the Book of Genesis as their common source, the traditional iterations of Judaism and Christianity alike hold the belief that human beings are heirs to a man and woman who were created by God, and who once lived harmoniously in a paradisal state. Yet Christianity's theological innovation consisted in the reading that man's disobedience constituted a fundamental estrangement from his Maker, and a radical lapse of his essential being into one governed by and bound to Sin. The hope offered by the New Law is the transcendence of this lapsed state, and the eventual recovery of that lost perfection. Freud shares this notion of a fall from a primal condition, an idealized beginning to which man wishes to return. On the microcosmic level, he writes that the separation [*Ablösung*] of a child from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary yet painful achievements of his development. The unconscious strategies he uses to liberate himself from his father's clutches, born of ostensibly hostile impulses, in fact disguise an original affection:

> [T]he whole effort at replacing the real father by a superior one is only an expression of the child's longing [*Sehnsucht*] for the happy, vanished days [*der verlorenen glücklichen Zeit*], when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men…He is turning away from the father whom he knows to-day to the father in whom he believed in the earlier years of his childhood; and his phantasy is no more than the expression of a regret that those happy days have gone.[116]

Here *Sehnsucht* yokes the childhood of an individual to the childhood of mankind. As longing for the father, religion lends expression to the unappeasable remorse and guilt the sons feel in murdering the primal father, and realizes the wish to recreate the conditions under which they

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[116] Freud, "Family Romances" (1909), in *SE* IX:237, 240-241. In the exegetical literature Adam is often allegorized as a child, or represents the childhood of mankind.

lived during his domination.[117] On different planes, then, both of these stories, together with their biblical exemplar, present an originary account of how the son loses the father, and tries in vain to find him again.

At the core of the Christian drama is a violation against a paternal figure, the divinely ordained but still appalling crucifixion of Christ facilitated by a fraternal band of loyal followers. The positing of the murder of the *Urvater* by his sons in *Totem and Taboo*, and the entire venture of civilization to which it gives rise, shows how Freud, too, detects a violent act committed on the one by the group as the central and determinative moment in both mind and culture, but transposes it to historical and psychodynamic beginnings. The pattern resurfaces in *Moses and Monotheism*, with the hypothesis that Moses was killed by his own recalcitrant and akrasic followers, only to subsequently trigger a hyper-adherence to his precepts—what Freud calls "deferred obedience [*nachträglichen Gehorsam*]."[118] With the Oedipus complex, "the nuclear complex of the neuroses," the one-versus-the-many dynamic fades from view, and actual violence against the father is substituted for unconscious death wishes against him, but the life-long shaping power of these aggressive impulses towards him remains.[119] Indeed, the ability and ease to abandon their cathected object at the end of the complex represents the dividing line between normal and pathological development.[120]

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[117] Freud, *TT*, in *SE* XIII:148.

[118] Ibid., 143.

[119] Ibid., 129. The complex was first coined in 1910 (Bennett Simon and Rachel Blass, "The Development and Vicissitudes of Freud's Ideas on The Oedipus Complex," in *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*, ed. Jerome Neu [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 172).

[120] Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), in *SE* XIX:177.

In the beginning, then, was not creation (as in Judaism) but the Sin, if by beginning we mean not what is chronologically earliest but is the *terminus ad quo* of a traceable development. Literally speaking Sin is "original" for Christian theological anthropology because it occurs *in principio*, but in its doctrinal sense it weds an essentialist to an existentialist proclamation: the propensity to offend against God is *innate* to man, but is *inherited in consequence of* the Fall of Adam. Sin is the basis of individual and collective human identity, and is that which connects the generations to each other. Lamarck may not have derived his theory of acquired characteristics from either Paul or Augustine, but the notion that traits are transmitted from ancestors to descendants is a biological adaptation or translation of Christian hamartiology. Until the end of his life Freud clung to Lamarck's view of organic evolution despite his personal admiration for Darwin and the overwhelming preference of the contemporary scientific establishment for the latter's theory of natural selection. With this perplexing adherence to acquired characteristics, Freud emplots the story of the individual, humanity, and the Jewish people along the lines of a Christian model. Each human being is a recipient of a phylogenetic inheritance, crucial elements of which are the unconscious knowledge "that [he] once possessed a primal father and killed him" and the guilt acquired in consequence.[121] Yet it is not until *Moses and Monotheism* that Freud confidently asserts that groups as well retain impressions of the past in unconscious memory traces.[122] It is on the basis of this collective unconscious, based not on archetypal symbols (à la Jung) but on violent and traumatic events, that the murder of Moses becomes a tradition subliminally passed down *me'dor le'dor*.

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[121] Freud, *MM*, in *SE* XXIII:101; *CD*, in *SE* XIX:136.

[122] Freud, *MM*, in *SE* XXIII:94.

By contrast with Judaism, Christianity teaches that Adam's disobedience leaves a lingering stain on himself and his descendants. His turning away from the divine will stamps humanity with a guilt that can only be washed away by the faith in Christ's salvific work on the Cross. Freud adopts the centrality assigned to guilt in the personal and social realms by Christian anthropology but makes three important revisions: he moves its seat from the soul to the psyche, establishes its origins and effects as unconscious instead of conscious, and reclassifies its nature as a feeling in lieu of an ontic state of being. In the letter to Rolland we observed that Freud was no exception to this shift, equating filial piety with a sense of guilt in surpassing the modest accomplishments of his father. In the early years of his applied psychoanalytic work Freud hypothesized that civilization itself is an act of atonement, the creative response of remorse that simultaneously revivifies the father and the conditions of his rule, yet tries to ensure that his murder stays unrepeated.[123] When he later formulates the structural theory of mind during the early 1920s, he discovered the "unconscious sense of guilt [*Schuldgefühl*]" that originates in the superego, is the heir of the Oedipus complex, and is an extension of the normal workings of "conscience" (i.e., the critical faculty supervising the ego).[124] It is with these metapsychological reconceptualizations that Freud can unlock the mystery surrounding man's *Unbehagen*: "the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt."[125] This inverse proportion is due to the vicious circle he detects between instinctual renunciation and conscience, whereby inhibited aggressive instincts—the most

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[123] Freud, *TT*, in *SE* XIII:145.

[124] Freud, *EI*, in *SE* XIX:33-37, 49-53.

[125] Freud, *CD*, in *SE* XIX:134.

powerful weapon of the superego—are displaced back onto the self.[126] In the Jewish case, guilt feelings over the murder of Moses do not lead to the discontent predicated of civilized man, but are nevertheless the engine fueling instinctual renunciation and the especial zeal for ethical attainment.[127]

As with beginnings, Freud may also be said to Christianize ends. Earlier it was noted that Freud's stress on the determinative power of the prior works to counteract the Christian construal of a figural relationship between the Old and New Testaments. However, the converse tendency is equally prominent in his work, whereby, in accordance with the logic of its version of *Heilsgeschichte*, Christianity is represented as the apogee of a spiritual process, here with world-historical-psychological proportions. *Totem and Taboo* does not simply derive Communion from the totem meal—it understands the former as the final instantiation of the latter. Similarly, *Moses and Monotheism* portrays Jesus as the third and last incarnation of the primal father (with Moses as the second). The novel excavates the roots of the Jewish character, but its concluding sections transition to a psycho-religious investigation of the Christian mindset, thereby mimicking in its literary structure Christian salvation history's persona as a move away and advance from Judaism. When Freud permits Christianity to have the last word, he echoes its own desire to supersede all preceding religious formations.

Furthermore, upon close inspection Freud appears to be of two minds with regard to the perfection or fulfillment of Judaism in Christianity. On the one hand, Christianity is an "advance [*Fortschritt*]"—the same word to characterize the superiority of Judaism in its valorization of

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[126] Ibid., 128-30.

[127] Freud, *MM*, in *SE* XXIII:134-135.

