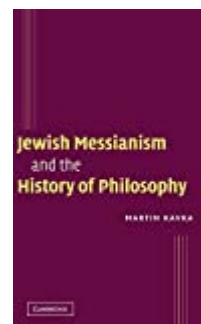




Martin Kavka. *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 256 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-83103-1.



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Kavka's book, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy*, is thoughtful, innovative, well written, and erudite. The breadth of Kavka's analysis is admirable. He is able to draw on texts in Greek, Latin, French, German, and a host of other traditions from the ancient, medieval, modern, and post-modern periods. Kavka casts a wide net. He draws brilliant connections and offers insights in a masterful way that shows an active interaction with philosophy and modern Jewish thinkers. He marshals evidence, employs logic, and creatively draws conclusions in ways that speak to a life of the mind. However the absence of rabbinic context and background on the subject of Jewish messianism in the book begs being touched upon.

Kavka's thesis is that Jewish messianism and the history of philosophy contest the ancient opposition between Athens and Jerusalem, but the way Kavka does this is by retrieving the concept of meontology (the doctrine of nonbeing) from the Jewish and philosophical tradition. In Greek *to me on* is the study of that which is not, of nonbeing. However lest the reader think this is merely an obscure and arcane treatment of a topic in philosophic discipline of metaphysics, do not be misled. Kavka recovers what he calls the Jewish meontological tradition. He argues that the notion of messianic redemption, the notion of a redeemer to come, cannot be defended without turn-

ing back to the analysis of nonbeing in the Greek philosophical tradition. Kavka holds that his focus on meontology in Jewish philosophical texts can end up having a reactivating effect on the philosophic tradition.

Kavka argues that for Emmanuel Levinas, Franz Rosenzweig, Hermann Cohen, and Maimonides, the Greek concept of nonbeing (understood as both lack and possibility) clarifies the meaning of Jewish life. Kavka offers new readings of figures in contemporary Continental philosophy. He critiques previous arguments about the role of lived religion in the thought of Jacques Derrida, the role of Plato in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, and the centrality of ethics in the thought of Franz Rosenzweig. While Levinas, Rosenzweig, Cohen, and Maimonides are the focus of Kavka's retrieval of the meontological Jewish tradition, he also demonstrates and draws on masterful familiarity with the thought of Plato, Husserl, and Derrida.

Kavka draws on the Straussian distinction between Athens and Jerusalem, also found in Harry Wolfson and Lev Shestov, to use Athens for Jewish ends, justifying Jewish anticipation of a future messianic era. Strauss writes, "Philosophy in its original and full sense is then certainly incompatible with the biblical way of life. Philosophy and Bible are the alternatives or the antagonisms in the drama of the human soul. Each of the

two antagonists claims to know or to hold the truth, the decisive truth, the truth regarding the right way of life. But there can only be one truth.”[1] Strauss further comments, “Philosophy demands that revelation should establish its claim before the tribunal of human reason, but revelation as such refuses to acknowledge that tribunal.”[2] Within Strauss’s the following oppositions reign between Athens/Jerusalem; philosophy/revealed religions; reason/faith; thinking/action predicated on ethics to change the world; theoria/piety (submission to ancestral good); free quest/obedient love; no sense of having strayed/*teshuvah* and feeling of having strayed from what was first given as a revelation; realism replaces hope but the philosopher gains from living beyond hope because he has no fears/hope predicated on returning to a past Edenic relation with God; God is distant (see Kenneth Siskin’s *A Distant God*)/Jewish belief that God acts in Jewish history; philosophy speaks of virtue (*arte*) with knowledge as the greatest virtue/religions speak of moral action and compassion, mercy, and graciousness as immutable active attributes; good is thinking/good is the messianic age and deeds of righteousness; in philosophy questioning is the piety of thought/in revealed religions questioning is to serve the higher foundation of religious belief; in philosophy the superhuman is internal to the mind after Nietzsche’s conception of the *ubermensch*/in revealed religion the supernatural is a function of miracles; after Hume philosophy is skeptical/in revealed religion skepticism is irreverent blasphemy, etc.

Kavka envisions modern Jewish thought as an expression of the intimate relationship between Athens and Jerusalem. Kavka attempts to show that in the messianic age, which can be experienced indirectly through the perfection of the rational faculty, there will be no gap between the *topos* of Athens and Jerusalem.

Maimonides and other philosophers hold that intellectual virtue and moral virtue as well as their acts will be central to accomplishing the redemption. For Kavka, drawing on Herbert Davidson, Maimonides was the supreme representative of a philosopher who sought to bring together Athens and Jerusalem.[3] Maimonides, Kavka suggests, enjoyed “dual citizenship” in philosophy (Athens) and Judaism (Jerusalem). Historically speaking the Rambam was born in Cordovero, Spain traveled to Fez, Morocco to escape the Almahads, then to the Eretz Yisrael where he davened in front of the Kotel, and then onto Cairo, Fostat with a brief stop in Alexandria. Thus, to say that the Rambam was a citizen of Athens is to qualify that the Rambam encountered Greek Philosophy and science in Arabic translations. Many Jewish studies academics

will find fault with Kavka for his ahistoricism. Kavka himself admits, “To show that these texts are relevant today, to preserve their life, I must blast them out of their historical contexts” (p. 9).

Rambam, in the final four chapters of the *Moreh Nevukhim*, demonstrates that Judaism commands intellectual knowledge of God. Rambam cites Deut. 4:35 (“You have been shown, in order to know that the L-rd is God”) and Deuteronomy 4:39 and Psalm 100:3 (“Know that the L-rd is God”), and Jeremiah 9:23 to back this claim. Rambam understands “glory only in this, in intellectual understanding and knowledge” (*haskel ve-yaddo’a*). For philosophically inclined Jews, this command to know God through studying Torah was expanded to include the requirement to learn the natural sciences and the Greek metaphysical tradition. Kavka suggests that Maimonides connects this interpretation of the command to study natural science with the command to love-God, when he writes in Guide III:28 that love of God “only becomes valid through the apprehension of the whole of being as it is and through the consideration of His wisdom as it is manifested in it.” It is through the *sekel hapoel* that life is redeemed and is the link to God (*hasekel hapoel zeh hakesher bain Adam veHaShem*). In the messianic world this intellectual link or bridge will be made strong and perfect. Kavka notes that Maimonides, in the Epistle to Yemen (written in 1172), tells the embattled Jews of Yemen, who are faced with forced conversion to Islam, that devoting themselves to rational perfection will prepare the way (or even constitute) the arrival of the messiah—a parallel to the path toward redemption that Maimonides will later lay out in the Guide. Elsewhere in Rambam’s commentary to *Perush al ha-mishnah Sanhedrin X*, Rambam notes the various levels of hope beside that of intellectual bliss that many eagerly await: pleasures of Paradise, where all material things of life will be supplied in undreamed of abundance; glories of the messianic state punctuated by remarkable achievements of King Messiah and the independent and opulent position of Israel; joy of resurrection; attainment in this world of physical happiness (*eudemonia*), i.e. bodily health and security, fertility of lands, and abundant wealth; and expect resurrection of dead and eternal bliss in Paradise. Rambam, with regards to resurrection, writes, “[common] people will ask, ‘in what condition will the dead rise to life, naked or clothed? Will they stand up in those very garments in which they were buried, in their embroideries and brocades and beautiful needlework, or in a robe that will merely cover the body? And when the Messiah comes, will rich and poor be alike, or will the dis-

inctions between weak and strong still exist?’—and many similar questions from time to time.” The sources for an understanding of the redemption, in Rambam, appear in the *Moreh Nevukhim* when he speculates on the theory of the eternity or the destructability of the universe—(II, 29b) *Letter to Yemen*, chapter 10 of the *Perush al-haMishnah Sanhedrin*, and the last two chapters of the *MT Sefer Shof-tim*.

