



Beyond Use, within Reason: Adorno, Benjamin and the Question of Theology

David Kaufmann

New German Critique, No. 83, Special Issue on Walter Benjamin. (Spring - Summer, 2001), pp. 151-173.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0094-033X%28200121%2F22%290%3A83%3C151%3ABUWRAB%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9>

New German Critique is currently published by New German Critique.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ngc.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Beyond Use, Within Reason: Adorno, Benjamin and the Question of Theology

David Kaufmann

The theological mode of examination gains its full meaning in a turn against art that is all the more destructive for being hidden. The fundamental motif of these examinations is that the theological illumination of the works provides an authentic model with which to interpret their political aspects as much as their fashionable ones, their economic determinations as well as their metaphysical ones. One can see that this is an attitude that sets itself against that of the historical materialists with a radicalism that turns them into their opposite.

— Walter Benjamin¹

It is well known that in the early 1930's Gershom Scholem warned Walter Benjamin against the baleful influence of Brecht. Scholem argued that his friend was misrepresenting himself as a materialist when in fact his great talents lay in metaphysics, and more specifically, in a theologically inflected metaphysics of language.² Scholem did not

1. From a 1931 review of a book by Willy Haas: Walter Benjamin, "Theologische Kritik," *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 3, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980) 277; Benjamin, *Selected Writings 1927-1934*, ed. Michael Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 430.

2. Benjamin, *Briefe 2*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966) 525-29; and Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994) 373-81.

directly dispute the validity of the insights of dialectical materialism, although his own version of political and religious anarchism – that sadly forgotten tradition³ – obviously played a strong part in his objections. Rather, he was making a claim about the true bias of Benjamin’s intellect. It is therefore not surprising that Scholem should have been equally suspicious of Adorno. For a long time, he misrecognized Adorno’s aberrant Marxist tendencies as anti-theological. In an amusing letter, Adorno reported that Scholem saw him as the “dangerous arch seducer” and he recorded that in Scholem’s company he “had the odd sensation of finding [himself] identified with Brecht.”⁴

Had Benjamin not been so pathologically circumspect about his complicated and often conflicting friendships, Scholem would have known that Adorno had expressed similar reservations about the Brechtian savor of Benjamin’s materialist turn. In a letter from June 1934, Adorno concedes that his misgivings about Brecht have been the cause of his own protracted silence:

I hope I am not making myself guilty of unfair interference when I admit that the whole difficult complex of problems is connected to the figure of Brecht and to the credit that you grant him, and that it therefore also touches the principle questions of the materialist dialectic, such as the concept of use value, to which today I can grant as little importance as ever.⁵

Like Scholem, Adorno wants to recall Benjamin to what he considers to be the kernel of Benjamin’s thought, the true seed from which the *Pas-sagenwerk* should grow:

For it seems to me that, where it concerns what is most decisive and most important, for once and for all it has to be said out loud and the full categorical depth has to be reached *without* bypassing theology;

3. For a preliminary exception to this, see Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, trans. Hope Heaney (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992).

4. Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel 1928-1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994) 323. See also the remarkably inaccurate English version of this and the other letters I cite in this article in Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-40*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity, 1999) 248. (The inaccuracies are sometimes a question of proofreading, as with this letter, which is dated incorrectly.) Adorno quoted a part of this letter (leaving out a rather nasty crack about Hannah Tillich) in his “Gruss an Gershom G. Scholem Zum 70. Geburtstag,” *Gesammelte Schriften* 20, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986) 480-81.

5. Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* 73, *Complete Correspondence* 53.

for I also believe that we, on this decisive level of Marxist theory, help all the more, the less obviously we appropriate it submissively. . . .⁶

Adorno thus pits theology against the temptations of Brecht's "coarse thinking" and wants to save what is most important and decisive in Marxism with the aid of the kind of thought that Marx, like Feuerbach before him, had done so much to demystify.

As it is precisely this theological side of Adorno's writings that tends to get lost in most Marxist readings of his work (just as his Marxism gets lost when it is straitened into the pieties of "post"-liberal readings), it is of more than passing interest to try to figure out just what Benjamin, Scholem and Adorno actually meant by "theology," if indeed they all meant the same thing. In fact, as I will show, they did not; at least not exactly. Although they all make use of the categories of Jewish theology, they are not all Jewish theologians (or even necessarily Jewish).

A note about Jewish theology might be in order here. It is a commonplace (untrue, as it turns out) that Judaism has no theology. Hence Gillian Rose claims in an essay on Benjamin that "there is no Judaic theology — no *logos* of God."⁷ But, as David Novak has remarked, the predominant modes of Jewish thought in the middle ages — rationalist accounts of the relation between God and Nature and Kabbalah — were very precisely attempts to come up with the *logos* of God. The rise of modern science and the modern stress on human history have rendered these earlier attempts implausible, and so since Kant, Jewish theology has had to take other tacks.⁸ And these tacks have not always been recognizable, for, as Kaufmann Kohler argued, Jewish theology differs from its Christian counterpart. As Judaism lacks dogmatics, its theology is not the systematic exposition and defense of a creed.⁹ What is more, as Jews reject the Incarnation, post-Talmudic (and non-Kabbalistic) Judaism tends not to speculate on God's being, but concentrates on His relation to the world and on the world itself. Scholem put the point succinctly in a speech at the memorial for Franz Rosenzweig held at the Hebrew University in 1930:

6. Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* 74, *Complete Correspondence* 53-54.

7. Gillian Rose, "Walter Benjamin — Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," *Judaism and Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 175-82.

8. David Novak, "Contemporary Jewish Theology," *Problems in Contemporary Jewish Theology*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbock (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1991) 191-92.

9. Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1918) 1-6.

