

Der Begriff des Judentums in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie

herausgegeben von
Amit Kravitz und Jörg Noller

Mohr Siebeck

Digitaler Sonderdruck des Autors mit Genehmigung des Verlags.

Amit Kravitz, geboren 1978; Studium der Philosophie und Geschichte an der Hebräischen Universität Jerusalem; 2013 Promotion; derzeit forscht und lehrt er an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

Jörg Noller, geboren 1984; Studium der Philosophie, neueren deutschen Literatur, neueren und neuesten Geschichte und der Ev. Theologie in Tübingen und München; 2014 Promotion; derzeit arbeitet er an seiner Habilitationsschrift über personale Lebensformen.

Gedruckt mit freundlicher Unterstützung der Geschwister Boehringer Ingelheim Stiftung für Geisteswissenschaften in Ingelheim am Rhein.

ISBN 978-3-16-155419-3 / eISBN 978-3-16-155420-9

DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-155420-9

ISSN 1616-346X / eISSN 2568-7425 (Religion in Philosophy and Theology)

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

© 2018 Mohr Siebeck Tübingen. www.mohrsiebeck.com

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlags unzulässig und strafbar. Das gilt insbesondere für die Verbreitung, Vervielfältigung, Übersetzung und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

Das Buch wurde von Laupp und Göbel in Gomaringen aus der Minion Pro gesetzt, auf alterungsbeständiges Werkdruckpapier gedruckt und von der Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren gebunden.

Printed in Germany.

Digitaler Sonderdruck des Autors mit Genehmigung des Verlags.

Inhaltsverzeichnis

<i>Amit Kravitz/Jörg Noller</i> Einleitung	1
<i>Micha Brumlik</i> Gottesbezug als Heteronomie? Das Judentum als Herausforderung des deutschen Idealismus	11
<i>Amit Kravitz</i> Innerhalb der Zeit, außerhalb der Geschichte. Zu Kants Auseinandersetzung mit dem Judentum in der <i>Religionsschrift</i>	25
<i>Walter Jaeschke</i> Vom Atheismus der Vernunft zum Theismus der Vernunft. Jacobis Begegnungen mit jüdischen Denkern und jüdischem Denken ..	43
<i>Jörg Noller</i> Mysterien der Aufklärung. Zur politisch-philosophischen Bedeutung des Judentums bei Karl Leonhard Reinhold und Friedrich Schiller	59
<i>Yitzhak Y. Melamed</i> Spinozism, Acosmism, and Hassidism: A Closed Circle	75
<i>Günter Zöller</i> <i>Imperium in imperio</i> . Fichte's Juridico-Political Critique of Judaism in Its Historico-Systematic Context	87
<i>Christian Danz</i> „Ihre Wahrheit hat die alttestamentliche Religion nur in der Zukunft“. Schellings religionsgeschichtliche Deutung des Judentums	101
<i>Myriam Bienenstock</i> Hegel über das jüdische Volk: „eine bewunderungswürdige Festigkeit [...] ein Fanatismus der Hartnäckigkeit“	117

Andreas Arndt

Gemeinschaft und Gesinnung. Schleiermachers rechtliche und
politische Ausgrenzung des Judentums 135

Paul Franks

Struktureller Antisemitismus oder kabbalistisches Erbe?
Das Verhältnis des deutschen Idealismus zum Judentum 147

Verzeichnis der Autorinnen und Autoren 177

Personenregister 179

Spinozism, Acosmism, and Hassidism: A Closed Circle

Yitzhak Y. Melamed

“Das von ihnen gelehrt Prinzip der Selbstvernichtung ist, wohl verstanden, nichts anders als die Grundlage zur Selbsttätigkeit.”¹

“Solange der Mensch noch irgend etwas selbst zu sein begehrt, kommt Gott nicht zu ihm, denn kein Mensch kann Gott werden.”²