The messiah or Philosopher King, who will be born in a Davidic family, will trace his lineage back to Ruth. The messiah will not be aware of his royal origin or his priestly mission, and until he has disclosed himself, his family and immediate parentage will not be known (see Zech. 6:12 and Is. 53:2). His destiny will become manifest, however, in due time, and the temporal rulers of the earth will be seized with fear for the security of their thrones and will conspire to overthrow him (*Letter to Yemen*, pp. 6d.). While the mashiah ben Yosef will be assassinated the mashiah ben David will pass his reign on (Comm. On Mishnah San.). Rambam holds that the messianic state will endure 2000 years and will be an unbroken continuation. The philosopher King will enjoin the world towards intellectual perfection. He will not be an ignoramus, and must excel in learning and wisdom. He will be wiser and mightier than Solomon and well-nigh the equal of Moses in prophetic power.[4] As well as being a Talmud Hakham, Rambam’s messiah will free the nation from foreign domination, enlarge its boundaries, and implant Ahavat HaShem in every home.

Rambam placed a premium on the wisdom of the messiah. For example, in “the letter to Yemen” Rambam showed the imprudence of the Messianic imposter, who appeared amongst the Jews of Arabia, in ordering equal distribution of private wealth. Rambam argued that this communistic principle *avant la letter* was stupid and would impoverish the rich.[5] Rambam views the redemption sub specie *aeternitatis* as the intellectual consummation of the ages, rather than as a redistribution of wealth that the Communists and socialists view reducing everything to class rivalries. Rambam does not view all humans as equal. For example in the *Moreh HaNevukhim*, Rambam dismisses those people who regard anthropomorphisms in the Tanakh literally as inferior to those with a philosophic understanding of such anthropomorphisms. With regards to intellectual virtues, Rambam does not view all as equal and thus with regards to rewards of material benefit these are not to be equal as well. In fact Rambam is with Ralbag that HaShem watches over one with Hashgehah Pratit in proportion to one’s intellectual virtues. Rambam rejects the innate equality of

people. Einstein is not the equal of most neophytes in physics. Not everyone can achieve the same rank, intellectually. It is not the divisions between rich and poor that will change in the messianic era, but rather a spirit of good will, brotherhood, and peace will come as the result of primitive instincts to fight, envy, and ridicule. While it is true that the hardships of meeting basic needs will be eradicated, for the sages say in Sabb. 30b, “the land of Israel will one day produce cakes ready baked, and garments of fine silk,” Rambam sees this as a popular way of expressing the “good times” of the messianic future (Comm. On Mishna, San X).

In short for Rambam the messiah will be a philosopher king who is an observant Jew, absorbed in the study of Torah and enforcement of Rabbinic law. He will reconstitute the Sanhedrin. In the *Moreh HaNevukhim*, Rambam emphasizes the importance of wisdom to guide the messianic age when he writes, “all the great evils which men cause to each other because of certain intentions, desires, opinions, or religious principles, are likewise due to non-existence because they originate in ignorance, which is the absence of wisdom. If men possessed wisdom, which stands in the same relation to the form of man as the sight to the eye, they would not cause any injury to themselves or to others; for the knowledge of truth removes hatred and quarrels, and prevents mutual injuries.”[6] Rambam’s analogy of wisdom to sight is Aristotelian. In the metaphysics, Aristotle shows that “sight” is the *eidos* of the material eyeball. Just as the Pythagorean formula shows that the diagonal of an isosceles triangle is the square root of a^2+b^2 , which has a form, so too do the true, good, and beautiful have forms. The form of the eyeball is “sight” which has the form of vision. Emerson, in his essay “The American Scholar,” imagines HaShem Himself to be a “transparent eyeball,” a metaphor for an omniscient God. Aristotle and Rambam prize sight above all the senses. Derrida, in *L’Oreille De l’Autre*, has seen this emphasis on sight rather than hearing as flawed and “logocentric.” Derrida could point to Rabbi Isaac the Blind (a relation of the Rabad of Posquies), who was blind but possessed much insight and “vision.” Clearly Rambam, in the wake of Aristotle, would include internal sight as a reality not to be dismissed, just as Derrida would accredit blind musicians like Beethoven, who could hear the music he was setting down in his mind, even though he was deaf. In fact many musicians who are composers can hear the music they set down in notation before it is played in performance.

In the messianic era man will have reached the pro-

foundest knowledge of God, of the exterior world, as well as the complex secrets of his own being. The greatest quest of man will be for God via *Torah Lishmah*'s searching for Hokmah, Binah, VeDaat. Knowledge will be universal. In this sense Paradise is "on this side of the grave," in that intellectual attainment in this life can serve as the foundation for future reward. *Olam Ha-Bah* has already been created although it may be invisible—it is future for those individuals who are destined to enter it (*olam hazeh prozdur li-olam ha-bah*).

Kavka shows the way Maimonides temporalizes the concept of non-being—in other words, non-being is not-yet-being. Kavka examines Maimonides use of non-being in the Moreh HaNevukhim, and its influence upon Hermann Cohen's writings. He traces the movement from the analysis of non-being to the formulation of a messianic ethical teleology. From Aristotle, Maimonides associates nonbeing with privation of a potential for actuality. From Plotinus, Maimonides associates this cluster of concepts with matter. Kavka further notes, "In Guide 1:17-18, Maimonides passes from an analysis of privation to an examination of biblical verbs meaning 'to approach' or 'to draw near.' In both cases, nonbeing as privation gives rise to a desire for the fullness of being. Maimonides articulates the path of this erotic desire as a discipline of intellectual self-perfection. The desire for God is expressed through *imitatio Dei*, in which God is defined as pure intellect in *actu*, who cannot be reified into the language of substance and attribute. Maimonides argues that we can know only God's attributes of action; we cannot imitate who God is, but can know only God's attributes of action; we cannot imitate who God is, but we can imitate what God does. One might read Maimonides as arguing that God has essential attributes that transcend the limits of human understanding" (p. 12). Against this view, Kavka argues that there are no hidden attributes of God for Maimonides. "Rather Maimonides argues that God cannot have any qualities whatsoever. God is nothing outside of God's acting, because God acts are God's essence—or in another formulation, God's essence is the actuality of God's life. There is no difference between intellectual perfection and practical perfection in Maimonides" (p. 12). Kavka shows that the divine attributes of loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment are "necessary corollaries of God's being an intellect in *actu*" (p. 12). Kavka notes that in other writings Rambam names the intellectual perfection that is the telos of religious life, *olam ha-ba*; it is defined as the soul's participation in the "supernal fellowship with the existence of God the Creator."^[7]