Geistigkeit—but a false one at that, to the extent that its message of atonement and redemption from guilt is wishful fantasy.[128] On the other hand, to the extent that it raises the murder of the *Urvater* to consciousness, discovers the roots of human discontent in the primal crime, and proposes a means of absolution, Christianity may be likened to the analysand who is on the way to recuperation. That is to say, he is in a better position to manage (if not be cured from) his neurosis because he has achieved the *telos* of psychoanalytic treatment itself, namely, "mak[ing] what is unconscious in him conscious," an aim driven by the assumption that knowledge of something enables greater control over it.[129] The Jews, on the other hand, were not just unable to solve the question of guilt, they deny that such a crime even happened. In this respect, they represent the patient at an earlier and more tenuous stage of treatment, who is yet to work through the resistance fortified by unconscious impulses against analysis and the reconstruction of his inner life.[130]

Freud confirms Christianity's self-understanding as an advance, at one and the same time illusory yet indicative of a growing sober and healthy self-consciousness. The association made in the preceding paragraph between Christianity and the patient pressing on along the royal road to recovery touches on another vital theme in Freud's works: the power of the present and future to come to terms with, mitigate the pressure of, and even outgrow the past. If "Judaism" figurally connotes the power of the past to overshadow the present, then "Christianity" in the same respect signifies the hopeful, progressive, and optimistic aspect of psychoanalysis, perhaps best

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[128] Ibid., 88.

[129] Freud, *TT*, in *SE* XIII:87.

[130] The unintended consequence of modeling the Jew on the defensive patient is to lend greater credence to antisemitism. The cultural stereotype of the sick Jew, and the linkage of Jewish identity with denial (in its common rehearsal, of the murder of Christ) both gain additional ammunition.

crystallized in the proclamation that "[w]here id was, there ego shall be."[131] Even with the determinative power of the distant past, therapy was conceived by Freud as a means of emancipation from it.[132] The promise of analysis is becoming ever more conscious of the hitherto unconscious springs of behavior. Suggested by the shift in tense, the suffering patient is subjugated by the past inasmuch as the traumatic childhood event, repressed into the id, continues to mar his life in the form of neurotic symptoms. The sign of health is the capacity to live more fully in the present, to allow the ego priority of place in the psyche.

Christianity is the son of Judaism, which in its identity as God's consummate and final revelation necessarily desires freedom from its father's legacy. For Freud, the liberation from the paternal grip is possible, ideal, and standard, on both the personal and cultural levels. Normally the father complex dissolves on its own by the threat of castration, an unconscious rite of passage that is either maximally undergone without complication, or minimally attenuates the more fervent Oedipal impulses. Its successful traversal entails a self unencumbered by a struggle with the father, one who has managed to make the past, past.[133] Analogously, science, in the position of son with respect to religion, will eventually surpass its anterior *Weltanschauung*, solely on the strength of its certain, sober, and realistic knowledge about the world.[134] In fact, science's hostile filial status is consistent with the message it implicitly endorses: to the extent that its overthrow

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[131] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures On Psycho-Analysis* (1933), in *SE* XXII:80.

[132] Rieff, *Freud*, 203.

[133] For Freud, following Rank, the hero is precisely he who "has had the courage to rebel [*erhoben*] against his father and has in the end victoriously overcome [*überwunden*] him" (*MM*, in *SE* XXIII:12 / *GW* XVI:108).

[134] Whereas Freud attempted in *Moses and Monotheism* to establish correspondences between the Jewish character and the scientific sensibility, this figural understanding of filiality links science to *Christianity* on account of their common belatedness.

of religion eliminates childish dependence on the F/father, it empowers human beings to mature —that is, to become their own fathers.

Moses and Monotheism does not conclude with the prognostication that Christianity will ever be able to relegate Judaism to the past, to be altogether free of its father. "Where Judaism was, there Christianity shall be" is unlikely to be the future of illusions, unless the modal means not replacement but proximate abidance. Yet this frustrating juxtaposition is certainly present in the world of Freud's work: like love and death, ceaselessly battling each other for dominance in the psyche, the Jewish and Christian drives vie interminably within his writings without either a clear victor or a lasting satisfaction. The profundity of the war is brought into relief by unearthing the limits of Freud's continuity with and departure from Luther, the determination of which will in turn test the accuracy of Pfister's suspicion of Freud as an unknowing Protestant.

IV. The Hidden and The Revealed, Simultaneous and Inseparable

Martin Luther appears just one time, obliquely, throughout Freud's published corpus. He wrote to Abraham that he had recently received a letter from the Swiss psychoanalyst Alphonse Maeder with the addendum, "Here I stand, I can do no other"—the now legendary dictum uttered at the conclusion of the 1521 Diet of Worms—but does not provide an attribution.[135] Yet Luther's practical absence from Freud's intellectual universe belies a dialectical hermeneutic relation between them, one that builds on the ambivalences to Christian thought writ large explored in the previous section. The crux of their thematic kinship revolves around their representations of father-son relations. While Freud shares Luther's portrayal of a hidden father who institutes an impossible law, engendering a reaction of hostility, guilt, and longing in the son, in different

[135] Freud to Abraham, September 21, 1913, in *A Psycho-Analytic Dialogue*, 148.

ways he will reject the gospel of a revealed father who can offset or overcome these effects and its underlying source. Again, because of Haeckel's law of recapitulation we can observe both the accord as well as its qualification on the imbricated levels of the individual, the species, and the group.

Luther had showed that longing and aggression were the animating forces in man's soul under the sign of the *Deus absconditus*, vacillating between a desire to comply with God's rule and a resentment for having to live under it. As far back as the self-analysis in *The Interpretation of Dreams,* his earliest published discussion of Oedipal dynamics, Freud discovered that paternal authority engendered a deep-seated ambivalence in the son. Obscured behind their manifest content, his dreams pictorially expressed a vacillation between the feelings of filial affection and aggression. With the structural turn of the early 1920s, Freud was able to reconstruct the trajectory of the Oedipal phase, and to exhibit the formative impact of contradictory impulses towards the father on the son's subsequent development. To appreciate the impact of the drama, we must remember that it is situated between two acts of identification [*Identifizierung*], the earliest form of emotional tie to another person wherein "the little boy will take a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like him and be like him, and take his place everywhere. We may say simply that he takes his father as his ideal."[136] Identification is thus an expression of the son's longing to be, and always be with, the father. However, with the introduction of the mother as an object cathexis during the Oedipal stage, identification assumes a hostile coloring, now admixed with the son's aggressive wish to replace the father as the sole beneficiary of the mother's affection and attention. The transmutation of identification, and the corruption of the

[136] Freud, *Group Psychology*, in *SE* XVIII:105 / *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, in *GW* XIII:115.

once unadulterated desire for harmony or fusion between the generations, is brought about by the first manifestation of the paternal law: the threat of castration in response to the son's discharge of sexual excitation.[137]

The prospect of punishment is experienced as so monumental, as such a damning sentence, that the mother is forfeited as a sexual object. One would expect the father to be given up as well, for the institution of the law must feel like a painful betrayal, an unrequited love and undue rebuff for what was originally an innocent erotic attachment. Yet ultimately the effect of the law is not to demolish but to *strengthen* the son's primitive identification, as if to now prove to his father that he is worthy of so doing by virtue of his compliance.[138] Indeed, the son's longing becomes so intense that the father is actually introjected into the ego, forming the son's superego and thus constituting a prolongation of paternal influence. In the aftermath of the Oedipal stage, law and identification precede, proceed, and mutually reinforce one another, for the primal antithetical precept [*Mahnung*] of the superego is that one ought to be and yet may not be one's father.[139] Identification has become decree, while the oxymoron at the heart of the superego's dual commandment guarantees the impossibility of complete conformity. It is no surprise, then, that in his last systematic presentation of psychoanalysis Freud characterized the law of the father as the "greatest trauma of [one's] life."[140] Behind the imagined loss of the phallus and the "actual" loss of the mother lies the loss of son's simple concord with the father. The superego frustrates the drive to identification, stipulating that father and son are not the same

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[137] Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," in *SE* XIX:177.

[138] Freud, *EI*, in *SE* XIX:32.

[139] Ibid., 34 / *Das Ich Und Das Es*, in *GW* XIII:262.