As for theology, the discipline . . . that deals with man's innermost and darkest needs, that seeks to bare the riddle of his concrete existence and show him the deed he must do in order to uncover the path leading from creature to Creator theology is not a science of the essence of the divinity beyond creation but consists rather of the eternal questions of love and will, wisdom and ability, judgment and mercy, justice and death, creation and redemption. Theology has concrete questions.¹⁰

Jewish theology, on this reading, will tend to stress the human when it discusses first and last things. And so Adorno and Benjamin can remain fiercely theological without discussing God directly.¹¹

With that in mind, I will begin by looking at Benjamin's seminal 1934 article on Kafka and at the sustained discussion of theology that accompanied it. This will show the points of contact and the distance between the secular theology of Adorno and Benjamin and the more properly Jewish theology of Scholem. This will also allow me to argue that Adorno uses the figure of theology to break the immanence of what he calls Idealism (which includes the thought of both Heidegger and Brecht!) in order to redirect philosophy. In short, in the place of Heidegger's "fundamental ontology," Adorno wants to establish a redemptive ontology.¹²

I

In this first section, I will discuss the way Benjamin divorces theology from revelation, while maintaining in the tantalizingly receding distance, the critical notion of redemption. I am thus following the late Gillian Rose who has characterized Benjamin's work as an account of the historical predicament of an abjected modernity. For Rose's Benjamin, ours is a time whose stress on an impoverished interiority (the result of puritanism à la Weber, Roman law à la Hegel, and capitalism a

10. Gershom Scholem, "Rosenzweig and *The Star of Redemption*," *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover: UP of New England, 1988) 26.

11. See also Adorno's letter to Scholem on 4 Mar. 1951 in "Um Benjamins Werk. Briefe an Gershom Scholem 1939-1955," *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter* V, ed. Tiedemann (Frankfurt: edition text + kritik, 1998) 165.

12. Elsewhere I have argued that the interest in the Jewish prohibition on speaking God's name (which plays a similar role in Adorno's thought to the equally Jewish *Bilder-verbote*) in Adorno's work of the 1950s and 1960s is part of his attempt to find appropriate figures for his critique of Idealist ontology. See my articles "Adorno and the Name of God," *Flashpoint* 1.1 (1996): 65-70; and "Redeeming Mimesis," *Why Literature Matters*, eds. Rüdiger Ahrens & Laurenz Volkmann (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1996) 265-80. See also my "Correlations, Constellations and the Truth: Adorno's Ontology of Redemption," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 26.5 (2000): 62-80.

la Marx) is the correlative of both the disgrace into which revelation has fallen and the loss of the horizon of meaning that redemption once provided.¹³ This reading allows us to see why for Benjamin, Kafka's work depicts the supposedly demystified modern world not as *enlightened*, but as *prehistoric*; that is, as pre-animistic. Modernity has not been cleansed of mythology, as its defenders might claim. On the contrary, it has not even achieved the state of myth. In fact, its defenders misunderstand the spans of time in which history should be measured. Unlike those who measure time in decades or centuries, Kafka thinks in terms of geological ages, of vast epochs: "The period [Zeitalter] in which Kafka lives does not signal to him any progress over the primordial beginnings."¹⁴ Kafka's characters live in a primeval epoch of undifferentiated swamp life, in what the odd nineteenth-century philosopher Bachofen called the "hetaeric" (28/130).

Kafka's modernity can therefore only be understood in analogy with the most primitive existence, before myth, before law (12/114). In this essay and in all his earlier works, such as "On Language as Such and the Language of Man" and the "Critique of Violence," Benjamin is fully antinomian in that he equates the law with myth. In the 1916 discussion of language, judgment is a mark of the fall into human speech; justice and the discriminations that attend on judgment do not partake of the divine which is more often than not figured by Benjamin as a form of redemptive violence. Given this reduction of law to the sheer superstitious alienation of myth, does our period, which is an apparently prehistoric age, mark a regression to a previous stage or a stasis that we have never recognized? Did we ever leave the hetaeric in the first place? Benjamin implies that Kafka's writing does not point to stasis, but to a kind of regression, for it still contains the hope of positive historical change. Benjamin's Kafka knows that myth and something beyond myth are somehow possible, the distant promises of future epochs. While Kafka's stories teem with figures who are locked in the

13. Rose, *Judaism and Modernity* 175-210. In this essay Rose stresses the parallel to Weber's project. For the similarity to Hegel, see her *Hegel contra Sociology* (London: Athlone, 1981) 149-220.

14. Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: Zum zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages," *Benjamin über Kafka: Texte, Briefzeugnisse, Aufzeichnungen*, ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981) 28; "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) 130. All future references to this essay will be included parenthetically in the text, with the page number of the German version cited first.

“womb of the depths,” (29/131) and the “spell of the family,” they also contain ciphers of hope – the half-formed creatures Benjamin calls “assistants” or “Helpers” (14/116): “For them and their kind, for the unfinished and the maladroit there is hope” (15/117).

In Benjamin’s discussion of Kafka, it is not so much that every age dreams the next one (a point he makes in his abstract for the *Passagenwerk*), but that every epoch redeems the previous one. This redemption manifests itself in an odd way, for it seems to entail a complete, apocalyptically destructive break. In the past, myth and law once redeemed the pre-animistic, hetaeric “*Vorwelt*” by smashing it to pieces. But this hope in the past does not lead Kafka to yearn for a new mythic world, a new law. He looks to something beyond that. His Odysseus is not the Odysseus of myth, but of fairy tale, of a myth whose mystified and mystifying powers have been vanquished (15/117). In Benjamin’s account, Kafka’s half-formed Helpers’ incompleteness indicates the possibility of a true future. Their fluidity partakes of a world not redeemed by the law, but signals an epoch on the other side of law. This epoch is as unformed as the Helpers themselves and is not fully visible to the benighted present. To the misbegotten vision of modernity, the future can only be (mis)represented as destruction, as a judgment on the guilt of the perpetually prehistoric.