Kavka notes that messianic anticipation plays a key role in this teleology, since the Messianic Era gives "powerful [assistance] for attaining *olam ha-ba*." Kavka may use language that Rambam would be uncomfortable with, i.e. the modern, not medieval, notion of "self-making." Kavka sees the process of rational self-perfection as a process of messianic "self-making." For the Rambam, the Jewish self/ego is only legitimated with a Jewish community. The Emersonian Romantic notion of individualism and self-making may be foreign to the medieval halakhic conception of a Jew within community. While it is true that the Dead Sea Scroll sect retreated into the solitude of the desert of Qumran; Rabbi bar Yohai and his son lived in solitude in a cave living on carobs because they were threatened by the Roman government; the Hasdei Ashkenaz cultivated the virtue of silence in solitude; the Baal Shem Tov lived in the Carpathian mountains in solitude; and the Kotzker Rebbe retreated into solitude towards the end of his duration in this world, the Jewish tradition has always emphasized life in community and association with other Jews. Ten Jewish men is the minimum halakhic number/quorum required for a minyan. Life is with people and fellow Jews, making the concept of "self-making" foreign to mainstream normative Judaism. While it is true certain Tzadikim have retreated into solitude to work on themselves, and the Musar tradition of Rabbi Salanter speaks to the need for this kind of self-perfection of Middot, Judaism has always rejected the solipsistic undertones laden in a modern Romantic notion of "self-making." Kavka is right to emphasize the importance of self-perfection in Rambam as intellectual perfection, but the adoption of the term "self-making" might make the Rambam uneasy.

At the end of Kavka's book, he draws on Pesikta Rabbati 34, which describes an embattled group of Jews, who read Torah in a heterodox manner and refer to themselves as the Mourners of Zion. They are ostracized by the majority of their community for arguing that their heterodox practice will facilitate messianic redemption. They describe themselves in the same language in which they describe the messianic figure. Kavka argues that the messianic posture of Mourners of Zion sect, insofar as it straddles positions of awaiting redemption and asserting the sect's own redemptive power, is meontological. Kavka uses the Pesikta Rabbati 34 text to argue against recent anti-meontological writings of Jacques Derrida which claim the authentically messianic cannot possibly be found in any of the Western monotheisms. They, as did Rambam to the Yeminite Jews, blur the boundry between the anticipated Messiah and the human striving

for perfection. Thus Kavka argues these two texts offer heightened expression of the tradition's belief in the imminence of messianic advent. Kavka relates these messianic ideas to the interpretation of non-being (meontology) rationally justifying Jews' anticipation of a future messianic figure and age. The eschatological projectory on the stage of Jewish history is the realization of redemption, from the not-there-yet launching out of nothing after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, to the reconstitution of that Edenic state in thought. According to Maimonides, in the *Moreh Nevukhim*, Adam Kadmon was doing philosophy in Gan Eden, pure *ruhniut*, until he was seduced out of philosophizing into materiality, *gashmiut*. The course of Jewish history is to emerge from the nothingness of life reduced to pure physicality to reconstitute Adam Kadmon's state as a philosopher engaged in *noesis noesis*, the understanding of understanding, which is pure *Geist/Ruah/Esprit*, because HaShem Himself, the unmoved Mover in the Maimonidean/Aristotelian model, is pure thought who thinks Himself in a state of independent autonomous self-sufficiency of perfection. Both Rambam and Rosenzweig see *olam hazeh* as fundamentally unfinished (as *me on*) until the messianic age dawns.

It may be helpful at this point to note what Kavka's Book is "not." It is not a Rabbinic treatment of the Aggadata on the messianic era and rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, although an understanding of this aspect of Jewish messianism would seem crucial for any sufficient understanding of Jewish messianism in general.

As with any book there is a scope and limits on what topics are addressed and the methodology employed. Kavka excludes from his focus the "traditional" concept of messianism in early rabbinic texts such as Bavli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashim which are not addressed directly. However, Kavka does recognize the existence of traditional Jewish views of messianism, as when he remarks, "traditionally, Jewish messianism refers not only to the general redemption of Israel and the world in the concrete sphere of historical and political reality but also to the anticipation of a particular figure who serves as the conduit of divine agency on earth. The anointed figure, whether seen as king or priest or holy person, manifests divine kingship in his association with Mount Zion (Ps.2:6), the residence of God (Is. 8:18). Thus anticipation of a messianic figure who brings peace and political autonomy to Israel is also anticipation of God's nearness to the nation, mediated through the human figure of the messiah" (p. 7). In the Jewish philosophical meontological tradition being the Messiah is synonymous with human and moral perfection.

Kavka's book does not fit into the categories of the genre of those books that deal with the messianic era in a scholarly way such as Joseph Dan's *Ha-Meshihiyut ha-Yehudit ha-Modernit*. Kavka's book is also not a historical treatment that deals with the messiah and messiah movements in their historical context such as Yosef Klausner's *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, Zion Wacholder's *Messianism and Mishnah: Time and Place in the Early Halakhah*, Leo Landman's *Messianism and the Talmudic Era*, Yosef Klotzner's *Ha-Rayon ha-meshihi be-Yisrael mi-reshito ve-ad hatimat ha-Mishnah*, Aviezer Ravitzky's *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, or Samuel Heilman's *Past, Present, and Future of Jewish Messianism*. It is also not a historical study of false messiah's within the projectory of Jewish mysticism such as Gershom Scholem's *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*. Neither is it a popular work such as Jerry Rabow's *50 Jewish Messiahs: The Untold Life Stories of 50 Jewish Messiahs since Jesus and How They changed Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Worlds*. Neither is this a book in the biblical teaching of the messiah such as: Joseph Alobaidi's *The Messiah in Isaiah 53: Commentaries of Saadia Gaon, Salmon ben Yeruham, and Yefet ben Eli*, or Robert Wolfe's *The Origins of the Messianic Idea*. Neither does Kavka address the concept of the messiah in sectarian literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls as do treatments of their leader, ha-Moreh HaTzedek, who was a messianic figure as dealt with by John Collins in *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* and Craig Evan's *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*.

