

DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

I.

Die Dissertation *Metaphysik des Profanen. Die politische Theologie von Walter Benjamin und Gershom Scholem* befaßt sich mit den frühen politischen und theologischen Begriffen der beiden Autoren aus der Zeit von 1915 bis 1923. Sie verfolgt die Absicht, die frühen Diskussionen Benjamins und Scholems zu Politik und Theologie zu rekonstruieren. Dabei konzentriert sie sich auf die Themen von Messianismus, Sprache und Gerechtigkeit. Auf der einen Seite wird die Verwurzelung der sprachtheoretischen und geschichtsphilosophischen Konzepte Walter Benjamins in einer vom Judentum geprägten theologischen Tradition herausgearbeitet. Auf der anderen Seite wird der theoretische und politische Gehalt zentraler Kategorien ihrer frühen Diskussionen in einigen Teilen von Scholems Spätwerk dargestellt. Auf diese Weise wird der enge Zusammenhang von Grundbegriffen der jüdischen Tradition, vor allem mystischer und messianischer Richtungen, mit den politischen und theologischen Ideen Benjamins und Scholems deutlich gemacht. Diese Ideen, die sich bei beiden Autoren schon früh herausbildeten, haben grundlegende Bedeutung für ihre späteren Auffassungen und haben damit auch einen nachhaltigen Einfluß auf die Gegenwartsphilosophie sowie die Judaistik dieses Jahrhunderts ausgeübt.

Im Einzelnen besteht die Dissertation aus einer Interpretation, die das Frühwerk Benjamins zu den in den Tagebüchern Scholems dokumentierten Diskussionen und unveröffentlichten Frühmanuskripten aus derselben Zeit in Beziehung setzt. Im Mittelpunkt steht Betrachtungen beider Autoren zum Messianismus, zum Begriff der Sprache und der Gerechtigkeit. Außerdem wird gezeigt, wie die in der frühen Auseinandersetzung gewonnenen Kategorien noch in sehr viel später verfaßten Texten Scholems ihre Geltung behaupten. Entsprechend wurde die Arbeit in drei Teile gegliedert. Im ersten Teil wird versucht, die Wurzeln der messianischen Ideen Benjamins zu identifizieren und so die von Benjamin verwendeten Kategorien zunächst politisch-theologischer auszulegen. Diese Kategorien bilden dann zugleich auch die Hauptideen der ganzen Dissertation. Zentral ist hierbei die Untersuchung des "theologisch-politischen Fragments" von 1921, in dem Benjamin sein Thesen zum Messianismus entfaltet. Das Ankommen des Messias wird darin dem Ablauf der Geschichte entgegengestellt, einem Ablauf, der allein von den Mächtigen

bestimmt wird. Der Messianismus unterbricht diese Form der Geschichte und eröffnet ein Zeitalter radikaler Umgestaltung. Inwieweit diese kommende Welt ein Ergebnis des messianischen Ankommens ist, oder ob sie eine zu verwirklichende Aufgabe der Menschheit ist, die durch die Ankunft des Messias nur vollendet wird, wurde als Gegenstand Benjamins messianischer Betrachtungen interpretiert.

Gestalt gewinnt Benjamins Messianismus vor allem in der Betrachtung einer seiner zentralen Ideen, nämlich der strengen Unterscheidung zwischen dem Heiligen und dem Profanen. Während er das Heilige dem abstrakten Wesen des Gottesreiches zuordnet, richtet Benjamin seine Aufmerksamkeit, soweit sie das Politische betrifft, zunächst vor allem auf das Profane. Dort steht die Aufgabe der Menschen im Mittelpunkt; ihre Rolle im messianischen Drama wird thesenartig skizziert. Dabei wird eine Dimension des menschlichen Handelns herausgearbeitet, in der die Menschen imstande sein könnten, das Heilige zu erreichen. Weil ein solches Handeln, das aus dem Profanen heraus unmittelbar auf das Gottesreich zielt, eine Verneinung des Heiligen bedeuten würde, ist das Heilige für Benjamin nur als Ergebnis unabsichtlicher Aktivität vorstellbar. Als Musterbild für ein solches Handeln erscheint der tragische Held, dessen Hingabe im Angesicht eines ihm unbekanntem Schicksals in seiner Untersuchung "Schicksal und Charakter" (1919) beispielhaft untersucht wird.

Genauso wie also das menschliche Handeln hat das Hervorberechen des Messianischen seine Phasen und Konjunkturen. Nur in diesem Zusammenhang kann die Idee der "*restitutio in integrum*", der Wiederherstellung ursprünglicher materieller und geistiger Verhältnisse, und das Versprechen auf menschliche Ewigkeit, verstanden werden. In diesem Sinne, nämlich als Bestandteile messianischen Denkens, versuche ich, die entsprechenden Kategorien des "Theologisch-Politischen Fragments" auszulegen.

Die letzte Aussage des Fragments bezieht sich auf einen Nihilismus, der zu einer "Weltpolitik" aufgerufen wird. Sie bietet zugleich einen Übergang zu Scholems frühen Konzepte einer theologischen Politik. Die politische Formulierungen Scholems aus den Jahren 1918-1919, vor allem in Zusammenhang mit seinem schriftlichen "Abschied" von der jüdischen Jugendbewegung, erschließen eine von beiden Autoren gemeinsam konzipierte Neugestaltung der Politik. Beide ziehen sich zu dieser Zeit des Zusammenbruchs der politischen Strukturen im ersten Weltkrieg aus praktisch-politischen Tätigkeiten zurück, sei es in der Jugend- und Studentenbewegung, sei es in der deutsch-zionistischen Bewegung und fordern

stattdessen theoretische Besinnung. Ob Benjamin zuvor schon einmal als wahrhaftig "politisch" in einem praktischen Sinne bezeichnet werden kann, ist zweifelhaft. Aber auf jeden Fall hatte Scholem zu dieser Zeit bereits nähere Bekanntschaft mit einem praktisch orientierten politischen Anarchismus gemacht: dokumentiert sind hier insbesondere seine Auseinandersetzungen mit seinem Bruder Werner Scholem, der später Reichstagsabgeordneter der USPD war und 1940 in Buchenwald ermordet wurde.

Man kann bei Scholem sehen, welche Form diese Verwandlung von aktiver zu "aufgeschobener" Politik annimmt. Scholems Vision der utopischen Dimension des Judentums hatte zuvor eine, wenn auch abstrakte Praxis im Zusammenhang von Anarchismus und Zionismus gefunden. Anarchismus und Judentum waren für ihn unmittelbar miteinander verflochten. In Verbindung mit dem kulturellen Imperativ Achad Ha'ams, dessen Essaysammlung *Am Scheidewege* auf ihn und Benjamin eine nachhaltige Wirkung ausübte, begann Scholem, ein einzigartiges zionistisches Konzept zu formulieren. In dieser frühen Vorstellung von Zionismus akzeptierte er keinerlei Trennung zwischen der prophetischen Konzeption von Zion in der Thora und der Rückkehr nach Palästina im 20. Jahrhundert. Diese Verbindung von biblischem Zion einerseits mit modernem politischem Zionismus andererseits beruhte auf einer Auslegung der Thora und der Glaube an den göttlichen Ursprung der Schrift; gemäß der Stimme des Propheten in Jesaja 2:3 und Micha 4:2: "Von Zion geht die Thora aus und das Wort Gottes von Jerusalem" - eine Formel, die Bestandteil der Liturgie jedes Gottesdienstes ist, in dem die Thora vorgelesen wird. Die Vorstellung von einer programmatischen Thora, in der Zion als eine zu erfüllende Politik mit messianischer Konsequenz interpretiert wurde, erscheint hier allerdings nur noch als "Aufschub".