Introduction

An early Hassidic tale recounts the story of Rabbi Shmelke Horowitz of Nikolsburg (1726–1778), one of the closest disciples of the Great Maggid (1710?–1772), a founder of the Hassidic movement. R. Shmelke was determined to bring the new teachings of Hassidism to his Jewish brethren in Western Europe, and thus embarked on a trip to Germany. At the German border, he noticed the Angel of Death, who ordered him to halt. “This is not your place,” announced the Angel. R. Shmelke hesitated, but decided to continue his trip as planned. Upon passing the Angel, R. Shmelke heard a voice: “I repeat: this is not your land!” Disregarding the Angel’s admonition, R. Shmelke stuck to his scheduled course. “I am warning you,” the Angel persisted. “If you begin propagating your teachings in this land, I will personally make sure that *all* the Jews of the land become Hassidim.” At this, R. Shmelke stopped. Realizing that the mass conversion of German Jews to Hassidism would radically alter the nature of the movement, he decided to return home.³

¹ Maimon (1984), 239. An early version of the paper was presented at a conference on the Concept of Judaism in Classical German Philosophy in Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München (December 2015), and at the Buber Society of Fellows – The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (January 2016). I am indebted to the participants at both events for their critical comments. I would also like to thank José María Sánchez de León and Zach Gartenberg for their most helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Conversations with my friends and teachers, Jonathan Garb, Warren Zev Harvey, and Avraham Abish Shorr helped develop some of the ideas presented in this paper. Finally, I am indebted to Ada Rapoport-Albert for an inspiring seminar on the Maggid’s Circle we jointly taught in Spring 2015.

² Fichte (1910), 128.

³ I have first heard this tale from my friend and teacher, Rabbi Abish Shorr. A recent Hassidic collection of Hassidic tales replaces the protagonist, R. Shmelke of Nikolsburg, by two

Hassidism hardly took root in Germany or anywhere else in Western Europe until the late twentieth century.⁴ Still, the main ideas of Hassidism were presented lucidly to the German public – both Jewish and Gentile – already in 1792, through Salomon Maimon's *Lebensgeschichte*. Maimon dedicates a chapter and a half of his autobiography to the description and analysis of the new Hassidic movement.⁵ The report of his visit to the court of R. Dov Ber of Mezerich, the prominent leader of the emerging movement at the time, is probably the most important external testimony we have about the emergence of Hassidism. Maimon's closeness to the events and his first-hand encounter with central figures of the movement make his testimony highly valuable; at the same time, this very closeness precluded Maimon's capturing the wider historical significance of the events he witnessed.

True to the ideals of his philosophical heroes, Maimonides and Spinoza, Maimon considered knowledge to be man's *summum bonum*.⁶ Yet, through a historical irony, Maimon was hardly aware of his role in the formation of two almost contemporaneous movements: Hassidism, on the one hand, and German Idealism, on the other. The two intellectual movements were worlds apart, and if not for Maimon's participation in both, we would probably say that they had nothing in common. But Maimon's co-presence in both movements yielded a crucial commonality: the notion of *acosmism*. That all particularity was truly a manifestation of the infinity of God – and thus the distinct *reality* of particularity an illusion – was one of the most striking teachings of Hassidism. As I will soon show, Maimon was already fascinated by this teaching when he visited the court of the Maggid around 1770. Twenty years later, he would coin the term 'acosmism' to describe the philosophy of Spinoza.⁷ The young Hegel, who was an avid reader

other prominent disciples of the Maggid, R. Zusia of Aniapoli, and R. Elimelech of Litzhensk. See Gerlitz (2007), 153–155. I am indebted to Elly Moseson for drawing my attention to this source.

⁴ Cf. Dubnow (1931), I 137. Nikolburg, a Moravian town less than 60 miles north of Vienna, was probably the most westward outreach of Hassidism in the late eighteenth century. R. Shmelke's brother, R. Pinchas Horowitz (1731–1805), also visited the court of the Maggid of Mezrich and later became the chief Rabbi of Frankfurt a.M. Privately, Pinchas Horowitz adhered to several practices that were typical of the Hassidim (but also of earlier pietistic sects). The nature and degree of his affiliation with the new Hassidic movement are still unclear.

⁵ See Chapter Eighteen and the end of the Nineteenth Chapter of the original 1792/3 edition. In Batscha's recent edition, Chapter Nineteen appears as Appendix Two at the end of the book.

⁶ See Maimon (1965), 1, and (2010), 5. On the shared radicalism of Maimonides, Spinoza, and Maimon, see Melamed (2014).