[140] Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, in *SE* XXIII:155.

and do not possess the same familial prerogatives. The son's internalization of the father does not bring them closer together, but instead becomes the basis of a lifelong separation and conflict between them, with the mature ego forever remaining subject to his continued domination in the psychical form of the *Über-Ich*.[141]

On the level of the individual, Freud continues Luther's intuition of the connection between law and the disruption of an undisturbed harmony between father and son. When the lens zooms out to the prehistory of the race, particularly in *Totem and Taboo*, it is the connection between law and *sin* that is confirmed. For Luther, law is not only a source of alienation between man and the hidden Father, but also functions to make human beings aware of the depths of their depravity—indeed, of their inability *not* to violate the Word of God. Combining the theory of recapitulation with Darwinian conjectures on primordial social organization, Freud can extrapolate that the Oedipal conflict that proceeds unconsciously within the psyche was in fact actualized, consciously, in the distant past. Originally, men wandered in small hordes led by a father figure, who offered protection in exchange for the observation of celibacy and the acknowledgment that the father alone is entitled to the female. On account of his extraordinary strength and capacity to provide for his followers the father was an object of love and admiration, but his prohibition came to provoke such anger that the sons banded together to commit patricide against him. For a while the aggressive impulses predominated, celebrating the liberation from the oppressive paternal yoke, until the feelings of guilt and remorse came to control the emotional and institutional reception of the murder. The totemic regulations, the most primitive realization of religious yearnings, arises from this longing and affectionate dimension,

[141] Freud, *EI*, in *SE* XIX:48.

from the attempt to "allay their burning sense of guilt, to bring about a kind of reconciliation [*Aussöhnung*] with their father."[142] Yet the psychological rule of ambivalence demands that the celebratory, aggressive side also find practical expression, originally satisfied by recurrent participation in the totemic sacrifice and meal. As the joyous half of the totemic system, this ritual symbolically recreates the killing, and in so doing reinscribes the patriarchal paradigm in which law triggers sin. Overall, then, the father's law leads to the son's sin, which leads to the son's law, which leads to the son's sin. Whether derived from the father or himself, the son invariably sins under the law, but violation prompts further compliance with it.

Luther's mutually reinforcing relation between law and sin is iterated in Freud's historical account of the Jewish people. As their creator/father, the visage Moses bears to his people is contingent on an adherence not to a sexual but a moral-religious rule, to wit, the cardinal tenets of monotheism: "they were not too mean for him to make a covenant with them and who promised to care for them if they remained loyal to his worship."[143] The ambivalence he both expresses and arouses in his devotees with the institution of the law, then, is similar to the one directed at the primal father: provided proper observance, his protection and guidance elicit affection and confidence in his sons, while frustration resulting from disobedience provokes hostility and aggression. The confrontation between an austere system and a refractory people inevitably ends with a failure to meet the demands of the code, and, in their desire to free themselves from it, the Jewish people murder Moses. At first the aggressive impulses rejoice by abandoning the law of Moses altogether, until, in a return of the repressed traumatic event, the

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[142] Freud, *TT*, in *SE* XIII:144 / *GW* IX:173.

[143] Freud, *MM*, in *SE* XIII:110.

feeling of guilt for the crime surfaces. Heretofore the trajectory of Jewish spirituality differs in two respects from that of the primal human family. First, hankering remorse here leads not to the erection of a new law that commemorates the father, but to the permanent reinstatement of the original Mosaic teachings. The father and his Old Law return, while his people remain bound to them. Second, unlike the totemic feast, which provides an outlet for the triumphant, hostile impulses, "[t]here was no place in the framework of the religion of Moses for a direct expression of the murderous hatred of the father. All that could come to light was a mighty reaction against it—a sense of guilt on account of that hostility," which is continually channelled into sharper instinctual renunciations and ethical aspirations.[144] On each side of the murder of Moses, therefore, does law produce both longing and sin: the deferred obedience of the Jews to the teachings of monotheism is subtended by an act of identification with their promulgator; but, to the extent that they both always fall short of obedience as well as deny that the murder ever took place, a guilty conscience is ever reactivated for "having sinned against God and for not ceasing to sin."[145]

That Freud and Luther both assume the historicity of the biblical narrative is surprising on its own: what is astounding and verily unexpected is their overlapping diagnoses of Judaism. They are united not simply in the conviction that religion writ large is wedded to a paternal law that is impossible to fulfill, but that it is the Jewish faith specifically wherein this paradox is revealed most clearly and consequentially. In other words, Judaism's legacy to the history of

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[144] Ibid., 134. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud showed that with the incorporation of the superego, the aggression formerly directed at the father during the Oedipal phase morphs into hostility towards the self in the form of the unconscious sense of guilt (*SE* XIX:123-124). The Jews, therefore, metonymize a universal psychological tendency: the more aggression is inhibited, the greater the sense of guilt becomes.

[145] Freud, *MM*, in *SE* XIII:134.

human spirituality consists in the bestowal of an unresolved psycho-theological problem, defined in *Moses and Monotheism* as a failure to conform to the will of the father, and a failure to sufficiently address the original sin against the father and the guilt to which it gives rise. If the father was only killed in the beginning, it would have been enough, but the father is killed anew with every transgression by the son. If Luther brings anti-Judaism into modernity, then Freud passes it on at the period's denouement.

But the accord between these two reformers goes no further. For Luther the soteriological drama of man's soul progresses beyond the encounter with a *Deus absconditus* towards the *Deus revelatus*, the God who offers man reconciliation by way of His Son. Through the process of justification and the extension of grace to the sinner, the relationship between Father and son, hitherto oscillating between the desire for approval and the certainty of damnation, is now made to approximate the eternal harmony between Father and Son. With his diagnosis of atonement as a fantasy, discussed above, Freud rejects the possibility of reconciliation with the f/Father, and, consequently, the possibility of the eradication of guilt. The gap between reconciliation and longing remains infinite; *Aussöhnung* remains the wish of *der Sohn*, a *Sohnsehnsucht*. With this fallen domino, other categories associated with the Revealed God—intergenerational harmony and the elevation of the Son—are jettisoned too.

That Father and Son cooperate in the process of justification is subtended by their consubstantiality, a doctrine supported by Luther yet extending back to the Nicene Creed. To be sure, Freud endorses versions of *homoousion*, the identity of father and son. The incorporation of the superego qua internalization of the father into the ego literally brings him into the son, such that the point where one entity begins and the other ends is not easily disentangled. Moses is

father to the people of Israel, but he is at the same time a son vis-à-vis the God whom he worships. Undergirded by a law of compensation in Freud's psychologized salvation history, if Christ's atonement truly absolves man for the primal crime, he "had to be a son, since it had been the murder of a father."[146] On the other hand, to the extent that he not only recalls the murder of the primeval father but is as well murdered by a band of sons, Christ is also "the returned [*wiedergekehrte*] primal father of the primitive horde, transfigured and, as the son, put in the place of [*gerükt*] the father."[147] Indeed, that Christ is both father and son facilitates the shift from Father-religion to Son-religion that Christianity represents.[148] As we saw above, however, whatever harmoniousness Freud says exists between fathers and sons on different planes of analysis is at a certain point, and irremediably, disrupted. If intergenerational unity goes, so too does the forgiveness of sinners.

To be clear, Freud's eschewal of the efficaciousness of atonement does not go hand in hand with the complete repudiation of the concept of a revealed father. What he opposes, rather, is the notion that a harmony between father and son denoted by the *Deus revelatus* is at all *enduring*, *isolatable*, and *perseverant*. Luther did formulate a theory of divine ambivalence, but it sits unsettlingly alongside the gospel of a Revealed God whose grace is meant to comfort those anxious of their eternal fate. Proudly professing himself outside the business of consolation, Freud exploits Luther's aporia to underscore the different ways in which the experience of paternal hiddenness overwhelms that of revelation. The lasting effects of psychic ambivalence in the son, sedimented by the two faces the father presents to him, implies the inseparability of

[146] Ibid., 86.

[147] Ibid., 90 / *GW* XVI: 196.

[148] Ibid., 136.

hiddenness and revelation as paternal properties, neither suspending nor abolishing one another. Like the Christian reading of Genesis 1-3, the course of identification is a paradigmatic tale of how the son lost his father ideal, moving from a relationship governed by unity to one of fundamental rupture. *The Future of an Illusion* exhorts human beings to abandon the caring father-turned-God who shelters them from an inhospitable world. Contrastively, with the primal horde and the Jews, the experience of the father as both hidden and revealed is simultaneous from the start, and continues to mark their respective histories. Where love was, there hate shall be.