Scholems Begriff des Anarchismus bzw. des Nihilismus hat sich nach 1923 noch einmal stark gewandelt. Der Begriff kommt nunmehr im Zusammenhang mit der messianischen Bewegung des Sabbatai Zevi von 1666 vor, der radikalsten destruktiven Umwälzung in den letzten 400 Jahren innerhalb des Judentums. Scholem hat diese Umwälzung im Sinne Bakunins interpretiert, wo die bakuninsche Parole ("die Lust der Zerstörung ist zugleich eine schaffende Lust") zum Hauptmotiv des 1936 veröffentlichten Aufsatzes "Mitzwa haba'a be'awara" wird ("Erlösung durch Sünde"). Dem letzten, erkenntnis-kritischen Begriff hingegen entspricht noch einmal eine neue Verwendung, wobei der Anarchismus auf einen Zustand hindeutet, der aus der Abwesenheit Gottes eine Orientierung zur Schrift ableitet. Die Tatsache, daß der Glaube an den heiligen Ursprung der Schrift

nicht mehr gesichert ist, sondern eben in Frage steht, hat nach Scholems Ansicht zur Folge, daß wir aus Mangel an Glauben dem Anarchismus notwendig verbunden sind. Diese Konstruktion findet ihren Ausdruck in der paradoxen Formulierung: "Wir sind vielleicht Anarchisten, aber wir sind gegen die Anarchie."

II.

Der zweite Teil der Dissertation, *Die politische Theologie Benjamins und Scholems*, erläutert den frühen Sprachbegriff, der in dem 1916 von Benjamin geschriebenen Aufsatz "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" konzipiert, und in den folgenden Diskussionen zwischen Benjamin und Scholem weiter entfaltet wurde. Benjamin entwickelt in diesem Aufsatz die Schöpfungsgeschichte aufbauend eine Sprachphilosophie, die vom Begriff eines sprachlichen Wesens ausgeht. Seiner Analyse zufolge ist Sprache nicht Mittel zum Ausdruck, sondern *ist* unmittelbar der Ausdruck des "geistigen Inhaltes" des Dinges, dessen Sachgehalt sich in der Sprache selbst zum Ausdruck bringt.

Mit dieser Neubestimmung des Wesens der Sprache eröffnen sich nun eine Reihe von Fragen. Eine davon betrifft das Wesen der Metapher. Wenn das Dasein einer Idee oder einer Sache sich von deren Sprache nicht unterscheidet, was kann dann metaphorische Bedeutung sein? Diese Frage wiederum verweist auf die Untersuchung eines Daseins, das über der Möglichkeit jeden Ausdruckes liegt, mithin auf Spekulationen über das Dasein Gottes in der Sprache. Die Geschichte der Erschaffung der Welt handelt von diesem Ausdruck des geistigen Wesens Gottes, genauso wie die Erzählung von der Erschaffung des Menschen. In seinem Ebenbild, *b'tzelem*, schuf er ihn. Und nachher nannte Adam die Tiere nach ihren Namen. Gott selber aber blieb ihm unansprechbar, unhörbar, und unübersetzbar. In diesem Zusammenhang mit der Darstellung des Ineinandergreifens von Schöpfung und Namensgebung bei Adams Entdeckung der Namen führt Benjamin den Begriff der Magie der Sprache ein. Er fragt: wie hätte Adam die Namen der Lebewesen erkennen können, wenn sie nicht mit ihm irgendwie kommuniziert hätten? Weil aber Namensgebung in diesem Sinne schon Erkenntnis bedeutet, bildet für Benjamin der Name den Ausgangspunkt der Suche nach dem sprachlichen Ausdruck eines Dinges als dessen geistigen Wesens.

Die Theorie der Ausdrucksmagie erschließt Benjamin auch eine neue Perspektive auf den Begriff der Offenbarung. Diese interpretiert er als den Übergang eines

geistigen Wesens von Einem zum Anderen. Das Vorbild hierfür ist die Übertragung von synonymen Bedeutungen oder die Übersetzung von einer Sprache in eine andere. Auch hier geht es nicht um einfache Bedeutungsidentität, sondern um den Übergang eines geistigen Wesens zwischen verschiedenen Sprachen. Aus diesen Überlegungen folgt, daß ein magischer Übergang vom Ausdruckslosen zum profanen Ausdruck stattfindet.

Die erste Übersetzung gab es schon bei Adam. In dem Übergang oder der Überlieferung des göttlichen, geistigen Wesens, an dem Adam *ruach elohim*, der Geist-, Atem-, oder Wind Gottes, gegeben wurde, sucht Benjamin Spuren des ausdruckslosen Ausdruckes. Mit der sprachlichen Überlieferung an Adam entstand auch die Übersetzung einer schöpfenden Sprache in eine benennende und, nach der Vertreibung aus Eden und der Sprachverwirrung, die von einer heiligen in eine profane Sprache. In diesen ursprünglichen Formen der Übersetzung findet Benjamin ein Muster für die Übersetzung in der Form eines ständigen Wandels. Benjamin lehnt eine Interpretation, die die Schöpfungsgeschichte als Darstellung eines physischen Geschehens faßt, nachdrücklich ab. Das Atmen Gottes will er nur als reinen Geist sehen. Ebenso verfährt er mit allen anderen materiellen Aspekten der Schöpfungsgeschichte. Diese Betonung der geistigen Elemente der Schöpfung ist, wie ich in der weiteren Auslegung von Benjamins Überlegungen zeige, vermutlich auf eine Abgrenzung zurückzuführen. Benjamin trennt hier eine Deutung, wie sie etwa bei Hamann und dem christlichen Kabbalist Franz Josef Molitor vorliegt, und nach der in der Schöpfung das Wort Fleisch wird, von seinem eigenen Begriff. Gleichzeitig hätte er von Molitor auf der anderen Seite eine Reihe von Ideen übernehmen können, die zur jüdischen Sprachtradition gehören.

Scholems Begriff der Sprache entwickelt sich in den Diskussionen, die er mit Benjamin im Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachaufsatz geführt hat. 1921 wollte Scholem seine Dissertation über Sprachspekulation der Kabbalah schreiben; nachdem er jedoch einen kurzen Überblick gewonnen hatte, entschied er sich dafür, sich auf *das Buch Bahir* zu beschränken, in dem viele Ausführungen sich auf die Sprache selbst beziehen. Erst nach fünfzig Jahren Untersuchungen der Kabbalah, die sich daran anschlossen, gelang es ihm, die Hauptströmung der jüdischen Sprachmystik in dem 1973 erschienen Aufsatz "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala" zusammenzufassen. Im Vordergrund des Aufsatzes steht die von Benjamin vertretene Vermutung, daß Überlegungen zur Sprache im Prinzip metaphysische Überlegungen sind, die von der Bedeutung der Wahrheit der Thora ausgehen. Scholems Überlegungen beginnen mit Betrachtungen zur

akustischen Sphäre des Ausdruckes Gottes. "Ausdruck" wird hierbei in ähnlicher Weise wie bei Benjamin gedacht. Es handelt sich um ein geistiges Wesen, das sich nicht durch die Sprache, sondern in ihr manifestiert, wobei der Ausdruck "durch" die Verwendung der Sprache als Mittel, ihre Entfernung von ihrem Wesen bezeichnet. In Scholems Formulierung ist die "Magie" der Sprache, d. h. die Art und Weise, wie das Ausdruckslose in einem Symbol Ausdruck findet, immer orientiert an einem einzigen und maßgeblichen Beispiel: dem Namen Gottes. So verbindet Scholem seine Forschung mit der von Benjamin; den er selbst einen "reinen Sprachmystiker" nennt.