⁷ "Es ist unbegreiflich, wie man das spinozistische System zum atheistischen machen konnte, da sie doch einander gerade entgegengesetzt sind. In diesem wird das Dasein Gottes, in jenem aber das Dasein der Welt geleugnet. Es müsste also eher das akosmische System heißen." (Maimon [1984], 217). For a discussion of this passage, see Melamed (2004), 78–9, and (2010), 78–80.

of K. P. Moritz's *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*,⁸ where various chapters of Maimon's *Lebensgeschichte* first appeared, would adopt from Maimon the view of Spinozism as a system diametrically opposed to atheism, or as a philosophy of "acosmism," the view that only God, but not the world of finite things, truly exists.⁹

In the first part of this paper I will study Maimon's description of the emerging Hassidic movement. For the most part, Maimon's observations are typically penetrating and precise. Indeed, recent scholarly research on the teachings of the Maggid has been very successful in documenting various teachings quoted by Maimon in the writings of the Maggid and his immediate disciples.¹⁰ But even Maimon's errors – such as his announcement (in 1792) that the opposition to Hassidism by the old Rabbinic establishment was able to eradicate the movement – are highly informative and significant. Our study of Maimon's testimony will focus mostly on his reconstruction of the Hassidic teaching of the annihilation of the 'I' and its complete submersion in the infinity of God. In the second part of my paper, I will focus on Maimon's critique of Hassidism and his claim that while the doctrine of self-submersion in God is essentially right, the Hassidic masters and their disciples failed to pursue their deep insight in the proper manner due to their lack of knowledge of nature and philosophy. I will then point out the commonalities Maimon alludes to between the early teachings of Hassidism and the philosophy of Spinoza.

⁸ I am indebted to Rolf-Peter Horstmann for this helpful observation. Hegel also had a copy of Maimon's *Lebensgeschichte* in his personal library. In his editorial preface to *Benedicti de Spinoza Adnotationes ad Tractatum Theologico Politicum* (cf. de Murr [1802]), Christophorus Theophilus (Gottlieb) de Murr quotes Maimon's characterization of Spinozism as acosmism, as well as Maimon's view of Leibnizianism as a middle position between Spinozism and atheism. It is possible that Hegel came across Murr's preface while he was assisting H. E. G. Paulus in the preparation of the new edition of Spinoza's *Opera* (Jena: 1802–3).

⁹ "The world is determined in the Spinozist system as a mere phenomenon without genuine reality, so that this system must rather be seen as acosmism." Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, § 50 (cf. Hegel [1981]). The claim also appears in Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy and on the philosophy of religion. For a close comparison between Maimon's and Hegel's claims, see Melamed (2004), 94–5. The view of Spinoza as denying the reality of the world rather than that of God appears already in Platner (1776): "Spinoza leugnet eigentlich nicht die Existenz der Gottheit, sondern die Existenz der Welt" (353). Platner does not use, however, the term 'acosmism.' I am indebted to José María Sánchez de León for drawing my attention to this passage. For a helpful discussion of the passage, see Turro (2015), 160–1.

¹⁰ See Weiss (1947) as well as (1956), and more recently, Assaf (2006). My friend, R. Abraham Abish Shorr, pointed out to me a few additional Hassidic sources confirming Maimon's testimony.

Part I: Acosmism and *Bitul ha-Yesh*

Salomon Maimon took part in two *Pantheismusstreite* in the second half of the eighteenth century. His response to the quarrel between Mendelssohn and Jacobi in the mid-1780s is explicitly recorded in his *Lebensgeschichte*:

Acting on his affinity for Spinozism, Jacobi, a profound thinker, tried to make Mendelssohn *malgré lui* into a Spinozist (something that no independent thinker would ever look askance at). In addition, Jacobi published an exchange of letters on this topic that wasn't meant to appear in print or to be presented to a general audience. What purpose was this supposed to serve? If Spinozism is true, then it will be so without Mendelssohn's endorsement. With eternal truths, what matters isn't having the majority on your side. This is especially so when the truth is of that kind that I take the one here to be – a truth that transcends all expression.¹¹

The quarrel between Jacobi and Mendelssohn over Lessing's alleged Spinozism was not the only pantheism controversy that took place in northern Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. Roughly at the very same time – and about one thousand kilometers to the east – the attack of the Lithuanian Rabbinic establishment against the emerging Hassidic movement included a seething critique of blatant Hassidic pantheism.¹² The denunciation of Hassidic pantheism as idolatry and heresy was quite a significant event, since medieval and early modern rabbinic authorities cultivated a mostly positive attitude toward pantheism; we can document barely two or three occasions in the five centuries before Hasidism in which the charge of heresy was brought against pantheistic teachings in rabbinic circles.