With its message of reconciliation to the Father, Luther claims that Christianity has escaped this vicious cycle of ambivalence that Freud uncovers; but, as the heritage of the Eucharist suggests, Freud's Oedipal reading of Christianity illustrates that it too is unable to escape the complex attitude towards the father. The failure was foreshadowed in the delegation of Christ as the scapegoat, as the Son who restores man's proper relation to the father. The drive to atone through the Son emerged from the remorseful and affectionate side, as a way to overcome the visceral guilt that had plagued man since prehistoric times. But the law of ambivalence stipulates that aggression must be allowed an avenue for expression, which in Christianity took the form of the elevation of the Son: "He himself became God, beside, or more correctly, in place of [*an Stelle*], the father. A son-religion displaced the father-religion [*Die Sohnesreligion löst die Vaterreligion ab*]."[149] The substitute becomes the successor. In a sense this supersession was inevitable: the sacrificial victim had to be a son, but the father proved

[149] Freud, *TT*, in *SE* XIII:154 / *GW* IX:185. In "Family Romances" Freud uses the word *Ablösung* when discussing the painful separation of a child from the authority of his parents through the process of maturation. We therefore have reason to suspect that even as it is founded in aggressive impulses, Christianity's displacement of its father was not devoid of pious resignation.

himself vulnerable to filial assault. In valorizing the Son over the Father, then, Christianity narcissistically honors and reifies the sons' rebellion against the paternal yoke. However, as long as the faith maintains this aggression-based identity, it cannot profess to solve, nay to even *want* to solve, the problem of guilt. Caught between a longing to appease the father and a desire to supplant him, the Son and Son-religion ultimately fail to deliver on their promise of reconciliation. The murder of the Son is committed in vain, a mere repetition of the primal crime.

If the problem of guilt persists, so too does the problem of the father, who ever looms over the son and remains the object of his psycho-theological endeavors. Yet this paternal lingering also bears on the familial relationship between Judaism and Christianity explored above. For Luther, Christianity had superseded Judaism by virtue of its ability to secure the means of salvation for the sinner, a pretension Freud recognizes in *Moses and Monotheism* when he writes that the Father-religion replaced by Christianity qua Son-religion is Judaism.[150] Given Freud's construal of an Oedipal relation between the faith traditions, Christianity's aggression towards *the* father is at one and the same time an aggression towards *its* father. However, if Christianity cannot reconcile father and son via the elevation of the Son, the father continues to stand over the son, and the Son-religion remains in a filial position vis-à-vis the Father-religion. Judaism may have paid a great psychological price for denying the murders of the primal father and of Moses, and for spurning the gift of reconciliation; but its distinct psychodynamic character, and its status as a Father-religion on account of its adherence to his teachings, attests to the truth of the indelibility of the father. It defiantly affirms that guilt cannot be relieved, only carried and redirected.

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[150] Freud, *MM*, in *SE* XXIII:88. Consistent with its elision of Judaism, *Totem and Taboo* identifies monotheism writ large as the religion Christianity displaces.

V. "Einen anderen Moses"

In a midrashic gesture Kafka once spoke of another Abraham, the one who does not ascend Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac, but who stays at home gripped by a paralytic fear. Freud's turn to culture in the middle of the 1910s begins with a similar rereading of a biblical character, centered not on the founder but on the lawgiver. Beginning in 1901, whenever Freud visited Italy he made a pilgrimage to gaze upon Michelangelo's *Moses*, located at the Santo Pietro in Vincoli church in Rome. By careful study and anatomical inference Freud concluded that the sculpture isolates not the moment before Moses shatters the tablets, but after "[h]e remembered his mission and for its sake renounced [*verzichtete*] an indulgence of his feelings." Michelangelo intends to incarnate "the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling successfully [*Niederringen*] against an inward passion for the sake of a cause [*Bestimmung*] to which he has devoted himself."[151] On the assumption of Freud's identification with Moses, readers have tended to understand his interpretation of the statue as self-referential, as a projection of his own unconscious conflicts, whether with his father or with Jung (with whom a parting of the ways was finalized a year before the essay's publication in 1914).[152] Yet the work undertaken in this chapter suggests another form of uncanny doubling: like the *Moses*, housed in a basilica, found at the nucleus of the Christian universe, molded by a devout Catholic for the sake of the glorification of God, Freud and his work are similarly stamped by and indebted to deep Christian impulses. But like this other Moses, he does not shatter the tablets of his ancestral faith. Befitting the Jew is not passionate aggression, but renunciation turned

[151] Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo" (1914), in *SE* XIII:230, 233 / "Der Moses des Michelangelo," in *GW* X:195, 199.

[152] Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 78; cf. Homans, *The Ability to Mourn*, 41, and Gay, *Freud*, 316.

creative. Through a two-pronged process of retrieval and suspicion, Freud found a way for Judaism to dwell within the home of Christianity.

CONCLUSION-DURING STRANGE GODS

"*One who goes away from home will come to see many unfamiliar things, and to take note of them; but it does not follow that he will swear by all the strange gods whom he meets along the road*."[1]

The labor of the preceding chapters served to support the thesis that it is Martin Luther who offers an invaluable hermeneutic lens for understanding the representations of father-son dynamics in the writings of Franz Kafka and Sigmund Freud. Their joint attention to the son's phenomenological experience of the father, and the son's attempts to work through the feelings of emotional distance and desire for reconciliation, constitute a secular adaptation of Luther's theological vision as it pertains to the divine-human relationship. In other words, the analytic juxtaposition of these three authors reveals that Luther lent Freud and Kafka a vocabulary, a set of images, and a conceptual scheme through which to explore the situation—and the problem—of generations.

The readings of Freud and Kafka underscored that their conversations with Luther should not be taken as an unqualified adoption. The denomination at the outset of their portrayals of intergenerational relationships as a "translation" of his doctrines of sin and salvation already connotes difference and alteration, for "carrying over" an idiom into a new register cannot occur without a degree of modification to it. Rather, we have argued that Luther is the object of a sophisticated and delicate process of suspicion and retrieval, of convergence and divergence; naming him as Freud and Kafka's hidden interlocutor most brightly illuminates the mechanics and meaning of their writings, bringing into view both what they embrace as well as what they reject from the scheme of their precursor. On the one hand, they maintain his "elevation of the

[1] Thorstein Veblen, "The Intellectual Pre-Eminence of Jews in Modern Europe," *Political Science Quarterly*, 34:1 (1919): 42.

son," defined as the aesthetic decision to concentrate on, and tell a story from the viewpoint of, the individual son; they preserve his intuition of the intimate connection between sin and law, specifically the inability of the son not to violate the ordinances instituted by the father; and his teaching of the two dissonant faces—hidden and revealed—that God manifests to man, which serve as the substratum of two fundamentally distinct kinds of relations thought to subsist between them, is converted into a detection of the two paternal personalities that the son encounters, along with the emotional, psychological, and attitudinal complexes that they generate. Taken together, these thematic overlaps across geography, time, and religious affiliation amount to the insight that the son finds himself thrown into an intractable conflict with his father that he cannot solve by his own means. With this diagnosis of the filial problem the consensus between the three individuals halts and goes no further, for Kafka and Freud refuse the possibility of any simple solution to or escape from it, let alone the one that Luther extends to believers. Presupposing as we have that images can be the receptacle of ideas,[2] and that religious identities, orientations, and commitments are coded within literary representations, the shared illustration of an irreparable disunity between father and son, as well as the conviction that the son can never fully stand outside of his father's shadow, implicitly disputes Luther's (and, by extension, Christianity's) insistence on the harmony of God with His sons (viz., Christ and man), and his belief in the power of Christ the Son to grant redemption.