In seinem Spätaufsatz stellt Scholem drei zentrale Betrachtungen jüdischer Sprachtheorie dar: Erstens werden Schöpfung und Offenbarung sprachliche Ausdrücke, der Ewigkeit Gottes ausgelegt, die im Profanen aber nur in der beschränkten Gestalt eines Symbols begegnen. Zweitens wird der Name Gottes als ein metaphysischer Ursprung der Sprache aufgefaßt, aus dem alles Andere hervorgebracht wurde. Drittens macht die Theorie des Namens die Magie seines Ausdruckes im Profanen ausfindig und so seine Verknüpfung der menschlichen Welt erfahrbar. So kehrt Scholem mit seinen Überlegungen zum schaffenden Wort Gottes und seinem unaussprechlichen Namen zu der Paradoxie zurück, die schon Gegenstand von Benjamins Sprachaufsatz war. Der Name, welchen Gott benutzt, um sich selbst zu nennen, und mit dem er angesprochen wird, ist weder auszusprechen, noch irgendwie anders auszudrücken. Der eine Name, der allem Anderen Bedeutung verleiht, ist selber bedeutungslos. Diese Paradoxie identifiziert Scholem als das Merkmal göttlicher Wahrheit. Das Verhältnis von unaussprechbarem Namen und schaffendem Wort liegt der Spekulation über die versteckten, heiligen Kombinationen von Buchstaben zugrunde, die zu einer schaffenden Sprache führen. Daß Scholems Weg durch die jüdische Sprachtheorie noch im Horizont des frühen Sprachaufsatzes Benjamins steht, zeigen die Interpretationen in den letzten Kapiteln dieses zweiten Teils.

III.

Der dritte Aspekt der politischen Theologie in Benjamins und Scholems frühen Aufsätzen und Diskussionen ist die Idee der Gerechtigkeit. Mit der Andeutung, daß Gerechtigkeit das Wesen der Erlösung ausmacht, verschiebt sich der Gerechtigkeitsbegriff von dem Bereich des Profanen zu dem des Heiligen. Daher bezieht sich die erste Bestimmung der Idee Benjamins und Scholems auf die

Notwendigkeit, die Gerechtigkeit dem Heiligen zuzuschreiben, und in Abgrenzung dazu einen Begriff von Recht und Urteil im Profanen zu konstruieren. In einer an Erlösung orientierten Konzeption von Gerechtigkeit entdecken wir frühere Kategorien mit neuen Bedeutungen wieder. Das richtende Urteil in der Form eines Wortes, dem wir am Schluß von Benjamins frühem Sprachaufsatz begegnen, steht im Mittelpunkt der Diskussion. Mit ihm sind die Ideen eines "mystischen Ursprungs des Rechtes", des Schicksals und der Schuld, unmittelbar verbunden. Das Verhältnis zwischen Schicksal und Charakter taucht hier wieder auf im Zusammenhang mit einem Begriff des Ursprungs des Bösen, der von Kierkegaard deutlich beeinflusst ist und gleichzeitig abgegrenzt wird. Statt einer Verallgemeinerung der ursprünglichen Schuld zu einer Verantwortung des Einzelnen sucht Benjamin nach eine Auflösung des Schuldbegriffes überhaupt; an seine Stelle soll das erlösende Streben nach Verantwortung treten.

Grundgedanken von Benjamins Begriff der Gerechtigkeit finden sich schon in den neuentdeckten "Notizen zu einer Arbeit über die Kategorie der Gerechtigkeit" (ca. 1916). In diesem Text differenziert Benjamin zwischen dem profanen ethischen Handeln und der Gerechtigkeit, wobei der sprachliche Unterschied vor allem im Hebräischen zwischen *mishpat* und *tzedeq* hervorgehoben wird. Dieser Unterschied, der das Material für die etwas späteren verfaßte "Kritik der Gewalt" (1921) bildet, dient als ein Ausgangspunkt für einige Überlegungen Scholems in dieser Hinsicht. Diese gipfeln in den unveröffentlichten "Thesen über den Begriff der Gerechtigkeit." In vielerlei Hinsicht scheint der Text ein Kommentar zu Benjamins Notizen zu sein. Er übernimmt Benjamins Kategorie der distributiven Gerechtigkeit und stimmt mit ihm darin überein, daß das Distribuieren über eine bloße Universalisierung der Güter hinausführen muß, sei es materielle Güter, sei es das "höchste Gut".

Scholem entwickelt die Theorie der Spaltung von weltlichem Recht und überweltlicher Gerechtigkeit weiter in einem unveröffentlichten Text über prophetische Gerechtigkeit und die Aufgabe von Jona. Der Aufschub des Urteils in dieser Geschichte, genauer gesagt, der Aufschub der Exekution des Urteils, der Jona selber durch die Prophezeiung liefern muß, wird als ein Hinweis auf Gottes Gerechtigkeit gedeutet. So wie Aufschub in der Prophezeiung Jonas Gerechtigkeit bedeutet, führt auch der fortdauernde und permanente Aufschub des Jüngsten Gerichtes die Gerechtigkeit auf der Erde ein. Weiter wendet Scholem den Begriff des permanenten Aufschubes in seiner Analyse der Gerechtigkeitsidee der bolschewistischen Revolution an, die sich in einem ebenfalls unveröffentlichten

Text "Über die bolschewistische Revolution" von 1918 findet. Nach Scholem wird der Bolschewismus durch eine "revolutionäre Magie" gekennzeichnet, die er seiner Bewegung verleiht. Dies, erklärt Scholem, ist das Prinzip, daß das messianische Reich nur durch die Diktatur der Armut entfaltet werden kann. Aber als eine historische Kraft, die eine künftige Gerechtigkeit ankündigt, ist die bolschewistische Revolution zugleich unfähig, sein Handeln in der Gegenwart zu beurteilen. Daher wird, nach Scholems damaliger Beurteilung, die Diktatur der Armut im Blut enden.

Benjamins "Kritik der Gewalt" bildet das Thema des sechsten Kapitels der Dissertation, das sich den Überlegungen der beiden Autoren zu dem Verhältnis von Gewalt und Gerechtigkeit widmet. Benjamins gleichnamiger Aufsatz aus dem Jahre 1921, der von den meisten Interpreten als ein politisches Frühwerk gedeutet wird, in dem Ansprüche des Staates wie auch außerparlamentarischer Kräfte (wie im Generalstreik oder im Antikriegspazifismus) auf Gewalt eine Erklärung finden. Jedoch ist die wahre Basis der Gewalt nach Benjamin die des Göttlichen, das sich in der Welt manifestiert. Gegenüber einer solchen Gewalt scheint das weltliche Recht, mystische und willkürliche zu sein. Im Gegensatz dazu, fordert er ein gewaltloses Handeln im Profanen, das er auf dem Begriff der "Politik des reinen Mittels" bringt. Er verweist dabei auf den friedlichen Umgang zwischen Einzelnen als Grundlage einer neuen Politik, die von einer "Kultur des Herzens" aufgebaut werden soll. Obwohl der Anfang des Aufsatzes sich mit deutlich politisch orientierten Auffassungen der Rechtsphilosophie auseinandersetzt, bilden doch letztendlich theologische Begriffe wie die Annahme einer göttlichen Gewalt und die Idee einer messianischen Gemeinschaft freiwirkender Individuen den Angelpunkt Benjamins

Das letzte Kapitel der Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem Einfluß dieser frühen politischen Theologie der Gerechtigkeit auf Scholems 1958 geschriebenen Aufsatz "Die Lehre der 'Gerechten' in der jüdischen Mystik". Hier zeigt Scholem, wie die Gerechtigkeit sich in drei Figuren darstellt: in dem Gerechten, Zadik, dem Frommen, Chassid, und dem Schriftgelehrten, Talmid Chacham. Schließlich wird das anarchische, mitmenschliche und zuweilen auch komische Hervorbrechen der Gerechtigkeit in der Figur des Gerechten dargestellt. Bezieht man sich auf die Eigenschaften, die Scholem dem Gerechten zuschreibt, so zeigt sich in der gerechten Figur zugleich die Vorzeichnung des Messias.