Maimon begins his account of the emergence of the new Hassidic movement by noting that, traditionally, the term “Hassid” (literally: pious) referred to a rare individual who practiced extreme religious devotion and asceticism.

Since time immemorial, these have been men who have turned away from material affairs and pleasures, and, to expiate their sins, devoted their lives to observing religious laws and practicing penance with the greatest rigor. They have sought to achieve this, as noted above, through prayers and other devotional exercises, through psychical suffering, etc.

But around this time, some of them stepped forward as the founders of a new sect. They asserted that true piety was in no way a matter of abusing the flesh, for this also weakened the soul's power and destroyed the psychic calm and good cheer necessary for attaining the knowledge and love of God. To the contrary: One should satisfy all bodily needs, and, insofar as they are necessary for our emotional development, make use of all sensual pleasures. After all, God created everything to glorify himself. True divine worship, according to them, consists in performing devotional exercises with all one's strength, *and in self-annihilation before God*

¹¹ Maimon (2018), Bk. 2, Ch. 12, 204. Unless otherwise marked, all English quotes from Maimon's autobiography are from Reitter's translation.

¹² See Wilenski (1970), 188 and 200–201. The first attack on Hassidic pantheism documented by Wilenski is from 1797, though as Wilenski notes (189 n. 22) the targets of this attack are Hassidic texts dating at least a decade earlier.

[*Selbstzernichtung vor Gott*]. For they asserted that, according to his vocation, man can achieve his highest perfection by doing nothing other than by regarding himself as an organ of God, and not as a being that exists and acts for himself [*Sie behaupteten, daß der Mensch, seiner Bestimmung nach, seine höchste Vollkommenheit nicht anders erreichen könne, als wenn er sich nicht als ein für sich bestehendes und wirkendes Wesen, sondern bloß also ein Organ der Gottheit betrachte*]. This, for them, is man's destiny. Thus they believed that the way to further their goal wasn't to spend their entire lives apart from the world, trying to suppress their natural feelings and kill off their vital powers. Rather, they should develop their natural feelings as much as possible, make use of their strengths, and try constantly to extend their influence.¹³

The teachings of the sect of the New Hassidism clearly enchanted Maimon. Notice Maimon's employment of the term "a being that exists and acts for himself [*ein für sich bestehendes und wirkendes Wesen*]," a term that is used by Maimon in his philosophical writings to refer, specifically, to substance.¹⁴ The view that man is not a substance but rather an organ or action of God has a clear affinity with Spinoza's philosophy,¹⁵ though obviously the New Hassidim had never read any of Spinoza's writings.

Maimon expresses great sympathy with the life-affirming teachings of the New Hassidim. Indeed, on one occasion, he even contrasts them with old ascetic Hassidim, by calling the members of the new sect 'Aufklärer.'

The enlighteners [*Die Aufklärer*], by contrast, insisted that a basic condition of true virtue is a cheerful soul, one open to all kinds of activity. They recommended – and didn't simply permit – the moderate enjoyment of all kinds of pleasures as a means of achieving a cheerful soul.¹⁶ *Their worship consisted in a voluntary disembodiment: that is, an abstracting of themselves from all things, even their own individual selves, and from all thoughts except that of God. Their worship also consisted in merging with God. [Ihr Gottesdienst bestand in einer freiwilligen Entkörperung, d. h. Abstrahierung ihrer Gedanken von allen Dingen außer Gott, ja sogar von ihrem individuellen Ich, und in Vereinigung mit Gott]*. The enlighteners thereby produced in themselves a kind of self-suppression – and thus they would ascribe the actions they performed in this state to God, rather than to themselves.

Their worship was made up, then, of a kind of speculative prayer, for which they didn't need a particular time or set of formulations; rather, they left it up to each person to determine those things for himself, according with his level of knowledge. For the most part, however, people chose the times that had been established for public worship. During this public wor-

¹³ Maimon (2018), Bk. 1, Ch. 19, 88. Italics added.

¹⁴ See, for example, Maimon, GW IV 63] *Streifereien*, 41. Maimon seems here to follow Christian Wolff who translated Spinoza's 'substantia' as 'ein bestehendes Ding'. See Wolff (1744), 4.