At this point it is fitting to summarize how we arrived at the identification of this common ambivalence towards Luther, and how it operates in each case. Our trajectory actually

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[2] The hermeneutical power and potential of this idea were first opened up to me by Anthony C. Yu, "The Fall: The Poetica and Theological Realism of Aeschylus, Milton, and Camus" (PhD diss., University of Chicago Divinity School, 1969), the introduction to which discusses literature's "indirect" confrontation with theological concepts.

began by constructing a genealogy that extends from the scriptural canons to modern fiction contemporaneous with Freud's and Kafka's works. It was claimed that certain episodes from the Hebrew and Christian Bibles are not only figurally related to one another, but also furnish archetypal models of the father-son relationship, enshrining discrete representations that are then appropriated and refigured by the Western literary tradition. Beginning with a cross-testament analysis was useful if not necessary for several reasons. First, it proved that the collocation of father, son, Father, and Son, so crucial to the logic and rhetorical thrust of this project, has not simply an important precedent but deep textual roots. Second, honoring the fact that all three of our subjects to varying degrees consciously rework scriptural material, it situates them within a larger representation history of father-son relations, and traces the tropes with which they speak about this dynamic back to biblical sources. Third, the manner and matter of Freud's and Kafka's meditations on Judaism and Christianity invited a return to the founding sources of these religions. That they recasted elements from both archetypal narratives—the longing for the father from the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" and the impossibility of a lasting reconciliation with him from the Akedah—mirrors their ambivalence to both faith traditions and to Luther specifically, and provides further evidence that Freud and Kafka avowedly and unavowedly demonstrate points of continuity and discontinuity with Christian as well as Jewish theological models.

Of our three authors it is Luther who would be most amenable to this hermeneutical effort to anchor literary offshoots to a biblical bedrock, ever assuring that the reformation of Christian spirituality he championed was based on a return to the gospel, the true intent and message of which could be divined by a proper interpretation of the Gospels and Epistles. At the end of Chapter 1 it was tentatively asserted that the Lutheran creed was an extended allegorical

elaboration of the "Prodigal Son" parable, and that the motifs depicted in narrative form therein (e.g., the elevation of the son, the present father, the realizability of reunion and restoration) were availed by him in the service of communicating a new story about the believer's progress from the sense of divine absconsion to one of revelation, from the surety of damnation to that of reconciliation. To be sure, Luther's rehearsal departs from the original paradigm in certain respects: man does not begin his journey at "home" but in the sty, in a state of abandonment, while the "distance" of the Father consists in various modes of onto-theological hiddenness. In his iteration, separation between the generations is as much prompted by the elder as the younger, and the yearning for the former arising from it is not as easily satisfied as the parable intimates. For Luther, only the Son, who has been transplanted from acting as the teller of the parable to the figure who propels (and completes) the believer's spiritual journey, has the power to break the vicious cycle of the son's search for divine approval and its continual deferral.

In linking Luther's soteriological drama to his critique of Judaism, the lineaments of which were drawn in the last section of Chapter 2, we have followed a recent trend in Luther scholarship that is less preoccupied with the question of whether his later writings against the Jews are prefigured in his earlier ones, or whether and to what degree his fulminations against the Jews and their religion are responsible for the brand of antisemitism that emerged in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany, than with perceiving his theology and his anti-

Judaism as inextricably intertwined.[3] With the doctrinal arsenal of the Revealed Father, the promise of forgiveness, and the Son's efficacious justificatory work, Luther could confidently assert that Judaism leaves one abjectly in the pigpen, longing for the Father but lacking the spiritual resources that would allow him to return home. The gloss in the middle of the chapter, however, culminated with the discovery of a certain aporetic quality to Luther's exposition of God's Janus-faced nature, one that at once parallels the unsettling coda of the "Prodigal Son" parable and effectively undermines the force of his assault on the Jewish faith. The bipartite lacuna consists in Luther's unresolved oscillation between two schemes of construing the relation between the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus*: one in which the former is but a distorted guise of the latter, the other in which both are proper and equal features of His character. The second option in this unsettled paradigmatic problem, furthermore, is tied to the more rudimentary ambiguity concerning the relation between the divine attributes of hidden and revealed. Whereas the Revealed God fundamentally cares about human beings, seeking to bestow them with the gift of grace despite their bondage to sin, the Hidden God is altogether indifferent to them, and leaves them uncertain of their eternal destination. That this ambivalence

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[3] See for example Andreas Pangritz, *Theologie und Antisemitismus: Das Beispiel Martin Luthers* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2017). In two ways have we amended Pangritz's account. First, it was argued not simply that Luther's theology and anti-Judaism ought to be considered in unison, but that the latter is more accurately understood as a necessary *outgrowth* and *consequence* of the former. Second, Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive delineation of those components of Lutheran doctrine that lead to such a critical appraisal of Judaism, one beyond Pangritz's almost exclusive focus on works righteousness. After all, for Luther Catholics too succumb to the error of works righteousness, a fact not unconnected to the reason why he "indulged in even greater vitriol in attacking Catholics" than in attacking Jews (Mark U. Edwards Jr., "Toward an Understanding of Luther's Attack on the Jews," in *Christians, Jews, and Other Worlds: Patterns of Conflict and Accommodation*, ed, Philip F. Gallagher [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988], 11, cited in Steven Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 1 [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], 389). Subsuming as we have works righteousness within a larger discussion of a Father who is both absconded and revealed enabled us instead to see Luther's hostility towards Judaism as grounded in an eschewal of the family scheme it constructs, and in the skeptical prognosis that it lacks any mechanism by which to resolve the rift between generations.

at the heart of the divine personality is not sufficiently sorted out is of premier consequence for the faithful, for it ultimately leaves their salvific status in a state of anxious suspension; ignorant of which visage of the deity has the last word, one is left with the disconcerting impression that he is somehow both younger *and* elder brother. Therefore, unable to guarantee the solidity of the *Deus revelatus* and *ipso facto* the Son through whom He is revealed, Luther's primary religio-psychological impulse of assuaging and liberating the troubled conscience—that which purportedly constituted the superiority of Christianity over Judaism—is severely compromised.

The engagements with Kafka and Freud in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, highlighted the degree to which these open tensions simultaneously come to characterize yet are exploited by their writings. On the one hand, Luther's concept of ambivalence qua trait of a complex God was reapplied in order to categorize Kafka's and Freud's mixed attitudes towards both Judaism and Christianity and to Luther himself. In Kafka's fiction this ambivalence takes the form of a deliberate albeit tangled blending of symbols from both faith traditions, whereas in the theological and philosophical pieces of his last years it appears as an unsystematic curation of theological positions, lying neatly in neither camp. Consistent with his own metapsychological model, the Freudian sort assumes a more stratified shape: a divided evaluation of *Judentum* combines at once with a stated aversion to the Christian heritage, and an unstated reliance on some of its major topoi and impulses.[4] One could almost construe this shared ambivalence as standing between Luther's proclamation of Christianity's supersession of Judaism and his

[4] By calling attention to this aspect we have circumscribed the approach taken by Paul Vitz in *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious* (New York: Guilford Press, 1988). As opposed to exhuming some Christian dimension of Freud's psychic personality that can be traced back to his childhood (e.g., the formative impact of his Catholic nanny), we restrict ourselves to what his *work* says or at least suggests.

inability to secure it. On the other hand, Freud and Kafka ought to be seen as seizing on Luther's aporias, with the cumulative result of undermining his theological optimism and its concomitant subordination of the Jewish faith. Portraying ambivalence as a *permanent* and *ineradicable* quality of the father-son relationship capitalizes on the instability of the *Deus revelatus* and underlines the obstinate persistence of the *Deus absconditus*. That the hiddenness of the father continues to haunt the son was indicated in imbricated ways across Luther's respondents. In the case of Kafka, the son finds himself not moving along a straight course from departure to reunion, but within an interminable spiral of revolt and return. The foreclosure of reconciliation generates an inescapable double motion of rebellion and longing. With Freud, the father's enduring shadow was given an anthropological and historical foundation. Reciprocating the primal father's aggression and affection—simultaneous and inseparable—delivered his sons into a condition that resembles that of man under the Hidden God, for it inaugurated an endless circle of defiance and remorse without the relief of atonement. Indeed, the entire enterprise of human culture that ensued in the aftermath of that first crime was nothing more than the drive to somehow manage the absence of the disappeared father.