INTRODUCTION

What began with a visit to Berlin one rainy summer a few years after the fall of the wall burgeoned into the following study of the intellectual partnership of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, which I submitted to the Free University of Berlin as a doctoral dissertation in the summer of 1999. The study concerns an early phase in the careers of both Benjamin and Scholem, dating from the period surrounding the start of the First World War. This friendship could have begun as early as the fall of 1913 when Scholem's Zionist youth group, *Jung Juda*, met the *Sprechsaal der Jugend* which was formed under the influence of the anarchist pedagogue Gustav Wyneken.¹ Benjamin had been chosen that evening by Wyneken's group to speak on the question of Zionism.² Yet the first encounter actually took place on July 16, 1915 in the library of the University of Berlin.³ Following this initial meeting, their friendship was to span 25 years until Benjamin's suicide in 1940 while fleeing the Nazis.

The most intensive phase of this intellectual partnership took place in an early period, beginning in 1915 and probably reaching a peak in 1918-1919 during the highly creative but also isolated period of the authors' residence in the town of Muri, near Bern, Switzerland. The dialogue of the early period culminates in 1923 with Scholem's departure for Palestine. Thereafter the discussion took the form of letters — those best preserved are from the years 1933 to 1940, which Scholem published with great satisfaction toward the end of his life.⁴ Yet while we are able to examine this late period with relative ease, on account of Scholem's efforts, the period undoubtedly seminal for the later exchange remains largely unknown. This

¹ Wyneken's key texts from this period are *Schule und Jugendkultur*, Jena: 1914, *Die neue Jugend: ihr Kampf um Freiheit und Wahrheit*, München: 1914, *Der Kampf für die Jugend*, Jena: 1919. A lasting impact of Wyneken on Benjamin is nevertheless questionable. On Wyneken, his turn to anti-Semitism, and Benjamin's break with the movement, see Momme Brodersen, *Spinne im eigenen Netz*, Elster Verlag: 1990, 52-56

² See Scholem, *Von Berlin Nach Jerusalem, Jugenderinnerungen*, Erweiterte Fassung, Jüdischer Verlag, 1994, 49, hereafter [von berlin:49], und *Walter Benjamin - Die Geschichte einer Freundschaft*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990, 10-11, hereafter [freund:10-11].

³ Scholem records this meeting quite memorably in his journal: "Ich komme ins Bibliotheks-Katalogzimmer, steht da mein Herr Benjamin und kuckt auf und kann seine Augen überhaupt nicht mehr von mir trennen. Ich sehe meine Sachen nach, jener geht hinaus; schön, denke ich, weg bist du. Aber siehe da, die Tür öffnet sich wieder, zurück kommt Herr Benjamin, auf mich zu, macht eine formvollendete Verbeugung und fragt mich, ob ich jener Herr sei, der auf dem Hiller-Abend gesprochen hätte?" [tag I:131]

⁴ Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, *Briefwechsel 1933-1940*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985. Other sources include Scholem's late recollections in his autobiography [von berlin], his book on the partnership, [freund], and in the collection of essays entitled *Walter Benjamin und Sein Engel*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992.

is partly due to the fact that it took place in discursive fashion yet the recent publications of Scholem's journals have made a record of these discussions available to the public for the first time.⁵ Other early manuscripts in Scholem's hand have yet to see the light of day. The nature of these highly theoretical discussions has also contributed to the fact that this formative period is least explored. Their ideas, which I have here characterized as an early political theology, are the focus of this study.

Politics were clearly one of the main issues of discussion. The beginning of their relationship, in marked contrast to its development, was constituted by a shared passion for politics, with the activities of the young Scholem at the center of debate. This was perhaps the period in Scholem's life when he was most actively engaged, attending clandestine meetings with his brother Werner (later USPD-Faction representative with Luxemburg and Liebknecht to the *Reichstag*)⁶ and campaigning with the *Jung Juda* against the First World War, for which he was thrown out of the *Gymnasium* a year before graduation.⁷ Passionately stating the case for a socialism with an "anarchistischem Anstrich" "anarchist streak,"⁸ Scholem developed a penchant for revolutionary and utopian political theory which was to have a considerable influence on Benjamin and carve the contours of a discussion which spanned their entire friendship.

Scholem's magnum opus, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, begins with a dedication to a genial metaphysician, critic and scholar. The influence which these three dimensions of Benjamin were to have on Scholem extended far beyond the "friendship of a lifetime," as he puts it in the English version. In fact, these early influences appear to have penetrated way into his mature works, touching upon the very basis and structure of his conception of Judaism. When we approach this from the point of view of the reception of Benjamin's work, where the philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno is considered perhaps the most important successor of Benjamin's legacy, it is important here to recognize how Scholem was truly the first to extend Benjamin's philosophical tradition to his own thought while in many ways remaining more loyal to the tenor and focus of the early categorical analysis. In this respect, The Marxist reception of the 70s was prone to error, tending to paint

⁵ Now with the publication of Scholem's journals and letters, we have a very reliable record of their early productive relationship. See Gershom Scholem, *Tagebücher*, I. Halbband, Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag, 1995. Hereafter [tag I].

⁶ Werner Scholem was later murdered in Buchenwald in 1940.

⁷ See [von berlin:59-61, 66-67] and in depth in the journals.

⁸ [tag I:71].

Scholem conservatively and failing to see his critique of Marxism as often more "radical" than their own. The need for a reappraisal of Scholem's work is, I believe, long overdue. I have therefore sought to make Benjamin's influence on Scholem's work one of the key aspects of this study, beginning with the early period and extending into his late studies on Kabbalah. It would also have been a task of great worth to extend the early political theology to Benjamin's more mature writings, particularly with regard to a messianic understanding of history. Yet this question, in its own magnitude and complexity, and necessarily predicated on a firm conception of the early period, will have to be reserved for a further project.

Despite these initial few words, the reader will find the personal anecdotes of the authors reduced to a minimum in the following study, not because they fail to make good reading but to focus instead on the main tendencies in their early thinking. I have therefore sought to restrict the narrative element to the chronology of the exchange and to the social and historical conditions that affected them rather than focusing on biographical events.⁹ The aim of this study is to provide a close reading of the authors and to reconstitute the character and verve of their early political theology. To this end, I have sought to explain their theory in an exegetical manner, favoring speculative commentary over personal association.¹⁰ Nevertheless, I do not think that it can be emphasized enough how thoroughly unique this partnership was in relation to its historical moment. At the same time due to the campaign to exterminate German and European Jewry, Benjamin and Scholem also form part of a generation which culminates centuries of German-Jewish culture. I have here tried to give the English-speaking reader insight into the intellectual atmosphere that gave rise to these ideas, from contemporary political and theological thinking in figures like Franz Rosenzweig, Ernst Bloch and Gustav Landauer, to historical influences such as Franz Joseph Molitor, Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Soren Kierkegaard.