¹⁵ See Spinoza (1985), Part II, Proposition 10: "The being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man ... Corollary: From this it follows that the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes." The quote is from Curley's translation.

¹⁶ This recommendation for "a moderate enjoyment of all kinds of pleasure" is quite similar to Nicolaus Stensen's 1677 testimony (before the inquisition in Rome) on the practices of Spinoza's circle: "Concerning the joys of the senses they teach that true wisdom consists in enjoying the pleasures of each sense, and of theatres, smells, foods, etc., to the extent that they do not cause nuisance to themselves or damage to others." (Spruit/Totaro [2011], 11)

ship, they practiced the aforementioned disembodiment – that is, they immersed themselves so profoundly in the idea of divine perfection that they lost touch with all else, even their own bodies, to the point where, according to their own accounts, their bodies would be completely without sensations.¹⁷

Ecstatic prayer was thus a measure, used by the New Hassidim, to achieve union with God.¹⁸ Maimon's attitude toward these extreme measures was mostly ambivalent, and we will shortly turn to scrutinizing his criticism of Hassidic practice, but before we turn to that task, let us examine briefly Maimon's description of his first encounter with an emissary of one of the Hassidic masters. The emissary told Maimon that the leaders of the new movement also had a unique manner of developing and propagating their teachings:

Breaking with convention, they didn't compose their sermons and moral teachings in a deliberate manner or arrange them in a practical way. That was how someone who regarded himself as autonomously existing and acting, as separate from God [*der sich als etwas für sich Bestehendes und Wirkendes, von Gott Getrenntes, betrachte*], did things. The high leaders, on the other hand, saw their teachings as divine and, consequently, as infallible – as long as they resulted from a self-dissolution before God. That is, they saw their teachings as being infallible as long as they were formulated *ex tempore*, as the circumstances required, and the leaders didn't add to them anything of their own.¹⁹

Improvisation was supposed to be the guiding principle in the composition of a Hassidic sermon.²⁰ Nothing was supposed to be prepared and planned ahead of time. The preacher was supposed to become a mere tool of God. Being impressed by this description Maimon asked the emissary for an example.

The stranger's description delighted me, so I asked him to share with me some of these divine teachings. He pressed his hand to his forehead, as though waiting for inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Then he turned to me, with a solemn expression and half-exposed arms, which he started move more or less as Corporal Trim²¹ did while reading a sermon, and began to speak as follows [...]²².

At this point, Maimon tells us, the emissary expounded a very original reading of a certain Biblical passage. We now know that the emissary was actually pretending to improvise the sermon on the spot, since the beautiful sermon is well documented in the writings of his teacher, R. Dov Ber of Mezerich.²³ Maimon was

¹⁷ Maimon (2018), Bk. 1, Ch. 19, 92. Italics added

¹⁸ For a detailed exploration of Hassidic ecstatic prayer practices, and especially the shouting of prayers, see the two excellent articles Wolpin (2014) and (2015).

¹⁹ Maimon (2018), Bk. 1, Ch. 19, 94.

²⁰ The rejection of pre-planned sermons appears in early Hassidic homilies on Deut. 13:15. See, for example, the interpretation of this verse by R. Moshe Tzvi of Severan in Steinman (1959), 119.

²¹ A figure from Laurence Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*.

²² Maimon (2018), Bk. 1, Ch. 19, 94.

²³ See Weiss (1956), 107–118.

clearly impressed by the performance, and asked the emissary to issue another sermon. This time the sermon addressed directly the issue of self-immersion in God.

Delighted by this helpful way of interpreting the Holy Scripture, I asked the stranger for more explanations of this kind. And so he continued, full of enthusiasm: "As the player (musician) played, the spirit of God came to him (II Book of Kings, 3:15). They interpret this in the following way: As long as a person shows himself to be autonomous [*selbsttätig zeigt*], he won't be able to receive the Holy Spirit. To this end, he must act as though he is merely an instrument. Thus the meaning of the passage is: When the player (*Ha-menagen*) (the servant of God) becomes identical to the instrument (*Kli-nagen*), the Holy Spirit will come to him.²⁴

The unity of the content of this sermon and its performance – the emissary claims to depart from the boundaries of the 'I', and thus truly act as an egoless instrument in the hands of God – left a remarkable impression on Maimon, which can be easily discerned even in his description of these events more than twenty years later. Still, Maimon had his doubts and criticisms of this new movement as well, and it is to these criticisms that we shall now turn.

