Reality in the Name of God, or, Divine Insistence: An Essay on Creation, Infinity, and the Ontological Implications of Kabbalah

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CHAPTER TWO

The Kabbalah of Being

§9. BADIOU’S FIRST THESIS: BEING IS SETS

So far, we have focused on what is unsatisfying in the two key discourses on God in the current epoch—phenomenology and process theology. These two elegant discourses have been criticized rather crudely for correlationism, a failure to think the infinite properly, incoherence, falling prey to the critique of onto-theo-logy, and/or the implications of refusing to accept God as creator. The only positive stance that has truly been defended is that the Kabbalah can be translated into philosophy and thereby offers a true rendering of God. But how does Kabbalah do this? Rather than simply spelling out how Kabbalah avoids the pitfalls related above to phenomenology and process theology, we will have to detour again through philosophical argumentation and the theories of more contemporary thinkers, since the goal here is not simply to present Kabbalistic ideas as such, but to present them as philosophically articulated theses. As noted, the work of the French philosopher Badiou will help us to do so, despite Badiou’s self-declared atheism. The first step in articulating the positive Kabbalistic theory of ontology will consist in working through some of the key theses of Badiou’s ontology.

The first and primary thesis informing Badiou’s ontology is the idea that “‘ontology=mathematics’” (BE 13). When we want to understand being in and of itself as being for Badiou, we must turn to mathematics, as mathematics articulates and inscribes
this idea (BE 3). By mathematics, Badiou in particular refers to post-Cantorian set theory. Set theory sets out to treat all possible entities as included in collections or forming collections and thereby sets forth the extensional aggregate as the form of how all that can be can be presented. Now, when we want to say what being is in and of itself, being qua being, we have to exclude all other qualities or properties. Ontology, ideally, is just about what is expressible about being itself and not any other quality or trait. In this way, one is not asking how being appears to a subject, but rather how being is itself without reference to what it means to a specific entity or to consciousness. For instance, we are not asking how a particular being exists, but just about being in and of itself, is-ness.

For Badiou, set theory forms the most basic expression of being because, following Leibniz, “What is not a being is not a being” (BE 53). The most basic thing that characterizes being is that it relates to unity and suchness, as noted earlier in reference to the Heideggerian rendering of ontological difference. Through its focus on extensional collections, set theory captures the very notion that nothing is that is not a unity or aggregate of some kind. But at the same time, one can distinguish in set theory between what is collected in a set and the set or frame itself. In this way, one should not confuse the transcendental unity of a collection with some substratum (eternal or otherwise) that underlies things or some Kantian thing in itself. Rather, the fact that set theory, in encoding ontological difference, allows us to distinguish what is in a set (regardless of what the set aggregates, whether it is of qualities, relations, perceives, etc.) means we no longer have to search for withdrawn substratums and suggest they hide from us in hidden dimensions. In this way, set theory is an actual writing and inscription of ontological difference as such. Set theory is only interested in what can be articulated as
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a unity and said to be such and such. Set theory only concerns itself with collections and collections of collections. It begins with “neither cosmos nor phenomena, neither cause nor substance” and thereby makes the least possible presuppositions about the nature and form of being (Badiou 2005, 23). Whereas another ontology will immediately attempt to describe the world in its qualitative richness and divide and categorize beings, mathematics as ontology, as set theory, only concerns itself with the most minimal aspect of being, which is to say, with being itself alone.

Badiou’s first thesis is that ontology should begin simply by “saying there is a multiplicity of multiplicities” (Badiou 2005, 23). Here, one also has the distinction between being and existence. That is, set theoretical ontology does not make any presuppositions about what can exist or does exist, what is given to experience or what is not empirically found. It does not in its most basic axiom and beginning say if any particular person or entity exists. It is not even making any claims on space or time or their natures. It does not say what there is; it states what any possible “situation” can be about as such and in general (BE 27). Set theoretical ontology thereby describes the basic framework of any and all possible statements about being, precisely by remaining indifferent to what one might happen to run across in phenomenological lived experience.

Badiou calls any general set containing things a situation. That is, for instance, one can speak of the situation of the room I am in now and state what this set includes in all its elements. In such a set one would include a computer, books, pens, chewing gum, a cell phone, etc. All these individual elements belong to the situation of ‘this room’ (Badiou 2005, 25). While for Badiou other discourses besides ontology speak about the actual nature of entities and how to
categorize them, ontology does not say anything more about beings beyond their belonging or not belong to sets and the nature of sets (Badiou 2005, 22). For example, anthropology would tell us what types of humans there are, how they behave, etc. Ontology would simply state what can be said about the act of forming a unity as such, whether that unity be something that includes humans or not. A situation is simply the presentation of the multiplicities that are associated with it and included in it. Ontology is about the general form of situations. In particular, Badiou thinks ontology is about “the pure multiple,” “the multiple ‘in–itself’” (BE 28). This means that pure ontology would be about inconsistent multiplicities that present only multiplicities.