Kavka's book is also not one of those collections of primary texts on the messiah, such as Raphael Patai's *Messianic Texts*. Neither is it a scholarly study of the messiah in Aramaic texts such as the Targumim as is Samson Levey's classic. It goes without saying that Kavka's text does not deal with the controversy surrounding Habad Messianism such as Berger's controversial work and more sympathetic "insider" treatments of Chabad messianism in general such as Alter Eliyahu Friedman's *From Exile to Redemption: Chasidic Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson and the Preceding Rebbebeim of Chabad on the Future Redemption and Coming of Mashiach* or Jacob Immanuel Schochet's *Living with Moshiach: An Anthology of Brief Homilies and Insights on the Weekly Torah Readings and Festivals*. Neither is this a work in Jewish-Christian debates regarding the messiah such as *Jewish-Christian Debates: God, Kingdom, Messiah* by Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton or historical studies of

the medieval debates by Haim Maccoby (*The Talmud on Trial*) and Robert Chazon on the medieval debates on the question, “whether the messiah has come,” such as that in Paris in 1240 featuring Rabbi Yehiel, Barcelona 1263 featuring Ramban, and Tortosa 1414 featuring R. Yosef Albo. Neither is Kavka’s book a study of the messiah in Yiddish literature as is Avraham Novershtern’s *Kesem ha-dimdumim: apokalipsah u-meshihiyut be-sifrut Yidish*. Kavka is also not offering a work in the history of ideas as Scholem’s *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*. Then what is Kavka’s book? It is a work in philosophic treatments of the messiah, but very unlike the classic Sarachek’s *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature*. Sarachek treats the understanding of the messiah and messianic age in Saadia Gaon, Rashi, Solomon ibn Gabirol, R. Judah HaLevy, R. Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Nahmanides, Hasdai Crescas, and Isaac Abraham, with an appendix R. Abraham bar Hiyya.

The reader should not expect to encounter a treatment of Aggadic passages that speak of the messianic era and its fulfillment. In some sense this allows Kavka to focus more directly on modern philosophic treatments of Jewish messianism. However since Kavka does treat Maimonides it is important to keep in mind Rambam’s grounding in Rabbinic texts. Rambam, for instance, is very familiar with the importance of *Har Habayit* in the messianic age and the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash. In the Mishneh Torah, Melakim, XII, 3 and XI, Rambam notes that the temple will be rebuilt and the dispersed tribes of Israel gathered unto the Holy land. The korbanot, the Shemittah, and the Jubilee will be reintroduced. The Levites and Kohanim will be reinstituted in service (some hold the Levites will be Kohanim and Kohanim will be Levites). The tribes will be given their territorial divisions. In these tasks the messiah will be guided by Ruah HaKodesh. When Rambam traveled to Yerushalayim he spent much of his time *davoning* in front of the Kotel. *Har Habayit* will be the center of messianic longings in the messianic age. The Temple Mount is the center of longings for the rebuilding of the Third Beit HaMikdash. Although Kavka does not focus to a large extent on early Rabbinic texts that express this longing for example in the Amidah when we davon, “VeHashav et HaAvodah LeDevir Beteichah”, when at the Pesah Seder we sing, “Kail Boneh, Kail Boneh, Boneh Beteichah BiKarov,” or when we break a glass at a wedding, or in leaving a section of a wall in a house unpainted. Some disciples of Rav Kook slept with stones under their heads hoping to be the first to dedicate building materials for the rebuilding of the third Beit HaMikdash. The importance of the Beit

HaMikdash to the Jewish people is seen in Tehillim (27:4; 84:2; 116:17-19) which relates that the people longed to visit the courtyards. The importance of the Beit HaMikdash and the Korbanot is seen in a passage from Maseket Shabbat where three views are given regarding the most fundamental passage in the Torah. Ben Zoma said, “I have found a verse that contains the whole of the Torah: ‘Shema Yisrael HaShem Elokaynu HaShem Ehad.’” Ben Nanus said: “I have found a verse that contains the whole of the Torah: ‘VeAhavtah ReEchah KiMochah.’” Ben Pazi said, “I have found a verse that contains the whole of the Torah: ‘You will sacrifice a lamb in the morning, and another at dusk.’” And Rabbi (Yehudah HaNasi), their master, stood up and decided, “The law is according to Ben Pazi.”

Evangelical Christians, alongside a segment of the Jewish population, see the Temple mount as the center of messianic aspirations. The messiah will descend the slope of Har Zaytim and ride up to the gate of Mercy on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9), through which he will enter Jerusalem, preceded by Eliyahu haNavi who will blow the horn to proclaim his arrival. This horn is to come from the sacrificial ram caught in the thicket that Avraham Avinu offered up instead of Isaac, and from which also the belt of Eliyahu HaNavi derives. The importance of the Temple Mount is tantamount as one of the major issues on the bargaining table for the final peace process between Israelis and the Palestinians will be the status of the Temple Mount.

Despite many Muslim claims, it is a historical fact that in 956 B.C.E. Shlomo built the first Beit HaMikdash on this site (I Kgs.6-7 & II Chron. 3-4), and in 516 B.C.E. Ezra and Nehemiah witnessed the completion of the rebuilding of the second Beit HaMikdash, again structured around the ulam, hechal, and devir. The walls of this twenty-meter-long space were lined with cedar wood planks, carved with palm branches, flowers, and winged cherubim, all gilt. Ritual objects stood in the hechal: a golden altar for burning incense, one (or ten as in Chronicles) golden tables for the lechem panim, and ten golden menorot with their various cleansing implements. Remnants of the first and second Temples are buried under the Herodian fill, and according to Yerushalmi Shekalim 29:2, Josiah hid holy objects in a cave under the Temple to prevent the Babylonians from stealing them.

The Mount’s legitimate Jewish sovereignty is affirmed by King David’s purchasing the threshing floor of Aravna (or Ornan) around 1000 B.C.E. for a sum of 50 shekels (II Sam. 24) or 600 shekelim (Chronicles), some-

time after the King took the stronghold of Zion and called it the city of David (II Sam. 5:6-9/I Chron. 11:4-7). Three of the holiest sites in the promised land are named in the Torah as having been purchased: the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, and Joseph's Tomb in Hebron.