The future, a real future that promises something that is truly new, can only be troped by the as-yet-unformed Helpers or the promise of judgment and the sense of guilt. I have suggested that Benjamin’s Kafka establishes a constellation between the archaic and the modern and looks at the prehistoric within the modern from the vantage point of a philosophy of history in which positive change is possible, if not directly representable. Hence he can posit a condition that seems contradictory, as Scholem was the first to point out. How can there be a pre-legal, hetaeric world that has already lost the law? How can an epoch be pre-animistic and post-mythical at the same time? Beyond the fairly obvious observation that Benjamin is using Kafka to explain (to Scholem) his own inability to embrace the *practice* of Judaism, we can easily see the tactical logic of Benjamin’s argument. Modernity, after the demystification of the world (and the attendant evacuation of value and hence of meaning)¹⁵ is as bereft as the

15. In this way, Benjamin, who studied with Rickert, is close to Weber, Rickert’s friend. For an all-too-brief account of Rickert and his place in Neo-Kantianism, see Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1978) especially 143-51. For Benjamin and Rickert, see Momme Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin: A Biography*, trans. Malcolm R. Green and Indria Ligens (New York: Verso, 1996) 38, 52.

swampy *Vorwelt*. They stand in a relation of tense analogy, not identity.

If we accept Benjamin's contention that revelation has deserted the modern world and with it has fled the horizon of redemption, Kafka's work can easily and fruitfully be read as a codex of ambiguous gestures, of gestures that are too big, too pregnant with possibility for the debilitated environment which confines them (18/120). In a similar way, Kafka's *Sinngeschichten*, his stories about meaning and interpretation, seem to explode the confines of their meager circumstances and grow in an attempt to reach the enormous spaces they indicate but cannot attain. This reading allows Benjamin to suspect that *The Trial* is nothing more than the "unfolding" of the interpretive possibilities of its most famous parable:

Kafka's parables [*Parabeln*] unfold . . . the way a bud becomes a blossom. Thus their effect resembles poetry. It does not matter that his pieces do not exactly fit the prose forms of the West and stand towards doctrine like Aggadah to Halachah. They are not analogies [*Gleichnisse*] but do not want to be taken at face value . . . But do we possess the doctrine that leads from Kafka's analogies and that will explain K's gestures and the behavior of his animals? It is not there; at most we can say that this or that alludes to it. (20/122)

Kafka's tales stand in relation to the values that give them meaning in the same way that the *aggadah* (the narrative, explanatory and exemplary aspect of the Talmud) stands towards the *halachah* (the doctrine of the actual law itself). Benjamin takes Bialik's famous argument that *aggadah* without *halachah* is ultimately meaningless and radicalizes its point by reversing it. What Kafka presents is precisely this *aggadah* that has lost the doctrine that used to ground it. In fact, according to Benjamin, Kafka would probably claim that his stories are the relics of this mourned-for doctrine. But Benjamin argues, on the contrary, that Kafka's stories are the heralds of a new one (20/122).

Benjamin quotes Kafka's late statement that he felt he was a failure because he could not transform poetry into doctrine, *aggadah* into *halachah* (27/129).¹⁶ Kafka's case should be exemplary, for we can assume that everyone who inhabits the archaic modern will be caught in the same predicament, will find him or herself lodged in the hiatus between the fading of the old doctrine and the dawning of a new one. For Benjamin, this liminal period is marked by the horrific distortions

16. It is interesting to note that Benjamin misquotes Kafka here. Kafka wanted to create a new Kabbalah, not *halachah*.

produced by forgetfulness, by both the forgetting of guilt and by the guilt of forgetfulness, that is, by forgetfulness and by forgetting that one has forgotten (30-2/131-34). “The most peculiar bastard in Kafka that the Prehistoric has conceived with Guilt,” Benjamin tells us, is Odradek, the animated spool in Kafka’s wonderful “Cares of a Family Man.” Odradek is “the form that things take in forgetfulness. They are distorted” (31/133). Forgetfulness seems to make us forget what things actually are, presents us with grotesques. Come the Messiah, such distortions will disappear (32/134).

The reference to the Messiah is not a bit of Jewish window dressing, but a necessary turn, for Benjamin’s new doctrine or *halachah* cannot be a revision of the law. His antinomianism will not allow that, for to institute the law would be a fall back into myth. In order to leapfrog over myth, this Messiah’s relation to the law has to be construed in Pauline (or, given the subterranean conversation with Scholem, Sabbatian) terms. This Savior comes to *abolish* the law.

In our era of waiting, in the breathing space between the hetaeric and the messianic, how do Kafka’s fables clear the way for that redemption, for that new doctrine? Benjamin finds a space in Kafka’s works between Guilt (figured by the alienated distortion of Odradek, by the swampy, undifferentiated promiscuity of Kafka’s women) and Hope (bodied forth by the as-yet-unformed Helpers). In the pre-messianic postponement described by Kafka’s narratives, we find in a holy attentiveness the counter to the forgetting that so marks Guilt. Kafka himself exemplified this:

If Kafka did not pray – which we do not know – still, what Malebranche calls “the natural prayer of the soul,” attentiveness, was most particularly his. And in his attentiveness he included, as do the saints in their prayers, all creation [*alle Kreatur*]. (32/134)

Study, the ever wakeful attention of Kafka’s students, marks the struggle against forgetfulness, the oblivion of sleep (33-34/136-37). But attentiveness and study seem to entail more than just keeping a watchful eye on creation, for study – which will not forget – also concentrates on the now-defunct law. In a draft review of Kafka’s posthumous *The Great Wall of China*, Benjamin argued that Kafka’s world is lawless and fearful. This fear, less an emotion than an organ, is an affective marker of its historical position between the ancient past and the

absolutely new, between primeval guilt and future expiation. In this state bereft of the law, the greatest form of distortion inheres in the fact that, for the fallen, the emancipatory by nature disguises itself as atonement – freedom appears under the sign of law, autonomy under the aegis of heteronomy. This condition obtains as long as what has been has not been made transparent, known and then dismissed (44-45). Given this line of thought, part of the job of attentiveness is to study the old law, make it transparent and thus stand in a position to dismiss it.