Reading Freud and Kafka primarily under the sign of Luther and the Christian tradition to which he belongs has made three significant interventions in the scholarly reception of these three authors. First, it has raised the awareness of Freud and Kafka not merely as profound thinkers about the religious life, but also of the capacity for their ostensibly non-theological literary material to stimulate theological reflection. At one and the same time it supplements the viewpoint of those who prefer to frame Kafka in universal terms, as speaking out from and into *l'humaine condition*, and compels us to rethink the conventional perception of Freudian

psychoanalysis as strictly speaking a secular science.[5] Second, against the grain of established interpretations we have redressed a blindspot that overlooks Freud's and Kafka's incorporation of symbols and themes *across* discrete and dissonant religious traditions, and hesitates to acknowledge a Jewish indebtedness to Christian theological structures. It was essential in this regard to attend to scholarly oversights either in neglecting the depth of this syncretic hallmark, or, in some cases, not to consider through the implications of using Christian terminology to characterize prominent features of their writings. This corrective endeavor thus raises a skeptical eye towards any unqualified predication of these authors as "Jewish," whether on account of their ethnic provenance or some decipherable *Geist* that permeates their work. Third, we have presented an alternative perspective towards the debate surrounding Luther's impact on subsequent Jewish thought, culture, and history, one that neither places him at the beginning of a pernicious intellectual trajectory that culminates with National Socialism nor names him as a controlling spirit hovering over modern Jewish philosophy and theology, but that identifies him

[5] Albert Camus is an exemplar of this strand in Kafka reception, even if he does nebulously acknowledge a religious impulse motivating Kafka's worldview: "His work is universal… to the extent to which it represents the emotionally moving face of man fleeing humanity, deriving from his contradictions reasons for believing, reasons for hoping from his fecund despairs, and calling life his terrifying apprenticeship in death" (*The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien [New York: Vintage, 1983], 136). With regard to Freud we have in mind Peter Gay's admittedly compelling thesis that atheism, not Jewishness, is the transcendental condition of the development of psychoanalysis (*A Godless Jew*, 31); and Philip Rieff's construal of psychoanalysis as the "last great formulation of nineteenth-century secularism, complete with substitute doctrine and cult…" (*The Mind of the Moralist*, 257).

as the one whose language of faith imbues the unsuspected areligious discourses of psychoanalysis and imaginative literature.[6]

This investigation has been indebted to a panoply of theoretical insights across the disciplines of literary criticism, philosophy, and theology. Following the symbol of the father and the son across time, space, genre, and religious background was undertaken with the support of Northrop Frye's mode of archetypal criticism, which pursues a "typical or recurring image" and in so doing "connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience."[7] The existence and potentiality of a latent religious meaning to superficially non-religious artifacts is derived from Paul Tillich's formulation that "religion is the substance of

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[6] Versions of the widespread "From Luther to Hitler" thesis have been espoused by Lucy Dawidowicz, Paul Lawrence Rose, and Richard Rubenstein, among others. Recognizing less of a need to dismiss than to complicate this direct line, Steven Katz convincingly shows how Luther's Judeophobia is "morphologically distinct" from modern racial antisemitism, not least of all because the desire for the erasure of Judaism qua ideology is dissimilar from the systematic obliteration of all Jews (*The Holocaust*, 387). On the other side are the recent—and at some moments intersecting—attempts to reconstruct the Jewish reception of Luther by Susannah Heschel, "Theological Ghosts and Goblins: Martin Luther's Haunting of Liberal Judaism," in *Polyphonie der Theologie: Verantwortung und Widerstand in Kirche und Politik*, ed. Matthias Grebe (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 2019), and Christian Wiese, "'Let His Memory Be Holy to Us!' Jewish Interpretations of Martin Luther from The Enlightenment to The Holocaust," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 93-126. Whereas Heschel encourages her reader to understand nineteenth-and early twentieth-century German-Jewish theology and religious practice as a protracted response to the challenge of Lutheran anti-Judaism, Wiese's article is more interested in tracking the reception of the *figure* of Luther among Jewish intellectuals, that is, how they articulated and assessed his religious, cultural, and political legacy. Across their articles what becomes apparent is the contradictory readings this selfsame individual could engender by both Jews and non-Jews alike. After all, both those in favor of and opposed to Hitler (Bishop Martin Sasse and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, respectively) could appeal to Luther as vindication for their stance. On the influence of Luther on the veritable history of German-Jewish Bible translations specifically, see Abigail Gillman, "Luther Bible, II. Judaism," in *The Encyclopedia of The Bible and Its Reception*, 17:222-224.

[7] Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 99. The genealogy sketched in Chapter 1 is also faithful to Frye's hermeneutic sensibilities, insofar as we demonstrated how the Bible has "set up an imaginative framework—a mythological universe, as I call it —within which Western literature had operated down to the eighteenth century and is to a large extent still operating" (*The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* [New York/London: Harvest, 1982], xi).

culture," and that "there is no cultural creation without an ultimate concern expressed in it."[8] In arguing for the transmutation of religious concepts into a secular literary register we are guided by Karl Löwith's foray into the philosophy of history, and his proposition that the idea of social and political progress is rooted in the tradition of Christian apocalypticism.[9] The presumption that the desire for recognition is a fundamental human drive is derived from Alexandre Kojève's study of Hegel, even if we transposed the category of recognition from the political to the domestic sphere, stamped it restrictedly as a filial aspiration, and, following Löwith, regarded it as the secular equivalent of and successor to the Christian's hope for justification.[10] The use of "presence" as an intergenerational predicate, as that rare blessing of paternal affirmation, stems from Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, wherein *Gegenwart* denotes a human readiness to acknowledge and respond to the existential reality of a *Du*.[11] Painting Freud and Kafka as preoccupied with and bearing some relation to the twin cultural legacies of Judaism and

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[8] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 42. It is appropriate in this context to mention a correlate remark by Nathan Scott, a disciple of Tillich's: "In short, the poet's purpose is to reveal to us the stark irrevocability of things as they are. And "things" is the word we must use, for it is with things that the poetic transaction is carried on, since, as I suspect, it is in things that Being has its location" (*The Broken Center: Studies in The Theological Horizon of Modern Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 202. Scott's theory of literature as words about God is more pertinent here than the crux of his cultural criticism, which consists in gauging the theological climate of modern literature and calling for the mutual fecundation of literature and theology.

[9] According to Löwith, the "philosophy of history originates with the Hebrew and Christian faith in a fulfilment and that it ends with the secularization of its eschatological pattern" (*Meaning in History* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957], 2). With the likes of Hans Blumenberg and Carl Schmitt, Löwith participated in a post-World War II effort to rethink the "secularization thesis." The linear conception of modernity as the gradual displacement of religion and faith by reason and science itself came to be displaced by a more sensitive view of the era's moorings in premodern images of knowledge.

[10] For a helpful summary of Kojève's theory of recognition from his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, see Matthew Rose, "Masters and Slaves," *First Things*, April 2021, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/04/masters-and-slaves.

[11] "Man wishes to be confirmed in his being by man, and wishes to have a presence in the being of the other. The human person needs confirmation because man as man needs it…secretly and bashfully he watches for a Yes which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one human person to another" (Martin Buber, "Distance and Relation," in *The Knowledge of Man*, 61).

Christianity evokes Isaac Deutscher's typology of the Jewish intellectual, the "non-Jewish Jew"; yet these particular "Jewish heretics" were shown not to have transcended the dogmas of both Judaism and Christian civilization but to be enmeshed in them, borrowing from them without decidedly aligning with either one.[12]

The greatest methodological indebtedness here is to literary thematics or "thematology" [*Stoffgeschichte*]; and faithful to the demands of this approach, we will conclude by saying something of the historiographical implications of this project. Our remarks revolve around this study's significance for a comprehension of both the German-Jewish intellectual tradition and its socio-cultural context.[13] Unearthing a Lutheran trace on Jewish thinkers, specifically on those with halfhearted attitudes towards the religion of their fathers, indexes just how much the specter of Christianity is central to the existential dilemma of the German-Jew; as such, we are compelled to shift our understanding of the widespread conflict constituting the experience of German-Jewry away from the cultural and ethnic binary of German-Jewish, and towards the religious binary of Jewish-Christian. In surveying some of the major scholarly examinations of the German-Jewish epoch, one can often sense that the pervasive presence of Christianity, its

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[12] Isaac Deutscher, "The non-Jewish Jew," in *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays,* edited with an introduction by Tamara Deutscher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 26-27. Deutscher's rendering is preferable to the analogous account of the sociologist Georg Simmel, since it more readily acknowledges the Jewish intellectual's alienation from his primordial community *as well as* from the host society. For Simmel on *der Fremde* see Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*, 31-32.