Part II: What the Hassidism Did Not Know

Maimon first criticizes the practices of the members of the new Hassidic movement while contrasting them with the asceticism of the old Hassidic order:

The followers of the second sect have, to be sure, more accurate notions of religion and morality, but because they tend to orient themselves using vague intuitions [*dunkle Gefühle*], rather than by precise knowledge, they, too, inevitably fell into all kinds of excess [*allerhand Ausschweifungen*]. The practice of self-annihilation necessarily curtails their activities or leads them off course. Moreover, they know nothing of natural science and have no psychological knowledge. And they are vain [*eitel*] enough to regard themselves as an organ of the divinity, *which, of course, they are, but only to the degree to which they have achieved perfection*. Because of all this, they engage in the most egregious acts of dissolution, putting them down as service to God. Every odd thought is, for them, a divine inspiration, every live urge a divine call to action.²⁵

Strikingly, Maimon does not deny the claim of the new Hassidim to be organs of the divine. Yet, he argues, being an organ of the divine is a quality that comes in degrees and is mostly a function of one's success in achieving adequate knowledge (which the Hassidim lack). Maimon elaborates his criticism in another passage that follows a description of the ecstatic prayer practices of the new Hassidim:

Still, however well founded such worship may be, that it has been subject to much abuse can't be denied. The cheerfulness of the soul that results from inner activity occurs only according

²⁴ Maimon (2018), Bk. 1, Ch. 19, 94–95. For an insightful discussion and documentation of this teaching in the writings of R. Uziel Meizlish, the disciple of the Maggid, see Weiss (1947), 97 and Weiss (1997), 71–73.

²⁵ Maimon (2018), Bk. 1, Ch. 19, 87. Italics added.

to the degree of knowledge [*Grade der erlangten Kenntnis*] attained. Self-dissolution before God is only justified when one's intellectual faculties are so occupied with their object – on account of its size – that one exists outside oneself, or purely in the object. If, however, one's intellectual faculties are limited in the face of their object, then the activity mentioned above will be hindered, rather than facilitated, by focusing on that object alone.

Because they went around idly all day, their pipes always in their mouths, some members of the sect were asked what they were thinking about the whole time. Being ingenuous, they answered, to be sure, "We were thinking about God!" *This answer would have been satisfying if the men strove incessantly to expand their knowledge of divine perfections through an adequately knowledge of nature.* But this couldn't have been the situation with them, for their knowledge of nature was very limited. So it must have been the case that when they focused their activity on an object that was, with respect to their capacities, unedifying, they were in an unnatural state. Moreover, they could only be justified in ascribing their actions to God if their actions followed from an accurate understanding of God. If their actions followed from the incompleteness of their knowledge, then they would necessarily engage in all kinds of excess [*Exzesse*] in God's name, as, unfortunately, the outcome has shown they do.²⁶

According to Maimon, the Hassidim were right to consider self-annihilation in God as the ultimate human ideal, but were absolutely wrong in thinking that they had *achieved* such self-annihilation. Maimon's snobbery would not allow for any casual Joe (or Avrum) to claim unity with God. Self-submersion in God, claimed Maimon, required proper understanding of God's infinity. Yet, the Hassidim actually conceived the infinity of God (the notion of 'Ain') as the most sublime and essential characterization of God. Maimon further stressed that adequate knowledge of God is closely tied to having an adequate knowledge of nature. The Hassidim had very poor knowledge of nature (i. e. physics); therefore, argued Maimon, they were not entitled to their claim to have achieved adequate knowledge of God. But why precisely is the knowledge of God strictly contingent on having proper knowledge of nature? Were the Hassidim simply not *entitled* to be Spinozists?

About twenty years before the publication of Maimon's *Lebensgeschichte*, and before he pursued the study of the sciences, Maimon himself endorsed the acosmism of the Hassidim. Thus, in his (still) unpublished manuscript, *Hesheq Shelomo* [*Solomon's Desire*], Maimon writes:

It is impossible to conceive any other existence but His, may he be blessed, no matter whether it is a substantial or an accidental existence. And this is the secret of the aforementioned unity [that God is the cause of the world in all four respects: formally, materially, efficiently and finally], namely, *that only God, may he be blessed, exists, and that nothing but him has any existence at all* [*ha-Shem Yitbarach levado nimitza ve-ein le-zulato metziut kelal*].²⁷

²⁶ Maimon (2018), Bk. 1, Ch. 19, 92–93. Italics added.