One of the central questions facing this study is Benjamin's early relationship to Judaism. In his late *Passagen Werk*, he was to describe his stance

⁹ I have included several works of this type in the bibliography. Two examples are, Bernd Witte, *Walter Benjamin: mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Reinbek: 1985 and Momme Brodersen, *Spinne im eigenen Netz*, Elster Verlag, 1990.

¹⁰ I have chosen this approach for two reasons: first, with regard to Benjamin, the secondary literature is rife with personal and often seemingly arbitrary associations. I have tried here to consider Benjamin's work as a part of the corpus of German philosophy, open to inquiry and investigation, rather than as a private reserve for insiders with references which have taken on purely cult significance. Second, Scholem's early texts remain unknown and in need of explanation. I have concentrated here on exposing this critical dimension in Scholem's thought for those who seek an understanding of the origins of his most innovative approach to Jewish history and culture.

toward theology with the metaphor of ink and a blotter — theology permeating all areas of his thought. In his interaction with Scholem, these thoughts become more concerned with articulating a distinctly Jewish dimension, albeit a Judaism unique to what he himself had experienced. His condition in this regard, no less than Scholem's, was one to which all German-Jews were subjected: to either convert and thus abandon Judaism, assimilate and abandon the question, or turn to Zionism and seek an "Erneuerung des Judentums" a "rejuvenation of Judaism" in the words of Martin Buber. Not willing to be subjected to the terms constructed by any of these positions, Benjamin sought to forge his own way to an understanding of Judaism. If his goal was to be able one day to call his thinking a "philosophy of Judaism" as Scholem reports, we would be in a position to evaluate the degree to which this was achieved. But if this proves impossible due to Benjamin's own lack of knowledge in this area, we must then evaluate his legacy in Scholem, on whom the statement made a lasting impression.¹¹ In this respect, I think it is necessary to try to dispel a confusion which some have associated with such a project, an illusion which no doubt has much to do with the tremendous interest in the study of Judaism in Germany today. Clearly the wish to repair an intellectual tradition so utterly destroyed over a half century ago cannot be fulfilled by overcompensation. Instead, a careful evaluation is needed with regard to German Jewry, whereby the one does not rule out the other and a person can be understood as being both German and Jew. With this in mind, I did not see any reason to portray Benjamin as having been more occupied with Judaism than he was, nor the opposite for that matter. At best, I would only hope to have followed a course laid out by Scholem many years before: not seek to apply Judaism to Benjamin but rather Benjamin to Judaism.

The title of this study, *Metaphysics of the Profane: the Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*, should be qualified by a few remarks. I have taken to the term metaphysics to highlight the basic nature of the thinking addressed in this study: it is a philosophy of fundamental questions of politics and theology, drawing on a near scholastic aptitude for categorical analysis and Talmudic rigor in a conception of a divine continuity of meaning. In this way, it is in fact a philosophy of divine as well as profane questions. But as the study will show, the emphasis of the authors is distinctly orientated toward worldly affairs, not merely in the sense of somehow "secularizing" theological notions to take on profane meanings, but in advocating qualified restraint with regard to the divine

¹¹ [tag I:391]. Scholem reproduces this journal entry in [freund:45].

realm while searching for its link to the profane.¹² Rather than a metaphysics of divine realms, the early political theology is concerned with the profane and consciously address itself to it.

The use of the term "political theology" also requires some explanation. It stems from a desire on the part of this author for a concise phrase to serve as an umbrella for subject matter related to Messianism, speculations on divine language and on justice. It goes without saying that it has nothing to do with the Nazi theorist Carl Schmitt who used the term in the title of a publication in 1923.¹³ In contrast to Schmitt who spuriously claimed to have invented the term,¹⁴ the view presented here is that political theology begins with the Torah itself and with political and religious structure of the Israelites, their classes of priests and judges, the divine ordination of kings — in short, everything that led Josephus to coin the phrase "theocracy" in order to capture the meaning of their social and religious organization.¹⁵ It is in a biblical sense that political theology is used here.

With these general remarks aside, I would like to begin with an overview of the study and a chapter by chapter account. This work is divided into three sections reflecting three main areas of discussion: on Messianism, language and justice. The first section is perhaps the most accessible for readers familiar with Benjamin's early writings, for it attempts to frame the context of the discussion on Messianism within the categories he himself establishes. This is followed by a broader portrayal of Scholem, the categories of his theological politics and the metamorphosis this politics undergoes. The discussion then turns to the linguistic dimension of the

¹² As of late, there has been some discussion of a "secularizing" effect with regard to Scholem. See, for example, R.J. Werblowsky, "Tradition in 'säkularer' Kultur," and I. Wohlfarth, "'Haarscharf an der Grenze zwischen Religion und Nihilismus.' Zum Motiv des Zimzum bei Gershom Scholem," in: *Gershom Scholem. Zwischen den Disziplinen*, ed. by P. Schäfer and G. Smith, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995, 70-80, 176-257.

¹³ Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, Berlin:1923. On Benjamin's later connection to Schmitt, see Fadini, Ubaldo, "Esperienze della modernità: C. Schmitt e Walter Benjmain" in *La Politica*, Nr. 3-4, 1985, 43-58; Figal, Günter, "Vom Sinn der Geschichte. Zur Erörterung der politischen Theologie bei Carl Schmitt und Walter Benjamin" in *Dialektischer Negativismus. Michael Theunissen zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by E. Angehrn, H. Fink-Eitel et al., Frankfurt: 1992, 252-69. Having been published only at the end of this early period, Schmitt does not enter this discussion.

¹⁴ On Schmitt's claim, see his letter to Armin Mohler from April 14, 1952 in Taubes, Jacob, *Ad Carl Schmitt, . Gegenstrebige Fügung*, Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1987, 36. Heinrich Meier in his *Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss und das Begriff des Politischen*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988, 84-85, himself no radical critic of Schmitt, believes that Schmitt took it from the anarchist Michael Bakunin's *La Théologie Politique de Mazzini et l'Internationale*. (St. Imier: 1871) in *Oevres complètes de Bakounine*, Éditions Champ Libre, Volume I, However, if Schmitt had indeed sought to plagiarize from Bakunin, it would have been easier to read the shorter but complete Italian and French manuscripts rather than the extremely long and fragmented manuscript Meier cites. These can be found on pp. 93-106, 282-298 of the volume above.

¹⁵ See the discussion of theocracy in the first section, chapter one.

authors' exchange, examining more closely the proposals of Benjamin's early essay from 1916 "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" "On language as such and the language of man" in light of the history of linguistic speculation in Judaism. Benjamin's proposals on language, and its relationship to Judaic linguistics becomes a formidable influence in Scholem's first studies of Jewish mysticism. It is an influence, however, which he is unable to fully explore until his late essay of the 1970s, "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala" "The name of God and the linguistic theory of the Kabbalah," where he applies Benjamin's linguistic speculations to the history of the Kabbalah and Judaism. The reader will now hopefully be steeped in the perspectives and terminology of the authors for the third and final section on justice. It clearly bears the most complex structure and undoubtedly the most challenging to the reader. It focuses on their idea of divine justice, formulated firstly through Benjamin's critique of the notions of original responsibility, the highest good, law, and right, followed by Scholem's application of the categories to the Torah and particularly to the prophets. It is here in this final section where we see the political theology come to fruition as a metaphysical tradition.