For this reason, the “new advocate” in Kafka’s story of the same name is exemplary. Once he was Alexander’s horse, but has now gone beyond both the violence of empire and the violence of the law. Bucephalus does not use the law [*Recht*] to enact justice [*Gerechtigkeit*] because justice and law, in spite of their etymological similarity in German, belong to different orders. As we have seen, Law cannot serve as the redemption of myth because it *is* myth in the first place. Furthermore, Bucephalus cannot help but remain true to his origins in empire, myth and law. But in this time of waiting, he enacts something that is truly new. He studies the law, but does not practice it: “The law [*Recht*] that is no longer practiced and is only studied, that is the gate of justice [*Gerechtigkeit*]” (37/139). Is Bucephalus’s study of the law an attempt to render the law transparent and thus dismissible? If so, Benjamin’s reworking of Kafka’s parable sounds like a barely coded apology for that strand of the scientific study of Judaism, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, that was represented by Moritz Steinschneider, who once said “We have only one task left: to give the remains of Judaism a decent burial.”¹⁷

While there is more than a whiff of the funereal in Benjamin’s essay, he does go on to try to imagine what that apparent oxymoron, a redeemed antinomian law would look like. For Benjamin, myth and law are of the same substance because they are both “gnostic” in that they split existence between good and bad divinities. Study, which seeks to turn existence into Scripture, life into doctrine, moves in the opposite direction, beyond the fetishes of good and evil – beyond even good and bad (37/139). Benjamin’s dream of a redeemed law would entail a code that takes the distinctions out of judgment and the judgment out of law. Benjamin claims to find such a law (*Gesetz* in this case, not *Recht* and therefore apparently of a different order) in Kafka’s lovely parable

17. Scholem, “The Science of Judaism – Then and Now,” *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York:Schocken, 1971) 307.

“Sancho Pansa.” In this brief commentary, Sancho, with the help of romances and stories of thieves, is able to divert his personal demon from its appointed object, and by turning it from himself thus renders it harmless. This demon – once it is defanged – is of course the famous Don Quixote who provides useful conversation and great amusement until his death (38/139). Good and evil disappear along with harm. The evil demon becomes the erring knight. Evil itself is replaced by redeemed or redemptive foolishness.

It should be clear here that Benjamin’s great essay on Kafka establishes its positions by using theological coordinates that go even beyond its dutiful quotations of (Chasidic) legend and Talmudic lore. It orients itself squarely between (lost) revelation and future redemption, though to be honest, it describes its terrain in terms of a vision of world history that is more geological than salvational. Its theology (with its stress on collective redemption and the messianic transformation of the world) derives from Judaism. This is the case even for Benjamin’s more heretical claims (such as the equation of law and myth).

While Benjamin’s theological physiognomy might be Jewish, it is not normatively Jewish. As my parenthetical comments about Benjamin’s relation to Judaism indicate, Benjamin’s account of the status of revelation, his complete rejection of the viability of even a metaphorically understood *halachah*, could not help but bring him into conflict with Scholem. Both Scholem and Benjamin were typical of their generation’s rejection of what they castigated as Liberal Judaism’s anemic, apologetic reduction of religion to a Kantian system of ethics. Nevertheless, even Benjamin at his most antinomian could not imagine a religion based on justice without *some* notion of law. So the law is summoned only to be dismissed. The oddity of the position of “Sancho Pansa” in Benjamin’s essay bears witness to his difficulty of trying to imagine Scripture without commandment, revelation without the law.

For Christianity, the notion of a revelation without the law is central. The advent of Christ in the Pauline tradition means precisely a revelation that abrogates the law, a revelation that frees one from the strictures of the law. For Judaism, such an abrogation must wait for the messianic age. “The New Advocate,” then, is a picture of that age, where war will no longer be practiced and the old law will be studied but no longer practiced. The *theological* danger in Benjamin’s reading of Kafka is that it foreshortens the period of exile, of *galut*, and makes it

seem as if the *halachah* were a curse, and not the road to redemption. It seems to mark history as a painful mistake. In his response to Benjamin, Scholem emphasizes that the ongoing openness of judgment and revelation are the very conditions of possibility for human history and that the apparent distance of the law is a sign of its life, not its death.¹⁸

In a letter from August 1931, Scholem suggested to Benjamin that he must stress the importance of the doctrine of law and justice in Kafka. He claims that Kafka's work looks like "the moral reflection of a halachist who attempts a *linguistic* paraphrase of a judgment of God's." Scholem continues: "Here for once the world is brought to a language in which redemption cannot be anticipated" (64-65). Two points should be already apparent from this. God's judgment does not take place in language – hence the need for paraphrase into language. Notice that Scholem does not call this act a translation. Moreover, this language of paraphrase is one which does not serve as an index of necessary redemption. Judgment is the Lord's and it is not a foregone conclusion. I assume that Scholem here is jealous to preserve God's freedom and the true justice of His judgments. We can thus see a very important difference between him and Benjamin and (ultimately) Adorno. For Scholem, redemption is a *historical* possibility and God's judgment is a moment of true choice, a sign that the future is open and that the moral universe is not mechanistically bound by law. For Benjamin and Adorno, as we shall see, redemption is a question of *logic*, an *apriori* derived from the Kantian and neo-Kantian *apriori* of God Himself. For them, redemption is a necessary postulate for a form of reason that seeks to calculate the level of distortion of the fallen world. For them, Odradek is the form that things take under the historical condition of forgetting – redemption is the logical condition that will show things in their true form. If Scholem wants to keep the horizon of redemption open, this is in part because he argues for the continuous openness of revelation. This becomes clearest in his "Open Letter to the Author of *Jewish Belief in Our Time*," a 1932 article in response to Schoeps's rather controversial, Protestantizing polemic for a "Biblical" Judaism. Benjamin was quite taken with Scholem's piece (he mentions it in several letters at this time) and Scholem thought well enough of it to

18. Noteworthy here as well is Rosenzweig's 1923 response to Buber: "The way to the teaching leads through what is "knowable" . . . But the teaching itself is not knowable. It is always something that is in the future . . ." Franz Rosenzweig, "The Builders," *On Jewish Learning*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1955) 76.