[13] Practitioners of "thematology" emphasize that they facilitate greater comprehension of the text along with its cultural background: "themes, motifs, and images constitute an important link between the literary work and the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which a post-formalist age now again insists on apprehending the work of art" (Theodore Ziolkowski, *Varieties of Literary Thematics* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983], ix).

capacity to act as both provocation and lure, has been elided or muted.[14] To be clear, we are far from suggesting that the focus on the efforts made by Jewish intellectuals to reconcile *Deutschtum* with *Judentum* is either historically inaccurate or methodologically misguided; alone is Walter Benjamin's pronouncement of the "bifurcated [*zweiseitig*]" German-Jew probative of a consequential fragmentation or disjunction in the soul of the latter.[15] However, these clashing spiritual patrimonies could be (and were) harmonized in ways unavailable to a hypothetical synthesis between *Judentum* and *Christentum*; in all its alterity, Christianity was an obtrusive reality that the modern Jew now encountered in unprecedented proximity.[16] It is therefore necessary to fill out the picture of the forces that shaped the problems and predicaments facing German Jewry.

Simply put, Christianity constituted the predominant cultural framework within which the German-Jewish adventure proceeded, a milieu radically stamped by the contribution of Martin Luther. Citations by both Jew and non-Jew alike abound attesting not merely to the cardinal

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[14] Treatments that use the "German-Jewish" paradigm include Frederic Grunfeld, *Prophets Without Honour: A Background to Freud, Kafka, Einstein, and Their World* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1980); George Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997); Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews,"* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002); Hannah Arendt, "Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940," in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968); and Jacques Derrida, "Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[15] Walter Benjamin to Ludwig Strauss, September 11, 1912, Ludwig Strauss Archive, cited in Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews*, 51.

[16] Two versions of this cultural fusion are cited in Grunfeld, *Prophets without Honour*, 8: "I am German and I am Jewish, one as much as the other, and neither can be separated from the other" (Jakob Wassermann, *Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude* [Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1921], 126), and "My language and that of my children is German. My being German and being Jewish do no harm to each other and do much for each other's sake… I experience this strange and intimate dualistic unity as something precious" (Gustav Landauer, *Der werdende Mensch: Aufsätze über Leben und Schriftum* [Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1921], 126). Hermann Cohen's *Deutschtum und Judentum* marks a third attempt (Gießen: A. Töpelmann, 1915).

influence of the *Lutherbibel* on the subsequent German literary tradition, or to Luther's principal role in the creation of the German vernacular, but to his singularly determinative impact on the development of a distinctive national ethos and ethic.[17] As diverse a group of thinkers as Heine, Hermann Cohen, Fichte, von Treitschke, Herder, and the poet Ernst Moritz Arndt could all nevertheless concur that Luther was singularly formative for the German mind and character.[18] This near indivisible linkage between *Deutschtum* and *Luthertum*, furthermore, helps explain a trend that would emerge among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jewish intellectuals:

> In general, the more Germany's Jewish intelligentsia identified with broader German culture from the Enlightenment onwards, the more it embraced a broader interest in Luther as a basic force in Germany's development as a nation. This would seem to be the reason neither Calvin and Zwingli were of any real interest to the same Jewish scholar—neither played a key symbolic role for the national-cultural entity into which Germany's Jewry hoped to fully integrate.[19]

The German arena that a de-ghettoized Jewry zealously entered into and identified with was permeated by Lutheran Christianity; participation in the former could not occur without absorbing or at least coming up against the spirit of the latter. No small wonder, then, that German-Jewry seemed to confront the sublime pressure of the Christian matrix at pivotal turns. At the onset of the age of emancipation, during which the nature, timing, speed, and scope of the

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[17] "The line of German-Jewish scholars who accorded Luther's Bible translation culture-defining force would extend from Moses Mendelssohn to Abraham Geiger…" (Wiese, 107). Wiese also discusses the case of Emil Gustav Hirsch (1851-1953), rabbi of the Sinai Reform Congregation in Chicago and son of theologian Samuel Hirsch, who praised the *Lutherbibel* as a ''cornerstone of modern German literature'' and an ''outstanding, eternal monument to the German spirit" (*Chicago Occident*, October 26, 1883, cited in ibid., 93). On Luther's relationship to and revivification of the German language, Heine writes that his achievement consists in the "wondrous power to translate from a dead language which had, as it were, already been buried, into another language that had not yet even been brought to life" ("Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland," in *Werke*, vol. 4: *Schriften über Deutschland* [Frankfurt: Insel, 1968], 78, cited in Ibid., 102).

[18] Wiese, 100, 109, 118.

[19] Wiese, 108. Cf. Heschel: "Luther was so intimately linked to Germany as a nation, state, and culture that for Jewish leaders, seeking integration into German society, repudiating him would have been tantamount to repudiating Germany" ("Theological Ghosts and Goblins," 332).

complicated processes of emancipation and assimilation were the subject of serious debate, a considerable faction of Liberal advocates of *Aufklärung* took for granted that, on the one hand, assimilation meant the disappearance of the Jews through *conversion*, and, on the other, that only the dissolution of Judaism would make emancipation feasible.[20] For the likes of Kant and Fichte, both the obstacle and its obviation were thus religious in nature, involving the renunciation of one faith tradition for the affirmation—whether genuine or perfunctory—of another. The opinions of this coterie mattered because in Germany, metaphysicians and philosophers were the main proprietors of the "house of mirrors into which Jews were seemingly obliged to enter in the passage to modernity"; both the negative stereotypes they drew of Jews and the ideal images to which these figures hoped they would conform were internalized by large members of a group navigating the requirements of a new cultural landscape.[21] Over the ensuing decades, therefore, Jews learned that acceptance by their German counterparts was conditional upon a self-transformation, one based to a great extent on the search for respectability; yet the kind of *Sittlichkeit* to be cultivated, particularly in the sphere of doctrinal, praxical, and liturgical reform, was informed by overtly Protestant norms and mores.[22] If the quester ultimately failed to attain the recognition he sought after, it was because he knew that the baptismal font was the surest

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[20] David Sorkin, "Emancipation and Assimilation: Two Concepts and their Application to German-Jewish History," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 35 (1990): 20.

[21] Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Jewish Self-Hatred and the Dialectics of Assimilation: A Comment on Todd M. Endelman," in *Two Nations: The Historical Experience of British and German Jews in Comparison*, ed. Michael Brenner, Rainer Liedtke, and David Rechter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 366.

[22] On the Protestant inflections of *Sittlichkeit* see George Mosse, "Jewish Emancipation: Between *Bildung* and Respectability," in *The Jewish Response to German Culture: From the Enlightenment to The Second World War*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg, 1-16; Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. chs. 1 & 2; and Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Grappling with Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *The Journal of Religion* 90.3 (2010): 392.

"Entréebillet zur europäischen Kultur" and the way to social advancement; only by means of the holy water could the Jew possibly hear the German say, "with you I am well pleased."[23]

Increasingly shearing the erstwhile protective garments of traditional observance, German Jews lived between worlds, eager to soak up the unfamiliar prospects of Christian-inflected vistas even as they felt (and were oftentimes reminded of) an unbridgeable remove from them because of their Jewishness. Their experience in the modern era can cogently be defined as the awareness, exertion, and *temptation* of Christianity upon them. No class of individuals was more acutely sensitive to this situation than the enlightened Jewish intellectual, he "whose deviation from the traditional pattern of life and thought was easily interpreted as a halfway station on the way to Christianity."[24] Faced with *Christentum*'s all-encompassing imprint on the spiritual landscape of German culture, a young Franz Rosenzweig concluded that only one option remained for the secular Jew: "We are Christians in every respect. We live in a Christian state, attend Christian schools, read Christian books in short, our whole 'culture' rests entirely on a Christian foundation; consequently a man who has nothing holding him back needs

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[23] Heinrich Heine, *Gedanken und Einfälle*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Fritz Strich (Münich: Georg Müller, 1925), 10:411. Heine, who begrudgingly converted to Protestantism as a response to the failure of civil emancipation, was not alone in commenting on this fateful price of admission. The writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal once described his grandfather's conversion as "being in accord with a perfectly natural trend…to step out of an isolation that no longer made any sense, and to enter what was generally considered the cultivated sphere" (Hugo von Hofmannsthal / Willy Haas, *Ein Briefwechsel*, ed. Rolf Italiaander [Berlin: Propylaen, 1968], 46, cited in Grunfeld, *Prophets without Honour*, 2). Moreover, in a controversial article Moritz Goldstein (1880-1972) exhorted his Jewish readers to either unabashedly "profess to be Jews or be baptized" ("Deutsch-jüdischer Parnass," *Der Kunstwart* 25.11 [1 March 1912]: 287, cited in Arendt, "Walter Benjamin," 30). On the *lex Gans*, the policy that prevented unbaptized Jews from academic teaching positions, see Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions*, 38-45.