I would now like to review the chapters in depth. Section one is centered on Benjamin's early concept of the Messianic in history. The advent of Messiah is clearly juxtaposed to the course of history shaped by the mighty and powerful. The Messiah, however, disrupts history and is determined to usher into worldly affairs a transformative age. In the first chapter, I ask whether this world-to-come is seen by Benjamin as a consequence of the Messiah's arrival, or a world fermented by humanity but consummated by the Messiah. In other words, does the Messiah bring on redemption or is the arrival of the Messiah, after the initiation of human activity, the *aposteriori* signal that redemption has come? This question, which is just as essential for revolutionaries contemplating revolution (in place of the Messiah) as it is for the messianic idea in Judaism, is taken up through an analysis of one of Benjamin's early texts, the "Theologisch-politisches Fragment" "Theological-Political Fragment."¹⁶ The categories which make up the "Fragment" form the basis for the discussion in this section as well as the political and theological terminology of the entire study. In chapter two, I attempt to formulate a re-occurring theme in Benjamin's approach: the need for a rigorous partition between the divine and profane. While the divine is enveloped in absolute terms, he directs his attention to

¹⁶ A good example of this is a question which Russian revolutionaries faced in the nineteenth century when considering whether a socialist society could be established without first undergoing capitalist phase, itself yielding an ultimately apocalyptic transition. See the discussion in Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1977.

the profane, speculating on the meaning of the division and opening up the realm to human activity. In the third chapter, I present a discussion of the role of humanity in the messianic drama, where Benjamin seeks to define a dimension of human activity capable of reaching the divine in representative form and, in the fourth chapter, how this largely unintentional activity requires the kind of devotion which he discovers in the hero of tragic drama. In seeking to understand the relationship between the fate of the hero and his or her devotion, the question of fate and character comes into play, with Benjamin drafting a short essay of the same title a few years later. In chapter five, I return to the two theological categories featured in the "Fragment," that of the *restitutio in integrum*, meaning the messianic promise of the restoration of things to their original state, and immortality as the guaranteed condition of humanity in a messianic age. I propose here the necessity of these categories, along with theocracy, for any messianic theory.

The chapter on nihilism, which concluded the first part of section one on Benjamin's messianic idea, makes the transition to a more narrative phase in this study, bringing together Benjamin's movement toward abstract, political speculation with the historical moment in which he is writing and with Scholem. Benjamin's early political activities in the German student movements and the influence of anarchist theory, which forms one of the centers of this study, are put aside in favor of a retreat from politics. It is arguable whether Benjamin is ever truly political in a practical sense, but his advocacy of a nihilism in conclusion to the "Fragment" has as much to do with the collapse of historical politics following the outbreak of the First World War, as with a renewed and intensified commitment to an abstract political theory, governed not by history but by a philosophy of right. In this, he affirms the role of theology in framing the contours of political analysis. Nihilism, as a "world politics," contends Benjamin, is also articulated as an affirmative, political idea by Scholem at the same period. In Scholem's case, nihilism is preceded by a more traditional, political notion of anarchism which is illustrated in chapter seven, where we see Scholem defining anarchism in opposition to his brother, the avowed independent socialist and later member of the *Reichstag*. Scholem can here be seen in the broader context of young, German-speaking Jews who discover a hidden affinity between Judaism and a utopian, revolutionary consciousness, centering around figures such as Martin Buber and Gustav Landauer. Scholem grasps this utopian dimension and seeks to steer it further toward a political conception of Judaism, one which is able to see the biblical notion of Zion not as a metaphorical covenant but as a living obligation and historical goal. Whether Zion should be interpreted as a metaphor or a program is

the focus of a debate between the two authors, featured in chapter eight. It is followed by an in-depth account of Scholem's early anarchist Zionism in chapter nine. Yet Scholem's activist front begins to retreat into the background as a more critical approach to the potential for immanent transformation emerges in 1918. This occurs while joining up with Benjamin in an intensive phase of intellectual exchange in Switzerland. This period is explored in some detail in the tenth chapter.

In the remaining two chapters of the first section on Messianism, we leave Benjamin behind on the shores of Europe and embark on a narrow journey in search of an overview of Scholem's theological politics. Departing from the early period, we begin in chapter eleven with Scholem's research into the Messianism of Sabbati Zvi in his essay "Redemption through Sin" (1936), followed by a synopsis of his later political reflections which I have termed a "critical anarchism" in chapter twelve. In both chapters, a new perspective is introduced to the early political theology: anarchism comes to describe elements within Judaism rather than political practice. In chapter eleven, cataclysmic tendencies in Jewish Messianism are understood as anarchic forces which yield new historical forms through their destructive activities. From this notion, we then are able to see how Scholem begins to evaluate radical changes in religious law and observance as anarchic elements within Judaism. The use of anarchism as a critical category, as I explain in chapter twelve, gives rise to a notion of Judaism beyond worldly confines, inexhaustible and constantly reinventing itself in the face of new traditions and historical constraints. Anarchism becomes the only position which makes religious sense, says Scholem.

The second tier of this early political theology is the conception of language which likewise constitutes the second section of this study. Turning back to 1916 and Benjamin's early essay "Über Sprache überhaupt und die Sprache des Menschen" "On language as such and the language of man," we find Benjamin employing the story of creation to construct a philosophy of language based on a concept of innate meaning. In his analysis, language is not the *means* to expression but *is* the expression of all things and ideas. Here the content of a thing is not expressed *through* language but *in* it. In this way, creation is key to Benjamin's theory and, by painting the broader context of linguistic speculation in Judaism, particularly Genesis and midrashic literature, Benjamin's categories emerge as part of this tradition.

The first chapter in this section deals with a crucial problem in this linguistic theory: if a thing or idea *is* its language, what is the meaning of a metaphor? And when referring to the divine, what else are we to find in language other than a metaphor? Through the question of a metaphor, Benjamin seeks to inquire into an existence which is beyond the possibility of expression, meaning here the existence of the divine within language. In the next chapter, he moves to the heart of the problem in Genesis: God expressed His inner substance to create humanity and ultimately the universe "in His image," but is Himself incommunicable, inaudible, and untranslatable. In chapter two, Benjamin introduces the notion of a magical dimension of language which he locates in Adam naming the animals. He is essentially asking: how could Adam have known the names of the created being unless they somehow communicated themselves to him? The name thus becomes the focal point of speculation on the linguistic expression of an object, the expression of its "substance of the intellect." In chapter three on symbolic revelation, Benjamin considers the magic defined in the relationship between an object and its name in the context of revelation, a transmission of this "substance" from the divine to the profane. A magical transition from the inexpressible to finite expression must take place here as well, he adds, supporting the observation with another passage from Genesis on the creation of Adam. In Benjamin's reading, he plays down the physical aspects of the transition of *ruach elohim*, God's spirit, to Adam, thus deliberately steering his interpretation away from Hamann and other linguistic theorists who emphasize an incarnation theory in the word of God forming the flesh of the son, in other words, a Christian linguistic theory. In the fourth chapter, the relationship between the expression of the named and the namer is brought fully into theological focus, with the genesic problem of knowledge in God's succeeding to Adam the act of naming. He seeks here to address the finite nature of the human word in relation to the infinite nature of God's. This linguistic transition from God to Adam, from a creating word to a naming one, and ultimately, after the expulsion from paradise, from divine language to the profane, is the subject of the fifth chapter on translation. By the notion of translation, Benjamin seeks to define a continuous transporting of one language into another, in the form of written and acoustic, animate and inanimate, profane and divine. In the expulsion from paradise, the expression of this translation was lost. What emerges in its place was a language of "damaged immediacy," as Benjamin writes, featured here in chapter six on the confusion of sign and symbol. In the breakdown of an immediate relationship between a name and the thing which is named, a multiplicity of words abound for the same object, just as a multiplicity of languages exist for the same expression.