Mount Moriah, the place of the Akedah, is associated with the Temple Mount, and the events relating to the creation of the world are identified with the "Even Shetiyya" likened to the naval of the world that connects heaven, earth, and the netherworld (see Yoma 5:2; Beit Hamidrash 5:63-70; Kohelet Raba 3:7). According to the Talmud it was not only the entire universe that evolved from Even Shetiyya, but the human race too originated in it. Adam was created from a ladle full of earth that HaShem took from the place of the altar (Yerushalmi Nazir 7:2). Breishit Raba 17:6 attests, "Out of the place where atonement is made for him, man has been created." The altar that was part of the original scheme of the creation of the world was the same altar on which Adam sacrificed, and after him his sons Cain and Abel, and Noah and his sons (Pesikta Rabati 43; Breishit Raba 34:9). When Abraham was ordered to sacrifice Isaac on one of the hills in the land of Moriah, which was identified in II Chron. 3:1 as the hill on which Solomon built the Temple, HaShem showed him this same altar. The Even Shetiyya was also identified with the stone on which Jacob slept and on which he dreamed of a ladder connecting heaven and earth (Gen. 28:11-22). Louis Jacobs has written a wonderful essay titled, "Jacob's Dream in Hasidic Interpretation" in which he notes the various readings of this dream in Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye (d. 1784), Rabbi Moshe Hayyim of Sudlikov (d. 1800), Rabbi Elim-elech of Lizansk (1717-1787), Rabbi Hayyim Tyrer of Chernowitz (1750-1816), Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz (1760-1827), Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum of Ujhely (1759-1841), and Rabbi Sholomo Zalman of Koputs (1830-1900). When Jacob woke he named the place Beit-Kel and the identification of the Temple Mount was made despite the fact that the location of Beit-Kel, north of Jerusalem, is clearly specified. Beit-Kel, meaning "House of G-d" and the Temple, also the House of G-d, became one. A legend relates that after Jacob took the stone on which he slept and placed it as a standing stone (*masseba*), HaShem stamped the stone with his right foot and sank it to *tehom*, and thus the stone connects earth, heaven, and the netherworld. Another legend attributes medicinal properties to the subterranean water that issues from the Even Shetiyya. It is related that a watercourse issues forth from the Holy of Holies. At first it is thin but as soon

as it reaches the entrance of the House of David it turns into a mighty stream (Yoma 77b-78a).

Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Akiba visited the destroyed Temple Mount. The emergence of a fox from the holy of holies prompted Rabbi Akiba's laughter, for it was seen as confirmation of prophecy. The loss of the Beit HaMikdash was so great that Rabbi Joshua said that from the day the Temple was destroyed there has been no day without a curse, the dew has not condensed, and the flavor has left the fruit. Rabbi Jose added that the fullness of the fruit was removed (Sotah 48a). Another sage added that since the destruction of the Temple, the gates of prayers have been sealed (Berakhot 32b). While current Rabbinic law forbids Jews to venture onto the Temple Mount until purified by pure water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer, Yevamot 6:2 decrees that one going up to the Mount should keep a proper decorum and not enter the holy place with his traveling attire. Rabbi Goren claimed that Jews had a historic right to pray in certain areas of the Temple Mount that were outside the strictly sacred zones. In fact Rabbi Goren led groups of fifty Jews up onto the Temple Mount to daven after 1967.

Traditions are associated with the fate of the Temple Mount in the days of the Messiah, when a stream will burst under the location of the Holy of Holies and flow to join the Euphrates River. On its way this flow of water will uncover the hiding places of the treasures and reveal them (Mishnah Kelim 88-91). Ezekiel describes the visionary Temple (ch. 40-48) that will be rebuilt in which no trace of idolatry will be found. In the messianic age the Sanhedrin which met in the Lishgat HaGazit will be reinstituted for deliberations.

Rambam legislated that the study of the Korbanot serve as a fitting substitute for the Korbanot until the Beit HaMikdash is rebuilt. Thus one acquires the merit for offering the Korbanot by studying tractates like Birds Nests, Zevachim, Menahot, etc. We must know the details of how to perform the Korbanot when the time is right. Middot, dealing with the dimensions and architecture of the Beit HaMikdash, is also essential. Rambam species the following conditions to be met in the messianic era: no war; no famine; the lamb (Jews) will not be persecuted by the wolves (other nations); the Beit HaMikdash will be rebuilt with a re-instituted Levitical priesthood; blessings will be abundant, comforts within the reach of all; and, the one preoccupation of the whole world will be to know the L-rd. Hence Israelites will be very wise, they will know things that are now concealed and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the utmost of the

human mind, as it is written, “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the L-rd, as the waters cover the sea (Isa.11:9). With regards to the building of the Beit HaMikdash, Rambam writes, “King Messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former state and original sovereignty. He will rebuild the sanctuary and gather the dispersed of Israel. All the ancient laws will be reinstituted in his days—sacrifices will again be offered.” Interestingly the Rambam interprets the verse “the lamb will dwell with the wolf” to mean that Jews (lambs) will not be persecuted by the other nations (wolves), while Abarbanel holds that in the messianic era, wolves will not desire to eat lambs flesh via a change in animal nature. Rambam speculated that the messianic age would dawn in the year 6000 of the Hebrew calendar by interpreting the verse from Tehillim, “a thousand years in your site O L-rd are but a watch in the night” to apply to each of the six creation days in Bereishit.” The Rambam warned against such calculation in numerical terms of eschatological fulfillment, and subsequent Hasidic thought such as the Baal Shem Tov asserts that the messiah will come not until the well springs (Torah teachings) are distributed to all four corners of the globe. The messiah, according to one Hasidic parable, is where ever one lets him in.

The Temple Mount is still revered and awaits its messianic fulfillment in the prophecy of Isaiah (2:2-4), “And it will come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all the nations shall flow unto it. And the people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the L-rd.” HaShem’s high throne in Isaiah 6:1-6 may be the celestial throne, placed exactly above HaShem’s throne in the terrestrial Temple, that is above the ark of the covenant (Tanhuma Vayakhel 7). Rabbi Simon bar Yohai estimates that there is a distance of eighteen miles—the numerical value of the letters of the Hebrew words, “and this is” in the verse “and this is the Gate of Heaven” (Gen.18:17). When in the Hallel we proclaim “Pitchuh Li Sharei Tzedek,” the spiritual metaphor of the gates in Shaymayim are quite literally signified. According to the Rambam’s Moreh HaNevukhim and Orhot Tzadikim, the seven heavens have many gates and within various chambers malachim are offering lectures on various topics. The gates leading to these chambers where the soul can find refreshment and delight are guarded by gatekeepers (*archons*) demanding passwords. The celestial Temple and the earthly Temple have many gates. The messianic age will involve the bringing down of the ce-

lestial Beit HaMikdash by the will of HaShem onto the Temple Mount.

This longing for the beit HaMikdash, which is a key component of Rabbinic understandings of the messianic era and Jewish messianism, is not addressed by Kavka since he is not interested in ideological recapitulations of eschatological prophecies but in philosophic workings of the *sekel HaPoel* that speak to an abstract/theoretical underpinning of the concept of Jewish messianism and the history of philosophy by retrieving the concept of meontology—the understanding of non-being from the Jewish philosophical and theological tradition. Kavka does however incorporate an analysis of Maimonides who was grounded in traditional texts that speak to the messianic era and its fulfillment. Rabbinic Jews may find Kavka’s treatment of the Rambam in this innovative book the most engaging and intellectually satisfying section of the book.