incorporate parts of it an essay almost thirty years later.¹⁹

Scholem rejects Schoeps's attempt to bypass the tradition (best exemplified by the Talmud and the Kabbalah). He argues that to go back immediately to the Bible is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of Jewish revelation:

Revelation, and this old deep truth is given short shrift in your writing . . . Revelation with all its uniqueness is still a *medium*. It is the meaningful as an absolute, as meaning-giving but meaningless in itself, that articulates itself in relationship to time, in Tradition. The word of God in its absolute symbolic fullness would be destructive if it could also be meaningful in an immediate (undialectical) way. Nothing . . . requires concretization when applied to historical time more than . . . the word of revelation. Indeed, [the word of revelation] whose absoluteness causes its endless reflections in the contingencies of fulfillment cannot be fulfilled. The voice that we perceive, is the medium in which we live, and where it is absent, it is hollow . . .²⁰

Scholem's recovery of the aura of revelation here depends on the notion that God's word was never immediately present, especially not at Sinai. Rather, the absoluteness of God – a central tenet of a rabbinic Judaism that sought to differentiate itself from the immanence of paganism and the unity of substance implicit in pantheism – is rendered forth in the absoluteness of the Word. This, in turn, can only be articulated through paraphrase and approximate (at best asymptotic) mediations. What is absolute can be approached but never achieved, except in panlogist fantasies. Put differently: the Word is not fully lost because it was never fully there. No, its self-enclosure requires commentary, discussion, questioning. The Word requires concretization in human language but that concretization is an ongoing process that does not allow for completion. In Scholem's conception, the abstraction inherent in the absoluteness of revelation is the condition of possibility of meaning, of action and interpretation, and, ultimately, of Jewish history itself.

This understanding of Revelation takes the pathos out of Benjamin's vision of an abjected modernity because it shows that vision to be based on an undialectical notion of revelation. Scholem makes this clear in a letter from July 1934:

19. See his "Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism," *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* 282-303.

20. Scholem, "Offener Brief an den Verfasser der Schrift *Jüdischer Glaube in dieser Zeit*," *Bayerische Israelitische Gemeindezeitung* 8.16 (1932): 243.

Kafka's world is the world of revelation, but of revelation seen of course from that perspective in which it is returned to its own nothingness . . . The *nonfulfillability* of what has been revealed is the point where a *correctly* understood theology . . . coincides most perfectly with that which offers the key to Kafka's work. Its problem is not, dear Walter, its *absence* in a preanimistic world, but the fact that it cannot be *fulfilled* . . . Those pupils of whom you speak at the end are not so much those that have lost the Scripture . . . but rather those students who cannot decipher it.²¹

In other words, what Benjamin takes to be the historical disgrace of revelation is nothing of the sort, but the very source of revelation's continuous relevance, its endless productivity. The crux here is that God and His Word appear in the Kabbalistic guise of the Nothing. Benjamin sees this Nothing as nothing, as an absence. But Scholem, perhaps a closer reader of Rosenzweig, does not:

You ask what I understand by "the nothingness of revelation." I understand by it a state in which revelation appears to be without meaning, in which it still asserts itself, in which it has *validity*, but no *meaning*. In which the wealth of meaning is lost and what is appearing, as if reduced to a zero point of its own content, still does not disappear (for revelation is something that is appearing) – that is where its nothingness comes forward.²²

For Scholem, Kafka's work is exemplary in that it shows revelation as it is, reduced to perhaps its purest form as form, as the ground on which meaning is constructed but which does not have meaning itself. In this letter, Scholem claims that Benjamin's inability to understand this notion of revelation is the greatest error of his approach to Kafka.

In Scholem's account of Kafka, then, it is not that revelation has lost its aura, but that this sense of loss, the undeniable impossibility of fulfillment, is precisely what constitutes revelation's aura in the first place. In many ways, Scholem's critique is similar to the critique that Adorno will level at Benjamin's exposé of the *Passagenwerk*, when he argues that Benjamin has made a fundamental error in ascribing reification to bourgeois consciousness, when in fact the Lukácsian point is

21. Scholem, ed., *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932-1940*, trans. Gary Smith & Andre Lefevere (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992) 126-27.

22. Scholem, ed., *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932-1940* 142. Translation modified. See *Benjamin über Kafka* 82.

that consciousness is actually *produced* by reification.²³ In both cases, his correspondents argue that Benjamin has argued undialectically and mistaken cause for effect.

In the case of the Kafka essay, however, Adorno does not agree with Scholem. He subscribes wholeheartedly to Benjamin's vision of historical abjection, to the full force of the secularization hypothesis that Scholem rejected. In later years, Adorno went as far as to claim that Scholem's own work assumed secularization while denying it:

It appears the profoundest irony that the conception of mysticism that he urges presents itself in historical-philosophical terms as precisely that immigration into the profane that he had held to be so pernicious in us.²⁴

But, as I shall show, for Adorno the flight into the profane promised more hope than Benjamin's Kafka essay indicates. Whereas Benjamin expresses a loosely dialectical philosophy of history, where hope resides in the destructive interstices *between* epochs, Adorno claims a dialectical possibility of redemption in *all* figures *within* an epoch. Adorno's chief criticism of Benjamin is always that he does not read dialectically enough. In an odd way, he sees Benjamin as too pessimistic, as misreading the ciphers of Kafka's work. Adorno's response to Benjamin's essay in the letter of December 17, 1934 is wonderfully rich because it lays out in a very specific context his sense of theology, of dialectical materialism and of the sheer scope of redemption.