Profane language emerges from paradise damaged. Yet human language is not without any reference to its predecessor, claims Benjamin, seeing within humanity a residue of the creating word of God. This creating word is preserved in profane expression in the language of judgment, he contends in chapter seven — the dimension of justice in the profane. Judgment is deemed the ray of hope through which a redeemed language of pure immediacy will once again be established, while immediacy harkens back to a pure linguistic state in the garden of Eden. The "irony" which Benjamin refers to at the end of this episode is the fact that the expulsion from paradise was not the birthplace of good and evil but an example of how God administers divine justice; the existence of the two in the form of the fruit of the tree precedes the forbidden act. Thus the lesson which this passage bears for Benjamin is that of the "mythical origins of law." This is then expanded in third section of this study, which we shall turn to shortly.

Chapter eight breaks from a close analysis of Benjamin to explain the discussion in the context of possible influences on the early philosophy of language. The newly published materials from Scholem reveal a tremendous debt to the Christian Kabbalist Franz Joseph Molitor and his book *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition, Philosophy of History or on Tradition* (1827), whose critical influence on Scholem began to take effect around the time of the authors intensive discussions on language. Indeed, if Benjamin sought a concise source for many of the ideas that he presents in his essay, he would have only had to turn to the seventh chapter of the first volume of Molitor's work to obtain a clear and sophisticated understanding of Jewish linguistic theory. In Scholem's enthusiastic reference to Molitor's work as "a true ideology of Zionism," he was to link himself in no uncertain terms to a conviction which Molitor shared: the notion of Hebrew being itself the divine language. It appears that Molitor and Scholem diverge from Benjamin at this point, who suggest in its place a theory of translation.

Benjamin's orientation to a philosophy of language, which is nevertheless supported by some of the main elements of classical, Jewish linguistic speculation, was a great impetus for Scholem and his early research into the Kabbalah. He wanted, in fact, to write his doctoral dissertation in 1921 on linguistic mysticism based largely on the discussions with Benjamin. But after some initial scholarly research in the vast uncharted waters of the history of the Kabbalah, he was forced to change his course. After fifty years of a tireless quest, Scholem was able to return to his youthful pursuit in the 1973 essay "Der Name Gottes und die

Sprachtheorie der Kabbala" "The name of God and the linguistic theory of the Kabbalah." This essay forms the subject of chapters nine through sixteen in the part dedicated to Scholem in the second section on language.

Perhaps the center of Scholem's essay, and that which marks his attempt to apply the early political theology of language to the history of the Kabbalah, is the assertion that linguistic speculation is metaphysical speculation, seen here as reflection on the meaning and truth of the Torah. Consequently, a metaphysical approach to creation is also the starting point of Scholem's study. The categories of his analysis begin, first of all, with the acoustic dimension of God's pronunciation i.e. "let there be light," and light occurs. Here expression is viewed much the same way as it was by Benjamin: substance is manifested *in* language and not *through* it, where language is more than simply a medium of expression. In chapter nine on the structure of symbolic mysticism, we see Scholem introducing a similar problem to that which we saw in Benjamin: how does a symbol express the inexpressible? Scholem links the "magic" of the symbol, in its ability to articulate the unpronounceable, to Benjamin's "linguistic mysticism," as he calls it, thereby paving the way for a broad study of mystical linguistics in terms first drawn up by Benjamin. In addition, Scholem establishes three points with which he seeks to define Jewish linguistic theory. First, that creation and revelation are linguistic expressions of God's infinite nature which confront the profane in the limited form of a symbol. Second, the name of God is the metaphysical origin of language, from which everything else emerged. Third, the theory of the name is located in the magic of its expression in the profane and its link to the human word. These three stipulations mark the focus of Scholem's analysis. The remaining chapters follow Scholem's journey through the history of Jewish linguistic thought, seeking to expose the ways in which his methodology is indebted to the early linguistic theory. Chapter ten on the creating word of God and His unpronounceable name returns to the paradox already addressed by Benjamin, that the name which God used to name Himself, the name to which He is addressed, is no longer expressible or pronounceable. It is a name that creates meaning but is itself meaningless. For Scholem, this paradox typifies the power of the divine. He draws a distinction between the unpronounceable name and God's creating word, providing the groundwork for the discussion of the hidden, divine combinations of the letters of a creating language. This is the subject of chapter eleven.

Post-biblical linguistic thinking in Judaism abounds in the possibilities of discovering elements of this creating language, even if only in the limited sense of a

symbolic form. If the Torah acted as the blueprint for the story of creation, which one of the earliest commentaries on Genesis, *Bereshit Rabbah*, suggests, then the discovery of this language must consist of deciphering a code concealed in the words of the Torah. Naturally, we encounter a problem with the physical aspects of creation when viewing words as the building blocks of the world, as Benjamin's notion of the spirit or breath of God comes into focus. The letters themselves, as the smallest particles of the word, turn to figurative atoms under a linguistic microscope. Their combinations, as the book *Sefer Yetzirah* proposes, is the key to their power. This tradition continues in medieval Spain, with Scholem pursuing the writings of Nachmanides, Moses De Leon and Joseph Gikatilla. These medieval thinkers are speculative grammarians of the divine name, as they search for the structure and meaning of the divine in symbolic form. In chapter twelve, figures from the Provence such as Isaac the Blind are introduced and contrasted to Schlegel's proposal that philosophers are grammarians of reason. But unlike philologists who view the written form as a secondary representation of true language, the Kabbalists see the written as the "true representation" of its secrets, says Scholem, situating Benjamin chiefly among them. Chapter thirteen explores the transition from early rabbinic thought to medieval, micro-linguistic speculation where the metaphysics of language are based on the secret dimensions of its atomic parts. Scholem considers here the contributions of the Ijyun circle to linguistic speculation in the Kabbalah, followed by a theory of a historical Torah which reveals a new meaning in every age. He then seeks to expose the metaphysical orientation of Jacob Ha'Kohen of Soria of the 13th century and Israel Saruk of the 17th century, implicitly linking them to Benjamin's speculations where paradisiacal language before its damaged immediacy is reconsidered. Scholem returns here to the question of whether Hebrew itself was the divine language, enabling a distinction between the views of the Kabbalists and Benjamin.

The micro-linguistic theory of the 13th century Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia takes on a central role in Scholem's essay, with Abulafia's linguistic "science of prophecy" forging the discussion in chapter fifteen. We see here how the Abulafia shares Benjamin's conception of linguistic intelligence, which the former recognizes not only in Hebrew as the divine language but also in every translated language. The divine name and the pursuit of knowledge remains at the core of the analysis, as well as a theory of linguistic magic. In short, we are able to detect quite a few of Benjamin's categories in Scholem's portrayal of Abulafia. The final chapter in this section on language consists of an attempt on Scholem's part to summarize the linguistic dimension of this political theology, drawing on the early categories

in the late research and suggesting a linguistic tradition to which Benjamin would belong.