As noted, Rambam specifies the following conditions to be met in the messianic era: the wolves (other nations); the Beit HaMikdash will be rebuilt with a re-instituted Levitical priesthood; blessings will be abundant, comforts within the reach of all; and, the one preoccupation of the whole world will be to know the L-rd. Hence Israelites will be very wise, they will know things that are now concealed and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the utmost of the human mind, as it is written, “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the L-rd, as the waters cover the sea (Isa.11:9). With regards to the building of the Beit HaMikdash, Rambam writes, “King Messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former state and original sovereignty. He will rebuild the sanctuary and gather the dispersed of Israel. All the ancient laws will be reinstituted in his days—sacrifices will again be offered.” Even in the diaspora Jews are duty bound to manifest reverence for the sanctuary that once adorned the holy city—a religious ideal, which Israel may never forsake. Belief in the coming of the messiah is so important that it is one of the *yod gimel ikkarim*. The belief in the messiah and coming of the messianic age is one of the *yod gimel ikkarim*. One who disbelieves the Messianic dogma is a *kofer*, and has no share in future life, he denies the infallibility of Moses and the prophets. The coming of the redeemer is promised in BaMidbar 24 and Devarim 30. Rambam interprets the phrase “a troop of asses” in Isaiah 21:7 (and when he seeth a troop, horsemen by pairs, A troop of asses, a troop of camels, He shall hearken diligently with much heed) to allude to the Messiah for Zechariah prophesizes the messiah in the phrase “lowly, and riding upon an ass” (9:9).

Interestingly the Rambam interprets the verse “the lamb will dwell with the wolf” to mean that Jews (lambs) will not be persecuted by the other nations (wolves), while Abarbanel holds that in the messianic era wolves will not desire to eat lambs flesh via a change in animal nature. Rambam’s allegorical method of interpreting the metaphor of the lamb dwelling with the wolf may be similar to the awful celestial phenomena narrated in Yoel 3:3-4 as a poetic representation of the defeat of Gog in the time of the messiah. It would appear that Is. 65:17 with its promises of a new heaven and new earth according to Guide II, 29 and Mishneh Torah, Melakim, XI, 12 can be construed in multiple ways. On the simple peshat level it indicates the exalted and happy condition of future Israel.

The subject of the Rambam’s view on resurrection was the subject of much discussion with others such as Samuel b. Ali of Bagdad. There was a large controversial correspondence between Meir b. Todros HaLevi of Toledo, anti-Maimonist and the Lunel scholars on Maimonides’ conception of Resurrection and the Hereafter. Rambam reasons that “he firmly believes in resurrection as a miracle whose possibility is granted with the assumption of a temporal Creation. Thus if HaShem created the heavens and the earth-the Grand Canyons, Titans, Himalayas, Alps, Galaxies, etc. He certainly can carry off a resurrection. The greatest miracle is yesh mi-ayin, thus a miracle of resurrection is not out of the question. Once we reject Aristotle’s view of an uncreated universe without beginning, the Jewish conception posits the existence of miracles. These miracles prove the power and control of HaShem over nature. Today with advances in cloning, stem cell research, and fertility treatments the control over nature with regards to the birth of children is making the potential miracle of resurrection a conceivable possibility. Sheep have already been cloned. In the future one might consult a geneticist with regards to having children who might run off one’s potential offspring in a lab analogous to the ease with which photocopies are made. This is not science fiction. One could conceivably dig up the fingernail of a great sage and clone him again. Moral questions arise to the consequences of potentially cloned persons in the future. Should this “resurrection technology” which is in the preliminary stages be encouraged or allowed since many possible genetic defective offspring risk being produced in the learning stages of the bell curve as this technology is perfected. More amusing ethical questions arise for example, can a clone be counted in a minyan? Rabbi Yitzak Breitowitz has published on this subject and warns that cloning is not an exact model for previous traditions regarding Golems

reported by Rava in the Talmud and the Maharal, for the clone is a viable person while a Golem is an artificial anthropoid. However the whole question of personhood is being questioned as the result of these potential new “resurrection technologies.”

Rambam points to Daniel 12:2 which states, “and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence” as well as Yehezkel’s vision of the dry bones. Daniel 12:13 goes on to state, “But go thou thy way till the end be; and thou shalt rest, and shalt stand up to thy lot, at the end of days.” Rambam could also argue for resurrection from various pesukim such as “Ashrei Yashvei Betechah Oed Yehalleluha Seleh” where the “Oed” is extra or in Shirat HaYam where “Az Yashir Moshe Ubenei Yisrael” indicates that “Yashir” is in the future tense, indicative of resurrection. Further Rambam sees a veiled reference to resurrection in the last verse of Malachi, which speaks of God sending forth Elijah HaNavi before the great and terrible day. Eliyahu’s return is complete proof that the resurrection depends upon the Messiah, for Eliyahu haNavi will precede and prepare the way for the redeemer. The supreme miracle will be performed by God Himself-it is the reward for the righteous. Rambam makes the distinction between the messianic state and the *olam ha-bah*. According to the Rambam, all who are resurrected will die after long and consecrated life. The souls of the righteous will then pass into a future world, where, upon reaching the stage of spiritual completeness, they will abide forever. There they will be soul-beings whose exclusive delight will be the intellectual/eternal association with HaShem. This reward affirms the philosophic proposition, “Psyche Ton Anthropos Athanatos.” From Hilchot Teshevah Rambam cites a Talmudic tradition that the righteous sit with crowns on their heads and enjoy the radiance of the Shekina. This eternal bliss is proportional to the Hokmah, Binah, veDaat gained in this world. Thus the crowns on the heads of the righteous represent intellectual achievement. This emphasis on the noetic aspect of reconstituted resurrected life is in stark contrast with the many who Rambam saw as drawing on materialistic passages in Talmudic texts that for instance suppose that the righteous in Gan Eden enjoy lavish banquets. For Rambam the banquet of which the Midrash speaks must be understood figuratively as the feast of the soul, or intellect. The Muslims hold to a further vision of gashmiut pleasure in the theology of the enjoyment of the vestal virgins. Rambam holds that there is no eating, drinking, or anything physical (*tashmish haMitah*) in Gan Eden.

Rewards are proportional to intellectual attainments. In fact Rambam shunned a materialistic conception of Gan Eden and found ridiculous those interested in material concerns such as, “will the dead arise naked or clothed? In their embroideries or in the shroud? And will the messiah equalize rich and poor?” Rambam does not allow for intermediate stages in the purging of the soul toward perfection. Rambam defended the sage against the view that the unworthy soul met an absolute and speedy end when the person died (see Chapters on Bliss). However while Rambam accepts a rationalistic vision, the Rambam is a Kabbalist. Rambam rejects the Kabbalistic notion of a cycle of worlds each lasting 7,000 years and created and destroyed successively. This eschatological scheme relates to Rambam’s citing of the verse that “1000 years in your sight of HaShem but are as yesterday” for if each creation day is 1000 years long then the messianic age will dawn in the year 6000 of the Hebrew calendar. Rambam rejects the view of the obliteration of the world in the year 7000 in Moreh Nevukim II, (ch. 29).