Adorno starts by seconding Benjamin's approach and insights:

Do not take it as immodest if I begin by saying that our agreement on the philosophical central points has never yet come so perfectly to mind as here . . . It also touches at the same time in a very principle sense the place of "Theology."²⁵

He goes on to call it "inverse theology." He is careful to distinguish it from Schoeps's "dialectical theology." Rather, he sees it lying close to the notion of Scripture that he finds in Benjamin's essay. Adorno concurs with Benjamin that Kafka could be best understood, not as a relic of a lost revelation but as a prolegomenon to a future Scripture, a future metaphysics. But Adorno adds a little twist here. He slips in the notion

23. Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* 139; *Complete Correspondence* 105

24. Adorno, "Gruss an Gershom G. Scholem" 481.

25. Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* 90; *Complete Correspondence* 66.

that Kafka would be best interpreted socially – that is, I take it, sociologically – and it is here that he claims to see the *Chiffernwesen*, the coded nature of their theology.²⁶ Adorno is writing quickly and passionately here, but also cannily, because he is looking towards the *Passagenwerk* and presumably working against Brecht. He wants to insist that the theology be read sociologically – and that the profane should be read sacredly.

What is at stake becomes clear when Adorno launches into his most telling criticism of the Kafka essay. He notices that Benjamin interprets all the anecdotes, images and stories that he interpolates in his discussion except for one: the childhood picture of Kafka that stands as an epigraph to the second section of the essay:

It is not by chance that of the interpreted anecdotes one – namely Kafka's childhood photograph – remains without an interpretation. Such an interpretation would however be equivalent to the neutralization of the epoch in a lightning flash. That means all possible disharmonies *in concreto* – symptoms of archaic self-consciousness, of the incompleteness of the mythic dialectic even here.²⁷

If Benjamin actually interpreted the photograph he would be forced to step beyond the postponement, the hiatus between historical ages that traps Odradek in its distorted and alienated existence. To put it another way, the Helpers are not the only ones who partake of redemption. Odradek also deserves a place in the new dispensation:

For it is archaic to let him spring forth from “Prehistory and Guilt” and not to reread him as just that prolegomenon that you see through so penetratingly in the problem of Scripture. If he has his place with the family man, is he not that man's care and danger, isn't the sublation of creaturely relations of guilt prefigured in him? Isn't care – truly Heidegger put back on his feet – the cipher, indeed the most certain promise of hope . . . Certainly Odradek, the obverse side of the object world, is the mark of distortion – but as such also a motif of transcendence, namely the elimination of boundaries and the reconciliation of the organic and the inorganic, or the sublation of death: Odradek does “survive.” To put it differently, escape from the relations of nature is promised even to that life which is trafficked as if it were a thing.²⁸

26. Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* 90-91; *Complete Correspondence* 66-67.

27. Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* 93.; *Complete Correspondence* 68. Walker's translation speaks of “Kafka's photographs of children” where the German clearly refers to that part of Benjamin's article that describes the shot of Kafka as a child.

28. Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* 92-93; *Complete Correspondence* 68-69.

Adorno accuses Benjamin of falling short of the attentiveness of Kafka himself, of a kind of archaic cruelty. Benjamin, whose seminal essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* ends with the claim that hope is only given for the most hopeless, is unwilling to grant hope even to Odradek.

It is important to note that Adorno implies – and not that subtly, either – that Benjamin has fallen precisely into the philosophy of history that he himself would come to criticize in his last work, the “Theses on the Concept of History.” In this view, redemption comes only to those lucky enough to be born at the right time, at the end of history. To counter this verdict, Adorno wants to read the disgrace of revelation sociologically and historically. The distortion of the object world has a very precise historical determination. It is called reification, and describes the tendency to abstract human life-processes into a series of unconnected objects. It is, in the classic Lukácsian version of the theory, to mistake living process for dead thing, and human history for an alien fate. It refers to a misrecognition imposed by history, a reversal that can be reversed within history.

Benjamin reminds us that the care of the family man which gives the title to the story is famously unspecified. The only thing that seems to bother the father of the house (although *Hausvater* can also be rendered as warden) is that the Odradek has no purpose. Having no purpose to wear it out, Odradek can live forever. It can survive. Does the *Hausvater* envy Odradek's immortality? Does he resent its lack of usefulness, its odd capacity to move and to speak while remaining what appears to be a worthless spool? Adorno's crack about Heidegger will help us to see in what way Odradek figures forth both creaturely relations of guilt and their overcoming. Let us understand Heideggerian care as determined by one's recognition that s/he is already in a world, is already involved with the projection into the future of his/her “ownmost potentialities-of-being,” and is concerned with/alongside the world.²⁹ If care signals the authentic recognition of one's finitude and one's embeddedness while marking the world in terms of one's project, then there is a sense in which the father of the house exhibits care as pure *ressentiment*: Odradek is useless and serves only as an unpleasant reminder of mortality. Is it not also possible that even Heideggerian authenticity, with its constant reference to Dasein's own situation, is

29. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY P, 1996) 178-80.

subtly narcissistic, and ultimately distorting? To put it slightly differently, if “Reality is referred back to the phenomenon of care,” then reality, understood ontologically (not as mere existence but as Being understood) is referred back to Dasein’s self-awareness; it is in this awareness that Being can first be understood and that the essence of objects can be disclosed.³⁰ Understanding is thus always understanding in relation to Dasein. Care grants meaning, not existence.

But what if care did not refer meaning back to the father of the house but branched outwards towards Odradek? On the risk of making Adorno cleave too closely to Levinas, let me push this line of thinking to make a point. What if care did not stem from the project of the finite existence but began with the (apparent) infinity of the other? It is not clear what exactly Adorno’s dream of the “elimination of the boundaries and the reconciliation between the organic and inorganic” actually entails and how it could lead to the sublation of death. But if we remember that Adorno has the problem of reification in mind, we can say that the boundaries between the organic and inorganic are conceptual, are distortions born of commodity exchange in a modern market. To put differently, we can say that these conceptual categories are not derived from an immutable natural necessity, but rather have come to appear to be natural, have over time congealed into the dead “second nature” of social convention. We should therefore not assume that Adorno means that reconciliation entails an oddly mythic suspension of mortality, but rather that the “meaning” of the categories of the organic and inorganic, animate and inanimate, living and dead can change, once they have taken their bearings from somewhere other than the reified and reifying bourgeois subject.