The third and final section of this study concerns the idea of justice, the third dimension of this early political theology. By the very suggestion that justice is the substance of redemption, it can no longer be viewed as part of the profane but solely as part of the divine. Thus, the very first proposal in Scholem's and Benjamin's conception is the necessity to subscribe justice to the divine and construct in its place a notion of judgment in the profane. In a redemptive conception of justice, we discover early references imbued with new meaning. The judging word, which we encountered in the second section in Benjamin's linguistic theory, is explored here in great detail, as well as the notions of the mystical origins of law, fate and responsibility. The relationship between character and fate which we first encountered in the first section on Messianism, is here coupled with the problem of the origins of evil. In chapter one, I have sought to juxtapose Kierkegaard's notion of responsibility to that of Benjamin's in seeking to explain how the origins of evil in the first encounter with sin undergoes a radical reinterpretation in Benjamin's metaphysics of Genesis. Similar to Kierkegaard, a new ethics is proposed here on the basis of the actions of the individual and not on original sin. Yet rather than an original sin transferred to individual sin, Benjamin seeks an overthrow of the notion of sin altogether, substituting in its place a redemptive pursuit of responsibility. In contrast to the universalization of suffering which Kierkegaard proposes, Benjamin seeks the universalization of the Jew.

The second chapter centers around the ideas of distributive justice, virtue and the material and spiritual restitution in the just state. In this chapter, Scholem's journals again play an important role, both in having recorded discussions and by presenting us with a hitherto unknown text by Benjamin entitled "Notizen zu einer Arbeit über die Kategorie der Gerechtigkeit" "Notes to a study on the category of justice." Along with exploring terms which belong to a *restitutio in integrum* of the 1921 "Fragment," these notes also constitute a precursor to the concept of justice in his "Kritik der Gewalt", "Critique of Violence." Benjamin differentiates ethical, worldly activity once again from the category of justice, focusing here on the difference between the terms *mishpat* and *tzedek* which he formulates in Hebrew. In chapter three, I discuss one of Scholem's unpublished manuscripts from the archive in Jerusalem entitled "Thesen über den Begriff der Gerechtigkeit" "Theses on the Concept of Justice." This text appears to be a direct commentary on Benjamin's notes on justice, with the first few theses attempting to pinpoint the sources of

Benjamin's text. Scholem reflects on the idea of distributive justice and comes to the conclusion that it must point to something beyond the mere universalization of goods, be it material goods or 'the highest good.' Echoing Benjamin's terminology, he attempts to distinguish justice from virtue, moving to a discussion of the morphology of the word *tzedek* from a perspective enriched by the categories of the divine and profane. Violence is then the focus of his inquiry into virtue and righteousness. Here Scholem seeks a more complex discussion of the relationship between justice and the force which establishes it, which is taken up in part B of the "Theses." Since it is apparent that part B was written many years after Benjamin's "Notes," I break off from the text here and bring other earlier manuscripts into the discussion, only to return to part B in chapter seven.

Chapter four on prophetic justice is based on another of Scholem's unpublished manuscripts, focusing on the prophecy of Jonah as well as the groundwork of divine justice in prophecy as a whole. The distinction between justice and judgment takes center stage in the terms *tzedek* and *mishpat*. The postponement of judgment in the story of Jonah, more specifically, the postponement of the *execution* of judgment, is suggested as an indicator of the meaning of divine justice. If justice in Jonah's prophecy is exhibited in the postponement of the execution of judgment, then justice on earth would be the permanent suspension of the Last Judgment. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the *tzadik*, the righteous figure who represents for Scholem the "being of justice."

Scholem's thinking in Switzerland in 1918 is the subject of chapter five, in which the aftermath of the First World War disrupts a decisive, political nihilism which he and Benjamin constructed. In this period of critical reflection on practical politics, a debate ensued on the meaning and importance of the Bolshevik revolution. Scholem's thoughts from this time are preserved in an unpublished, hand-written manuscript bearing this same title. In his late recollections of the debate, he writes that he defended the principle of revolutionary dictatorship, if this meant the dictatorship of the impoverished and not necessarily the proletariat.¹⁷ Scholem's sympathies, according to the late reflections, lay with the social revolutionaries against the Bolsheviks. Yet in his unpublished manuscript from this period, Scholem was more inclined to entertain the messianic qualities of a Bolshevik movement which imparted a "magic" to its ranks in the notion of a "dictatorship of poverty" — a magic linked to the messianic idea. But as a historical

¹⁷ [freund:100-101]

force promising future justice, it proved unable to judge its own actions in the present. The dictatorship of poverty, Scholem writes in 1918, is constituted to end in blood.

This brings us to the sixth chapter of justice which concerns the idea of violence. In this chapter, we turn our attention to one of the most celebrated essays of Benjamin's early writings, the "Kritik der Gewalt" "Critique of Violence." It presents itself in many ways as the most political of the early pieces, making explicit claims with regard to the question of justified violence in the hands of the state, the police and the judicial system in contrast to the counter-institutions of strikes and anti-war pacifism. However, the proposals with which Benjamin concludes his critique have little to do with practical, political activity in the end. In one sense, we see him defending the anarchist-pacifist challenge to the monopoly of state violence. The true basis of violence, he argues, is divine violence which God manifests in the world. He defines here the worldly counter-force to an arbitrary or "mythical" violence as a "politics of pure means." By this, Benjamin points to the friendly exchange between individuals as a basis for a new politics, itself formed from a "culture of the heart." What begins with a rather political thesis turns to theological speculation on divine violence and a messianic community of freely acting individuals. The "Critique of Violence" also seems to have had a considerable impact on Scholem, as part B of his "Theses on the Concept of Justice" reveals. In part B, Scholem seeks to bring together his analysis of justice in the form of divine postponement with several of Benjamin's ideas. Chapter seven speculates on the meaning of the remaining theses of Scholem's manuscript in this context.

This brings us to the eighth and final chapter of the third section of justice, which is also the final chapter of the study. In this last analysis on the impact of the early political theology on the mature Scholem, we move into the late 1950s to consider Scholem's conception of the righteous figure. In the manuscript on Jonah and in the "Theses on the Concept of Justice," we witnessed a growing interest in the role of the worldly righteous in justice, focusing on the linguistic relationship between justice, charity and righteousness. This takes its cue from the focus on virtue, *mishpat* and the righteous individual in Benjamin's "Notes" and "Critique of Violence," and presents many of the categories again with renewed vigor in an essay for the Eranos Jahrbuch in 1958 on "Die Lehre vom 'Gerechten' in der jüdischen Mystik" "The Teachings on the 'Just' in Jewish Mysticism." Here Scholem divides the figure of righteousness into three types, through which many

of the early categories are expressed. These are the righteous, the pious and the scholar — *tzadik*, *hasid*, and *talmid chacham*. The final few pages explore Scholem's personal link to the meaning embedded in names and the anarchic, collectivist, even comical eruption of justice in the world in the form of the righteous figure. From the perspective established in this study, there is no doubt that the characteristics which Scholem finds in the righteous are also those of the Messiah.

The focus of this study can be summarized as an attempt to reconstruct the early discussion of Benjamin and Scholem, seeking to emphasize the mutual effect that each had on the other in the body of ideas pertaining to politics and theology. It is also a study of the lasting influence that this early political theology was to have on Scholem. Should it make a contribution to the understanding of these areas of research, this author would be quite gratified. In its preparation, there are several individuals to whom I am indebted. I would like to thank Michael Löwy, Werner Konitzer, Anson Rabinbach, Christopher Powers, Kelly Stoner, Peter Carrier, Misako Takamoto, Martin Schmidt, and Jürgend Thaler for their comments on earlier stages of the manuscript. Thanks to the Visiting Research Fellows program at the Hebrew University and staff at the National and University Library in Jerusalem, I was able to consult the Scholem Archives in 1998. Special thanks is due to Joseph Dan and his guidance through every step of this study as well as Dietrich Böhler and the Hans Jonas Centre at the Free University of Berlin which provided an intellectual home for my work. Without them, this project would not have been possible. Despite this support, any remaining errors are my own.