Following Saadia Gaon, Rambam held that the miracle of resurrection will take place after the messiah’s appearance, and would constitute the first great act of redemption.

There are some Mikubalim who explain the process of resurrection as relating to the process of gilgulim. Rav Saadia Gaon rejects the Kabbalistic idea of gilgulim. However according to Kabbalists Pinchas ben Eleazar is a gilgul of Eliyahu ha-Navi because both are zealous for Hashem i.e. Eliyahu murdered the Baal prophets at Har Karmel and Pinchas murdered Cosbi and Zimri for zenut. Moshe Rabbenu is a *gilgul* of Havel. Mordechai is a *gilgul* of Yakov because Mordecai did not bow before the wicked Haman, yimach Shemo, while Yakov did bow before the wicked Esauv. Mordecai did not bow because Haman, had an idol hung around his neck. The theory of gilgulim also finds interesting associations with many Kabbalists themselves. For example Rabbi Chaim Vital, the Talmid Mevuhak of HaAri HaKodesh traces the various reincarnations of his soul spark (see Sefer Ha-Hezyanot) and the Ramhal is believed to be a *gilgul* of Rabbi Akiva since the Ramhal lived to age forty and Rabbi Akiva learned the twenty-two otiot at the age of forty.

Kabbalists, in general, claim to know the secrets of eschatological prophesies, the Beit HaMikdash, and esoteric subjects such as *ma’aseh merkavah*, *ma’aseh bereshit*, the mystery of the *tetragramaton*, etc. These secrets will be more revealed in the messianic age. The subject of the *merkavah* found in M. Hag. 2:1 is found further

in the corresponding section of Tosefta (T. Hag. 2:1-7) and in the gemara to this Mishneh in Yerushalmi (Hag. 77a-d) and Bavli (Hag. 11b-16a). These texts presume the dangers of this esoteric subject, for according to M. Hagigah 2:1 *merkavah* may not be expounded (*en doresin bam-merkavah*) except under special circumstances, and according to Megillah 4:10, it may not be used as a prophetic lection in the synagogue (*en maftirin hammerkavah*). Special knowledge of these esoteric subjects is reserved for a small group of initiates. Rabbinic anecdotes stress its secret and wondrous nature, and hazard for the premature. It is a matter of debate whether the Rabbinic tradition (see TB Hagigah 13a) may link *ma’aseh merkavah* and *ma’aseh bereshit* together based on the following passage from Seder Olam Rabbah (ch. 30, ed. Milikovsky, p.445), where we read, “he reveals the deep and secret things. (Dan 2:22). Deep that is the depths of the merkavah and secret that is ma’aseh bereshit.” *Merkavah* is also found in: Megillah 4:10; Tosefta Meg. 3(4): 28, 34; BT: Ber. 21b, Shabb. 80b, Sukk. 28a (=B.B. 134a), Meg. 24b. One of Eliyahu ha-Navis’s role in the messianic age will be to clear up exoteric and esoteric contradictions in Rabbinic texts.

Kavka has makes an important contribution towards exploring meontology in the work of Levinas, Fackenheim, Husserl, Maimonides, Hermann, Cohen, and Rosenzweig. Let us now turn to the concept of meontology relating to negation and nothingness in Maimonides.

Maimonides’ negative theology asserts that predications of affirmative attributes of God are dangerous. It is chutzpadic to suggest that human knowledge can transcend to comprehension of HaShem’s knowledge. One comes nearest to the apprehension of G-d only through negation. Thus we posit HaShem is not a body, not ignorant, not finite, not powerless. It is the negation of the privation of the attribute which is best for attempting to comprehend the divine. Socrates anticipated this medieval negative theology when he noted that with regards to God’s knowledge he felt like he knew nothing for God’s wisdom, understanding, and knowledge is without end. Kabbalists when speaking of HaShem’s infinity, employ the term *Ayn Sof*. However the Rambam as a rationalist rejected certain elements of Kabbalah, for instance by forbidding anyone to read Shiur Komah where the measurements of the Deity are given. For the Rambam the proposition, “*Ain lo demut haguf ve-aino guf*” carries with it an Aristotelian subtext where the unmoved mover is also incorporeal. In fact Rambam draws on Aristotle’s understanding of the unmoved mover as “first cause” (*tachlit rishonah*) as one of the proofs for the ex-

istence of G-d. The logic notes that since the heavenly bodies (moon, stars, planets, etc.) are in motion there must have been a first cause, namely G-d, who set them in motion. This is called the proof from motion, but other proofs such as the proof from design and the ontological proof also exist. Noteworthy however is that while the Rambam draws on Aristotle in certain regards, he rejects Aristotle in significant cases as well such as in the rejection of Aristotle's position that the heavens are eternal, for Jews hold that HaShem created the heavens and earth (see Bereshit). Just as there was a first cause there is a final cause, also God, when the messianic era will be realized on the stage of human history. As Sefer Shoftim of the Mishneh Torah makes clear in that eschatological manifestation of beings-move, the following conditions will attain: no war; no famine; blessings will be abundant; knowledge of HaShem will be as widespread as the waters in the sea and the one preoccupation of the world will be to know HaShem so that it will be a perpetual Shabbos; rebuild beit HaMikdash; and, the lamb (the Jews) will not be persecuted by the wolves (other nations), etc. In this messianic time we can think of the meontological development of being to be fulfilled from its potential and realized to its fullest from the point where it was non-being. What characterizes Rambam's messianic vision is its rational basis. Sarachek notes, "Maimonides dropped the Messianic hallucinations which sprang from the fevered imaginations of the mystics, and in their place incorporated into his concept reasonable beliefs which answer the need of the devoted yet thoughtful Jew for national salvation and the hope of mankind for a consummate civilization Justice, peace, brotherhood, intellectual pleasure, leisure, and long life would bless the human race. The philosopher practically discarded all the supernatural and fantastic features connected with the Messianic figure and era.[8] Rambam's sober vision is encapsulated by his reference to the Talmudic comment, "the only distinction between this world and the Messianic state will be Israel's liberation from the yoke of its cruel persecutors." This is realistic political philosophy not wild Kabbalistic belief in the suspension of the laws of nature and belief in fantastic miracles in the messianic era. Thus meontology in Rambam is the manifestation of the fulfillment of non-being to develop into there being a state where Israel is safe from its enemies. Rambam the rationalist thus differs from Kabbalistic modes of developing questions in meontology.