²⁷ Maimon (s. a.), 139. The transcription, translation, and emphasis are mine. The passage above appears in the *Ma'ase Livnat Ha-Sapir* section of the manuscript. I agree with Freudenthal's claim (cf. Freudenthal [2012], 115) that this section was most probably written in Eastern Europe, before Maimon's immigration to Germany.

Thus, oddly enough, even before he studied the natural sciences, the young Maimon was willing to assert the “self-dissolution before God.” Maimon’s patronizing attitude toward the Hassidim is especially disturbing since he was himself an object of such an attitude on the part of *Aufklärer*, such as Markus Herz, who first treated him as “a speaking animal [*redendes Tier*]” due to his “savage” appearance and unrefined manners.²⁸

Conclusion

About two decades ago, two leading scholars of Hassidism engaged in a debate about whether, and to what extent, early Hassidic thought can be adequately characterized as acosmist.²⁹ If my chief argument here is correct, there is a certain historical irony in the very posing of the question. The term ‘acosmist’, I argue, was coined by Salomon Maimon under the influence of his brief yet intense encounter with the circle of the Maggid of Mezrich. Thus, claiming that the early Hassidic doctrine of *Bitul ha-Yesh* is acosmist closes a circle.

In an earlier work, I have argued that when Maimon claims that the “Spinozist system” – which he qualifies as acosmism – had already been suggested to him in Poland through his study of the Kabbalah,³⁰ he may well have referred to the acosmism expressed in his own Kabbalistic manuscript, *Ma’ase Livnat ha-Sapir*.³¹ Following our close study of Maimon’s testimony on his visit to the court of the Maggid, we may now point out the specific branch of the Kabbalah that Maimon had in mind in comparing the Kabbalah to Spinozism, and identify it with the acosmist teachings of early Hassidism.

An old Hassidic – or perhaps anti-Hassidic – anecdote tells the story of two old Hassidic masters who entered a room. After some hours of silence, the first master pronounced: “Ich bin Gurnisht,”³² thus indicating that he had achieved the sublime state of self-annihilation in God. After another period of long silence, the second master whispered as well: “Ich bin Gurnisht,” indicating that he too had achieved the sublime state. Then, suddenly, a toddler – perhaps one of their

²⁸ See Maimon (2018), Bk. 2, Ch. 11, 195. Cf. Socher, *Radical Enlightenment*, 6–7.

²⁹ See Elijor (1992), 54–65, and Jacobson (1998). Jacobson presents powerful critique of the ascription of acosmism to Habad theosophy which stresses that denying the *independent* existence of the world is distinct from denying the existence of the world *simpliciter* (231). Jacobson seems to anticipate Schaffer’s important – yet, not sufficiently sharp – distinction between existence and priority monism (Schaffer [2015]). It is not clear to me, however, whether acosmism must be identified with existence monism (just as it is not clear whether Spinoza’s monism falls on the side of existence, or priority, monism).

³⁰ Maimon (1984), 157.

³¹ Melamed (2004), 79.

³² Yiddish: “I am nothing.”

grandchildren – burst into the room yelling: “Ich bin Gurnisht.” The two startled masters immediately reproached the toddler: “Bist Du Gurnisht?!” Indeed, as Maimon seems to teach, not everyone is allowed to claim to have achieved a state of nothingness.