If my interpretation is accurate, it will go a long way towards explaining a footnote that Adorno himself appended to a passage that I have already quoted:

To put it differently, escape from the relations of nature is promised even to that life which is trafficked as if it were a thing.

The footnote reads:

here is the deepest reason as well for my opposition to the immediate connection to “use value” in other circumstances!

30. Heidegger 195-96.

Reified life is promised liberation from “natural relations.” Now, to reified life, being trafficked as a thing seems natural, just as it seems “natural” that we are the proud possessors of our own labor and can exchange it as we please. It is precisely this misrecognition of abstract convention as a law of nature that Marx attempted to demystify in *Capital*. In fact, in the great chapter on commodity fetishism, Marx reveals what he takes to be the fatal metalepsis of bourgeois economics: the mistaking of the commodity for a natural entity that determines the laws of the market. But the commodity form, Marx argues, is derivative – it is itself an effect, not a cause. In order to achieve his dialectical demystification of the worship of the false idol of the commodity, he sets up an opposition between the specious naturalness of exchange value and use value. Adorno’s defense of Odradek thus poses the question about how natural “use value” actually is. Is the concept of use value itself not a product of reification, in that it first posits things, then their value in terms of human need? To this line of reasoning, Marxian use value and Heideggerian care become equally suspect because they both subordinate the object world to human mastery, consumption or the imposition of meaning. And under the sign of reification, the human world is misconstrued as an object world, and so is liable to the same forms of domination. The distortion that besets Odradek besets us all.

But for Adorno, there is hope even in that. Odradek, Kafka’s narrator tells us, has no purpose, has neither *telos* nor use. What does this mean other than that Odradek has no value, that it has been freed from distorted and distorting models of value? In Adorno’s reading, worthlessness in a world governed by exchange is a promise of the possibility of another world, one better than even the ideal Kant dreamed of – a kingdom (or is it empire?) of ends, in which dignity is extended, as in the prayers of the saints, not only to people, but to all creation.

II

To recap then: Adorno invokes theology, meant here as a constant reference to redemption (and not necessarily as a relation to revelation) to maintain an emancipatory promise as well as an access to the world of objects without falling into the temptation of reducing all people and all things to a calculus based on use or consumption. This “inverse theology” does not take the human as the source of meaning, nor does it take the divine as its end. The flight of the sacred into the profane

seems to involve a hovering between “natural” and “supernatural” interpretations, between the twin perils of uncritical piety and materialist reduction. Adorno’s criticism is aimed at all thought based on scarcity (economics) or finitude (Heideggerian phenomenology). And there is a sense that his writing, both early and late, gets its charge from a deep impatience and a clear disappointment. But there is a danger here of dismissing Adorno’s work as immature and hopelessly utopian, and thus missing its real target. Why would Adorno want to maintain that Marx and Heidegger suffer from the same philosophical limitations? How could they possibly be construed in this way?

In the first pages of his early lecture “The Idea of Natural History,” Adorno carefully undoes post-Husserlian philosophy. He argues that while the initial intention of phenomenology is the “overcoming of the subjective standpoint” and the arrival at a “principally different region of Being, . . . a transjective, an *ontic* region of Being,”³¹ it is basically flawed:

It is now the fundamental paradox of all ontological questioning in contemporary philosophy, that the means with which it tries to win its way to transjective Being is none other than the same subjective ratio that the structure of Idealism had brought into being.³²

If Adorno is correct in his claim that phenomenology, like Idealism, starts with the positing subject, it should come as no surprise that it falls into tautology. One can see this especially in Adorno’s account of Heidegger’s discussion of historicity:

. . . a Being, that is historical, is brought under a subjective category, historicity. This historical Being which is understood under the category of historicity is supposed to be identical with History itself. It [historical Being] is supposed to fall into line with the determinations that are impressed on it by Historicity. The tautology seems to me to be less a self-discovery of the mythical depths of language than new camouflage for the old classical thesis of the identity of subject and object.³³

History and historicity can be conflated only because the subjective principle holds sway: historicity (subjective) and History (supposedly non-subjective) become identical because in this reworking, they both start from the same place. Adorno argues that the category of history within

31. Adorno, “Die Idee der Naturgeschichte,” *Gesammelte Schriften* 1:346-47.

32. Adorno, “Die Idee der Naturgeschichte” 347.

33. Adorno, “Die Idee der Naturgeschichte” 353.

phenomenology will only gain its dignity when it stops searching out the possibilities of Being (and the potentialities of Dasein) and instead looks to “the essent as such in its concrete determination within history.”³⁴

Adorno puts the matter more succinctly in the critique of Kierkegaard in his first published book. The names of the accused are different but the charge is essentially the same:

[Kierkegaard’s philosophy] contests the identity of thought and being, but without searching for being in any other realm than that of thought.³⁵

Kierkegaard wants to grapple his way back to the object world, but he cannot escape from the limits of Idealist interiority. In a similar way, he tries to redeem contingency, freedom, and the particular from Kantian abstraction and the great chuffing engine of Hegelian panlogism, but ends up erecting a system that gives up “philosophy’s central claim to truth – the interpretation of reality.”³⁶

Thus, Adorno’s Kierkegaard falls prey to the very tendencies he tried to combat and loses the object world he had wanted to gain. Kierkegaard’s failure is perhaps more instructive than Heidegger’s if only because he struggles harder to overcome the “enchantment of hopeless immanence”³⁷ of a world whose intelligibility is ultimately posited by the subject. According to this line of argument, Heidegger’s definition of “world” gives up the world too quickly.

Given all this, it is perhaps not surprising to find Adorno criticizing Marx, in an aside in the book on Kierkegaard, for *his* fall into Idealism through a reductive commitment to what we would now call “totalization.” Adorno’s complaint is that Marx’s system can no more contain the phenomena it seeks to explain than Hegel’s, and for the same reason. It tries to reduce the world to a single substance, and thus sacrifices the negation, the alterity that drives the dialectic from the get-go. In short, it would seem that Adorno is using the dialectic to fight that most seductive of Jewish heresies, Spinozism.