[24] Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 54.

but a slight push…to make him accept Christianity."[25] That Rosenzweig could resignedly arrive at such a conclusion even after the baptismal certificate was no longer legally required to reap the full benefits of German society indicates the extent to which Christianity continued to represent for acculturated Jewry what William James refers to as a "live option," that is, a philosophical or theological orientation that makes an existential appeal to or claim on a person.[26]

As is well known, this live option led Rosenzweig himself to the doorstep of Christianity, before a sudden peripeteia on the eve of his intended conversion. Yet even if it was eventually reversed, his metanoia towards the Gospel was not without indelible effects on his undertakings as a staunch theological Jew. There is little doubt, for instance, that his experience at the threshold of the Church was a key motivation in his engagement with the *Patmos Kreis*, an intellectual circle formed during World War I comprising Jews, Protestants, and Catholics and dedicated to finding new approaches to religious, philosophical, and social issues. Its members were convinced that the propinquity of these religious traditions, both despite and because of their differences, would create "something new that is of the originals but also beyond the strictures of the originals, and so may open a new way into the future, together."[27] Even more germane to our purposes is a quality noticed in Rosenzweig's writings, namely, that his

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[25] Franz Rosenzweig to his parents, November 6, 1909, cited in Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Entering the Synagogue Through the Portals of the Church: Franz Rosenzweig's 'Conversion' to Judaism," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 3, ed. Dan Diner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004): 133.

[26] The phrase appears in "The Will to Believe," in *Pragmatism and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 199.

[27] Harold Stahmer, "Preface" to *Judaism Despite Christianity: The 1916 Wartime Correspondence Between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), xxii. Rosenzweig was not a founding member of the group but submitted essays to its journal, *Die Kreatur*, the Jewish editor of which was Martin Buber.

"affirmation of Judaism as a spiritually and theologically engaging faith bore the inflections of the Christianity he nigh embraced."[28] Irrespective of his cognizance of this influence, its indisputability renders difficult any demarcation of where the "Jewish" element ends and the "Christian" one begins. A similar feature was detected in Freud's and Kafka's work: their ambivalence towards Christianity in general and towards Luther in particular indexes the irresistible suffusion of Christian motifs and sensibilities consequent upon Jewry's entrance into German culture. The style of their amalgamated religious outlooks lies in accord with none of the dominant models of how to genuinely encounter the Other and construct cultural identities in a pluralistic context: the practice of restrained interfaith dialogue, the exercise of religious apologetics, nor the cultivation of an "analogical imagination."[29] Rather, their writings point to the enticement of Christianity on the work of Jewish intellectuals, and their creative efforts to define themselves vis-à-vis its paradigms.

This call for a shift in accent away from German-Jewish to Christian-Jewish, impelled by the discernment of the seductive quality of Christianity on German-Jewish intellectuals and of the precarious *Grenzland* between primordial and alien religious schemes within which they lived, enables us to retain classical categories of German-Jewish historiography even if it

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[28] Mendes-Flohr, "Entering the Synagogue," 131.

[29] The confluence of Jewish and Christian strands to which we have called attention in Freud's and Kafka's writings disregards the "uniqueness of each religious community…which cannot be merged or equated with a community which is committed to a different faith" (Joseph Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6.2 [1964]: 28); it resists the polemical principle of the necessity of inter-religious apologetics, which aims to demonstrate doctrinal incompatibilities between and within faith communities (Paul Griffiths, "An Apology for Apologetics," *Faith and Philosophy* 5.4 [1988]: 399-420); nor can it be said to translate an "alien" symbolic system into a "primary focal meaning" of one's own cultural and theological orientation (David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and The Culture of Pluralism* [New York: Crossroad, 1981], 454). For a more interactive if not symbiotic vision of inter-religious dialogue than Soloveitchik's, see "No Religion is An Island," in which "Judaism is…affected by the intellectual, moral, and spiritual events within the Christian society, and vice versa" (*Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings*, ed. Susannah Heschel [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011], 119).

necessitates altering their meanings. "Assimilation," commonly connoting a sociological process whereby one cultural identity is divested and substituted for another, is here understood as a religious exercise of *fusing* insights from multiple creeds.[30] Similarly, *Bildung* designates less the ideal of intellectual and cultural cultivation, a "secular religion" that "transcend[s] Judaism and Christianity," than a theological *formation* selectively drawn from and nourished by both wellsprings.[31] The category of "ambivalence," used to describe either the German Jew's relationship to modernity or to himself and his brethren (in the form of a *sui generis Selbsthaß*), is now applied to the divided passions one experiences towards the claims of agonistic faith traditions.[32] And "dissimilation," which itself implies an ambivalent movement of attraction and recoil away from the values of a host nation [*Wirtsvolk*], is in this context construed as a theological, not socio-cultural, gesture. That is to say, Freud's and Kafka's demotion of the son can be seen as a dissimilatory impulse, "halting at the brink" of assimilation's limits and affirming a vestigial identification with Jewish meaning structures.[33]

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[30] There is in fact a historical and interpersonal correlative to this "internal" activity: the German-Jewish historian Ludwig Geiger speaks of the "*Verschmelzung*" that occurred in Moses Mendelssohn's home, when Jews and Christians participated equally in "Berlin's social life" (*Geschichte der Juden in Berlin* [Berlin: J. Guttentag, 1871], 102, cited in Sorkin, "Emancipation and Assimilation," 22).

[31] Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism*, 18. Mosse admits that *Bildung* brought Jews and Christians together, but not in their statuses *as* Jews and Christians, and certainly not for the purpose of bridging religious divisions. For him, the appeal of *Bildung* for a self-conscious German Jewry consisted precisely in the fact that it ignored accidents of background and was in principle open to anyone. Jacob Katz refers to this new cultural space, based on a commonly held ideal, as the "neutral society" (*Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* [New York: New York University Press, 1993], 214-225).

[32] Mendes-Flohr, "Jewish Self-Hatred," 66, and *idem*, "Grappling with Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," 391.

[33] Shulamit Volkov, "The Dynamics of Dissimilation: *Ostjuden* and German Jews," in *The Jewish Response to German Culture*, 211. Volkov's article introduces the category of dissimilation because that of assimilation fails to acknowledge a "regressive" drive among German Jewry wherein Jewish identity is reawakened. This reassertion, according to Volkov, was in large part actuated by a wave of Russian and Galician migration into German's urban centers.

The invocation of dissimilation, the disillusioned impulse to separate from a majority entity after a period of prolonged integration into and identification with it, alludes to a final category that becomes subject to this same dialectical process of preservation and revision. German-Jewish historiography has in recent years begun to borrow concepts from ethnographic research in order to bring into greater relief the hybridized identity that German-Jews fashioned (and came to typify) as a consequence of their precarious social location at the crossroads between German and Jewish culture. Attempting to isolate a distinctly modern cognitive modality, one such rubric claims that marginal historical communities "may have suffered disruption but have responded creatively to it, living multiple consciousnesses as a result…the distinctiveness of the modern self might reside in its being a necessarily fractured or compound entity."[34] Freud and Kafka evince less a cultural than a spiritual composite, reflecting a protracted historical moment during which perspicacious individuals are vulnerable to the lures of competing religious ideologies; while the heuristic of suspicion and retrieval that was utilized to read them fine-tunes the notion of hybridity by stressing that identities are formed just as much by what is rejected as by what is affirmed. In the modern era, belonging is no longer monolithic or uncritically adopted; the Other always already lives in the realm of the Same, with all the frightful dangers and unexpected opportunities that he poses for our spiritual integrity. In this uncanny space, one will invariably encounter strange gods, but he is under no obligation to accept all of those whom he meets along the way.

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[34] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 46, cited in Samuel Moyn, "German Jewry and the Question of Identity: Historiography and Theory," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 41.1 (1996): 305.

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