Bibliography

- Assaf, David (2006), “Torot ha-Maggid R. Dov Ber mi-Mezrich be-Zichronot Shlomo Maimon [The Teachings of the Maggid R. Dov Ber of Mezrich in the Memoirs of Salomon Maimon]”, in: *Zion* 71, 99–101.
- de Murr, Christophorus Theophilus (ed.) (1802), *Benedicti de Spinoza Adnotationes ad Tractatum Theologico Politicum*, The Hague.
- Dubnow, Simon (1931), *Geschichte des Chassidismus*, 2 vols., translated from the Hebrew by A. Steinberg, Berlin.
- Elior, Rachel (1992), *Torat Ahdut ha-Hafachim: Ha-Theosophia ha-Mistit she Habad* [Unity of Opposites: The Mystical Theosophy of Habad], Jerusalem.
- Freudenthal, Gideon (2012), “Hitpachuto shel Maimon me-ha-Kabbalah le-ratzionalism philosophi [Maimon’s Development from the Kabbalah to Philosophical Rationalism]”, in: *Tarbitz* 80, 105–171.
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1910), *Anweisung zum seligen Leben*, ed. F. Medicus, Leipzig.
- Gerlitz, Mordechai (2007), *Zanterot ha-Zahav [The Golden Pipes]*, I. Bney Brak.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1991), *Encyclopedia Logic*, translated by T. F. Geraets et al., Indianapolis.
- Jacobson, Yoram (1998), “Bi-Mevochei ha-‘Ayin’ u-be-Mvuchot ha-‘Yesh’ [In the Labyrinths of ‘Nothingness’ and the Perplexity of ‘Being’]”, in: *Qiryat Sefer* 68, 229–243.
- Maimon, Salomon (1965–1976), *Gesammelte Werke [GW]*, 7 vols., ed. V. Verra, Hildesheim.
- (s. a.) *Hesheq Shelomo* [Heb.: Solomon’s Desire], manuscript 8^o6426 in the National Library in Jerusalem.
 - (1965) *Giva’at ha-Moreh* [Heb.: Hill of the Guide], ed. S. H. Bergmann and N. Rotenstreich, Jerusalem [Orig. Berlin 1791].
 - (1984) *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, ed. Z. Batscha, Frankfurt a. M. [Orig. Berlin 1792/3].
 - (2010) *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, translated by N. Midgley et al., London.
 - (2018), *Autobiography*, translated by Paul Reitter, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Abraham P. Socher, Princeton.
- Melamed, Yitzhak Y. (2004), “Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism in German Idealism,” in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42, 67–96.
- (2010), “Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite”, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48, 77–92.
 - (2014), “Let the Law Cut through the Mountain: Salomon Maimon, Moses Mendelssohn, and Mme. Truth”, in: L. Muehlethaler (ed.), *Höre die Wahrheit, wer sie auch spricht*, Göttingen, 70–76.
- Platner, Ernst (1776), *Philosophische Aphorismen nebst einigen Anleitungen zur philosophischen Geschichte*, Leipzig.
- Schaffer, Jonathan (2015), “Monism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, in: E. N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/monism/>>.

- Socher, Abraham P. (2006), *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon*, Stanford, CA.
- Spinoza, Benedictus (1985), *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, edited and translated by E. Curley, vol. I., Princeton, NJ.
- Spruit, Leen, and Totaro, Pina (eds.) (2011), *The Vatican Manuscript of Spinoza's Ethics*, Leiden, NL.
- Steinman, Eliezer (1959), *Be'er ha-Hassidut* [The Well of Hassidism], Tel Aviv.
- Turro, Salvi (2015), "Qué tipo de entidades son necesarias para hacer del mundo un mundo", in: *Studia Hegeliana* 1, 155–181.
- Weiss, Joseph (1947), "Al Drush Echad shel ha-Maggid mo-Mezrich [On one Sermon by the Maggid of Mezrich]", in: *Zion* 12, 97.
- (1956), "Al Torah Hassidit Achat le-ha-Maggid mi-Mezrich [On One Hassidic Teaching of the Maggid of Mezrich]", in: *Zion* 20, 107–8.
 - (1997), *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism & Hasidism*, ed. D. Goldstein, London.
- Wilenski, Mordechai (1970), *Hassidim u-Mitnagdim* [The Hassidim and Their Opponents], Jerusalem.
- Wolff, Christian (1744), *B. d. S. Sittenlehre widerleget*, Frankfurt a. M./Leipzig.
- Wolpin, Yohanan (2014), "Be-Hora'at Raboteinu ha-Kdoshim be-haramat kol ba-Tefila: 1 [On the Direction of our Holy Rabbis to Raise One's Voice in Prayer: 1]", in: *Kovetz Beis Aharon ve-Israel* 174, 91–114.
- (2015), "Be-Hora'at Raboteinu ha-Kdoshim be-haramat kol ba-Tefila: 1 [On the Direction of our Holy Rabbis to Raise One's Voice in Prayer: 1]", in: *Kovetz Beis Aharon ve-Israel* 175, 119–143.