In “The Idea of Natural History,” Adorno describes the mythic conception of nature as “what human history bears as fatefully obedient, foreordained Being, what appears in history, what acts as substance in

34. Adorno, “Die Idee der Naturgeschichte” 354.

35. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989) 86.

36. Adorno, *Kierkegaard* 74, 93-97.

37. Adorno, *Kierkegaard* 83.

history.” What stands opposed to such a conception is “the appearance of the qualitatively New . . . that does not play itself out in pure Identity, pure reproduction of what was always and already there, but happens in the New.”³⁸ Whether one reduces the substance of the world to Subject or Value, the result is still mythic: the misrecognition of the historical as inevitable and the reduction of all otherness – here seen temporally as freedom – to mere fate.

How things have developed in the world of men and women is not necessarily how they are or have to be. Adorno follows Kierkegaard’s attack on Hegel’s preemptive totalities. Kierkegaard suggests that people who fall into this confusion are led to a view of history that borrows from and does not advance upon necromancy:

To want to predict the future (prophesy) and to want to understand the necessity of the past are altogether identical, and only the prevailing fashion makes the one seem more plausible than the other to a prevailing generation.³⁹

Kierkegaard’s attack on the mythic belief in historical law is not very different from the attack on commodity fetishism or “second nature” as dead convention. In each case, the post-Hegelian thought is trying to awaken freedom – both as contingency and as alterity – from the spell that immanence casts over thought.⁴⁰ Each one wants to demystify *amor fati* as a form of idolatry.

“Theology” as Adorno construes it – the dialectical overcoming of a mythic sense of subjection to alien (and in truth merely alienated) powers – takes the place that reason was supposed to fill in the thought of enlightenment writers. It reveals the falseness of superstition and helps deliver fate into freedom. But it goes further than subject-centered reason because it does not merely emancipate humans. By maintaining a horizon of redemption for all creation, by a studious attentiveness to *Kreatur*, “theology” breaks with the immanence of the positing subject. It releases the object world from its dependency on the human for meaning. Thus, a redemptive ontology is the only possible form ontology can take in modernity. It is also the only path to a real emancipation.

38. Adorno, “Die Idee der Naturgeschichte” 346.

39. Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hon and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985) 77.

40. Steven Schwarzschild, “Adorno and Schoenberg as Jews,” *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 35 (1990): 460.

III

In a letter of 1951, Adorno disagreed with Scholem's claim that Benjamin's theology was "existential or substantial." He wrote that Benjamin's thought here, as elsewhere, maintained a "critical intention:"

In the tension between its ambiguous-mythical natural being [*Naturwesen*] and the mythical Self – what he earlier would have called the NAME – everything that one calls "ego," "person," "subject," "individual" radically dissolves in this philosophy, and here actually is the negative moment in the work of the concept in Benjamin.⁴¹

According to this view, theology in Benjamin breaks the hold of subject-centered reason and the horrors of human history by suspending the world between two myths – between the natural and the supernatural. To read Benjamin this way is to read him in terms of the study of the *Trauerspiel* or in terms of the great essay on Kafka that we have discussed above. It is to understand that Benjamin's writings fall under the shadow of an apocalypse and a subsequent redemption. This redemption cannot be figured (but should be – hence Adorno's brief on behalf of Odradek) apart from the destruction that precedes it. Or perhaps it can. In his last work, the theses on the philosophy of history, Benjamin posits the weak messianism of a generation – any generation – that suspends the horrific train of "progress" by redeeming (and therefore fulfilling) the hopes of the past. Thus, the hopes and desires of the downtrodden serve as incomplete figures of redemption. Adorno too pursues a similar "inverse theology."⁴² For him, theology means breaking through the limitations of a naturalism or a materialism based on scarcity or hunger or the sheer will to survive. As such, his vision of redemption is more radical even than Benjamin's and hence more rigorously beyond figuration, but in a different way. As the last aphorism in *Minima Moralia* shows even more clearly than the last section of the *Negative Dialectics*, redemption for Adorno is not (necessarily) to be hoped for, but it is (necessarily) to be thought through. That is to say, for Adorno, it is a regulative concept. It is the unacknowledged legislator for any (correct) account of the world.

41. Adorno, "Um Benjamins Werk. Briefe an Gershom Scholem 1939-1955," *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter* 5:165.

42. Adorno only accepted the description of "negative theology" in an esoteric sense, that is, in that he objected having his terms translated directly into theological categories. See his letter to Scholem of April 13, 1952. Adorno, "Um Benjamins Werk" 167.

Adorno's agnosticism about the actuality of redemption shows him, like Benjamin, to be the inheritor of the logic of nineteenth-century liberal Judaism, even though Adorno was baptized and raised a Christian. Steven Schwarzschild has argued that the Liberal Jews of the nineteenth century substituted the more acceptable dream of a messianic age – the product of progress in science and ethics – for the unacceptably nationalistic and miraculous notion of a personal messiah. According to Schwarzschild, they thereby rendered the principles of messianism and redemption untenable.⁴³ In this light, the self-confessed weakness of Benjamin's "weak messianism" marks an attempt, though ambiguous – to overcome the frailty of the Liberal position by trying to locate in the distance a messianic agent. And in this light, Adorno's reduction of redemption to a logical category is a rigorous working-through of the Liberal position, even though it is a tough one to hold.

In the end, we should read Adorno and Benjamin in terms of this "theology." Such terms might mitigate their Marxism (although not their critiques of capitalism) as well as their putative postmodernism. Those familiar attempts to map them onto more comfortable terrain, though, are apologetic and might miss the scandal of Benjamin and Adorno's relevance to us. For their radicalism can be called a kind of Marxism in the *galut*, or, in more secular terms, of anti-capitalist hope in exile.

43. Schwarzschild, "The Personal Messiah – Toward a Reconstruction of a Discarded Concept," *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, ed. Menachem Kellner (Albany: SUNY P, 1990) 15-28.