Meontology as it relates to nothingness touches upon the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* or *yesh mi-ayin* which intrigued medieval Kabbalists. A Kabbalistic interpreta-

tion of Bereshit is that God is said to have created not out of chaos/void (tohu abuhu) but "out of the nothing." Scholem in *Kabbalah and its Symbolism* writes:

"The chaos that had been eliminated in the theology of the creation out of nothing reappeared in a new form. This nothing had always been present in God, it was not outside Him, and not called forth by Him. It is this abyss, within G-d, co-existing with His infinite fullness, that was overcome in the Creation, and the Kabbalistic doctrine of the God who dwells 'in the depths of nothingness,' current since the thirteenth century, expresses this feeling in an image which is all the more remarkable in that it developed from so abstract a concept." [9]

For the Kabbalists, nothing is taken as God's innermost mode of being. God being ayin (nothingness) created the world out of Himself. In this sense God being unrepresentable in image can be described as a circle whose center is everywhere, but whose circumference is nowhere, as Nicholas of Cusanus held. Like Spinoza's substance (ousia), it is causa sui, nothing except more of the same can generate out of it. This Kabbalistic view is opposed to the Greek notion of there always being something eternal that was always there, a dilemma whose ontological and eschatological status bids to be resolved. Commentators have noted that *keter* (crown) was that sefirot of the Kabbalistic system of pleromatic emanation that is the origin of being, the place where something comes to be out of nothing. Keter is a figure signifying zero. The mystical "O" of the Kabbalah may refer to the "Hollow Crown" of *keter*.

Ein-Sof as *ayin* or *afisah* involves the negation of a boundry/*peras/gevul/grenzen*. So, grammatically in Greek if one wants to state that "the soul of human being is immortal" one posits, "*Psuche ton anthrapos a-thanatos*." The mystical alpha negates the boundaries of mortality. Likewise it is with the mystical aleph with which the Maharal put the golem out of commission spelling met from the emet written across its forehead, a word containing the first, middle, and last letters of the twenty-two otivot. The mystical aleph in Hebrew can negate the limits of what it means to be alive while in Greek the mystical alpha negates the limits (*peras*) of death. The nothingness of which the Kabbalists speak therefore can be negated too. Essentially, this nothingness is the barrier confronting the human intellectual faculty when it reaches the limits of its capacity. Nothingness for Kabbalists can separate the world that is articulate and the world of apparent nonsense. Thus ben Zoma, when he returned from Pardes, is recorded in the

gemarah to be speaking what appears to the untrained as nonsense, but in reality it is a language encoded with Kabbalistic significance. Lieberman, in introducing Scholem before a lecture, remarked that Jewish mysticism is nonsense, but the academic study of nonsense is scholarship. Nothing may separate the realm of linguistic cogency from linguistic nonsense. Wittgenstein may gesture towards this realm in the *Tractatus* when, in his seventh proposition, he writes, “Wovon Man nicht sprechen kann, Darüber muß Man schweigen.” *Ein-Sof* which turns toward creation manifests itself as *ayin ha-gamur* (complete nothingness) or God who is called *Ein-Sof* in respect of Himself is called *Ayin* in respect of His first self-revelation. Some Kabbalists allowed no interruption in the stream of Atzilut from the first Sefirah to its consolidation in the worlds familiar to medieval cosmology. *Creatio ex nihilo* may be interpreted as creation from within God Himself. Ramban speaks of free creation of the primeval matter from which everything was made. Ramban’s use of the word *ayin* in this *Perush al sefer Iyov* 28:12 and allusions in his comments on Bereshit that the meaning of the text is the emergence of all things from the absolute nothingness of God. The commentary to Sefer Yezirah by R. Yosef Ashkenazi (attributed in the printed editions to Abraham b. David) defined the first *Sefirah* as the first effect—the leap from *Ein-Sof* to *ayin*. R. David b. Abraham ha-Lavan, in *Masoret ha-Berit* (at the end of the thirteen century), defined the *ayin* as having more being than any other being in the world, but since it is simple, and all other simple things are complex when compared with its simplicity, so in comparison it is called nothing.

In Kabbalah the term *imkei ha-ayin* (the depths of nothingness) is operative. It is said, that if all the powers returned to nothingness, the Primeval One who is the cause of all would remain in equal oneness in the depths of nothingness. Kavka does not address the concept of nothingness in Kabbalah as it relates to meontology. Kavka’s focus is on a rationalistic tradition of Jewish messianism and meontology thinkers such as Hermannn Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas, and Maimonides. This review has tried to provide some of the Rabbinic background and context of Kavka’s developments that he does not include.

In conclusion, a word can be said about the writing style of Kavka’s work. Kavka possesses a superior faculty of communication and writing style that encodes thoughts in a substantive matrix of complex ideas. Kavka’s vocabulary is highly advanced and the detailed complexity of his subtle ideas highly developed.

Kavka’s writing is not newspaperese, to say the least. It speaks with the density of thought behind it. At times, Kavka as well as displaying masterful writing skills also demonstrates a *tour de force* in captivating and creative metaphors and associations. To say that Kavka commands a superior use of English language punctuated with thoughts in Greek, French, German, and other languages is accurate. This quality of the writing makes Kavka’s writing engaging to read for the philosophically inclined. However, for many whose souls are not so philosophically turned and devoted, the style of these methods of communication can appear, through misjudgement, to be difficult to understand. In an age conditioned to “easy to understand” simplistic logic of newspaperese, the philosophically uninitiated should beware that an age conditioned to making the word “disposable” (i.e. the age of the newspaper) may have low tolerance for the substantive language of a Kavka. It was Nietzsche who deplored that once there was a reverence for the written word encouraged by the fact that during the age of faith, the medieval ages, many read the Bible each morning, while today in the age of technology some have substituted the newspaper for morning reading so that the word has become disposable. Kavka’s language is written with care and for this reason it may seem foreign to those conditioned by modern technologies’ imposition of what Paul Cantor calls “a forgotten kind of reading” (and writing).

Kavka has mapped out not only the Jewish confrontation with the *to me on*, but sketched its important in relation to the messianic redeemed future. Kavka’s thoughtful, innovative, erudite, and scholarly book will be of interest to those interested in Jewish philosophy and philosophy in general. Especially, higher level graduate students and professors will want to consult its carefully reasoned and highly substantiated ideas backed up by learned footnotes that marshal evidence for arguments and positions. Students of Cohen, Rosenzweig, Levinas, and even Maimonides will find it fascinating reading and worth the effort to tackle. Kavka demarcates a new frontier in the metaphysical history of meontology putting the tradition of Jewish meontology more clearly on the map. This is a very engaging book that should not be ignored for those interested in philosophy.

Notes

[1]. See Leo Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” *Independent Journal of Philosophy*, 3 (1979), p. 114.

[2]. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

- [3]. See Herbert A. Davidson, "The Study of Philosophy as a Religious Obligation," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed., S. D. Goitein, (Cambridge, Mass.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), pp. 53-68.
- [4]. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Teshuvah IX, 2.
- [5]. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Deot V, 12.
- [6]. Moses Maimonides, *Guide*, III, ch. 11.
- [7]. Moses Maimonides, *Pereq Helek*, trans. Arnold J. Wolf, in *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. Isadore Twersky, (West Orange N.J.: Behrman House, 1972), p. 412
- [8]. Joseph Sarachek, Joseph, *The Doctrine of The Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (New York: JTS, 1932), pp. 129-130.
- [9]. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 102.

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