Even to speak about there being a collection as such, as a unity, is already to speak about the state of a situation rather than the situation itself. However, for Badiou, one never truly encounters a pure situation; one always already finds oneself confronted with states of situation in which things appear as unities and as parts of defined totalities. In this way, to anticipate a further key thesis of Badiou’s, “the one is not” in the situation, but there are ones in the state of situation in which all things have been collected and counted as one (BE 29). Without the state of situation, the multiple would not even be recognized, since there would be endless multiples of multiples. Ultimately for Badiou, set theory makes good on the idea proclaimed since Parmenides that being and thinking are one and the same. Whatever can be thought and collected is itself a being. The thesis here that marks Badiou as the next great ontologist following Heidegger is that all is multiple, all is sets.

§10. WHAT IS AN EXTENSIONAL SET?

Before continuing, let’s be sure that we understand the specific way post-Cantorian theory
defines a set. Set theory has what is called an “iterative” notion of the set (Moore 2001, xiv). A set or collection is dependent on its members. The members first must be. The members precede the set itself. That is, there is something that is collected into sets (to make the claims of pure ontology we will have to posit nothing and its marking and not any objects or things as commonly understood). This is why Badiou says that the situation as pure presentation is just multiples of multiples, as here he is naming the infinity of things that precedes sets. The state of the situation is already a seeing of things together as sets. Of course, as already noted, one never actually finds presented this pure situation and thereby only ever finds things as already grouped into sets and unities. Sets come later to collect these things into unities. But these sets do not refer to the properties or natures of the elements they aggregate. Rather, the sets merely gather them together. All can belong to sets including other sets. As we will see, set theory also claims that there is no one set encompassing the infinity of all things and sets, a set of all possible sets.

We must be clear that a set is what it is simply because of the things included in it. For instance, the set of all human beings is not a set due to the properties of humans showing they belong together; the set of all human beings merely collects together a series of elements. A set is then a recognition of the many and its turning into a one. This is why one can talk about the set of all things in the cushions of my couch as much as the set of all sea mammals. Both are just the joining together of elements already there. This is also what is meant when it is said that set theory uses an extensional notion of a set. An intentional set would have a rule determining what can and cannot belong to it. For instance, the concept of rationality will determine what things can be grouped in a set of all rational things. But an
extensional set or iterative set works from the ground up and just bundles together things willy-nilly, as it were.

This is why one can say that consciousness itself aggregates sets. Consciousness (especially according to Husserl) has object-directed intuition. But that means it is always looking at things as unities, as sets. Consciousness itself is able both to recognize sets and to posit them. For this reason, I can be aware of the set of pillows on a bed, one pillow, the room, etc. Consciousness itself is constantly intending unities and recognizing them. But this is not simply true of consciousness. Being in and of itself is characterized by such unities.

That a set, as a collection, is indifferent to the things it includes does not mean that one cannot take these elements and perform operations. For instance, one can take part of the elements of a set and make a new subset. If a set includes A, B, and C, a subset would be just A and C. For Badiou, one should “abandon all hope of explicitly defining the notion of a set” as the pure multiple is simply “founded solely by a relation of ‘belonging to’” (*BE* 43). Now, even though a set presupposes the things it collects, in pure ontology, as we will discover, the only thing that need be presupposed is literally nothing when articulating the general laws of being as such. In addition, Badiou will show how this nothing or void is to be identified with the infinite multiplicities of multiples of a situation that he sees as being without any unity as of yet. In some ways, there is a virtuous circle here, as one will only be able to show that sets presuppose infinities of infinites of things that they collect and aggregate into particular sets only once set theory itself has demonstrated the being of the actual infinite. In other words, this is an equation that will philosophically confirm the Kabbalistic view that zero
and infinity not only exist, but that one equals the other and that that is the least one can say about both.

It is due to the set having such a minimal being that it is articulated and understood via the axioms that govern its laws and functioning. One of the axioms, for example, precludes a set belonging to itself in order to avoid the paradoxes associated with such a condition as articulated famously by Bertrand Russell: “Russell’s paradox can best be illustrated by a famous analogy popularly known as the story of the barber of Seville. The barber of Seville shaves all the men in the city of Seville who do not shave themselves. Now comes the obvious question: Does the barber of Seville shave himself? If he does, then he doesn’t. If he doesn’t, then he does. This is a logical paradox” (Aczel 2001, 181). These paradoxes and this axiom show that there is no set of all sets, as such a set would have to include itself. This is also why an intensional set model is rejected, since such an intensional rule-governed set would ultimately be subject to the paradoxes of a set belonging to itself. In an intensional model, there is no reason not to define a set as governed by the concept of belonging to oneself. And for this reason concepts or laws cannot govern how sets and their elements and members are determined—only the mere act of collection can. This is also why one will presuppose that only zero, as zero, is identified with the pure inconsistency of the nonexistent whole of things.

§ 11. THE SECOND THESIS: ‘THE ONE IS NOT’

On the basis of these ideas (that there is no set of all sets, that sets presuppose infinity of infinites, etc.), Badiou proposes his second main thesis: “The one is not” (BE 52). Badiou immediately asserts that the idea that there is no one-all means that God also does not exist (or perhaps more precisely, “God is dead”) as God for Badiou only names the whole and all-
encompassment of things (Badiou 2006, 26; BE 277). It is partly comprehensible why Badiou makes this assertion, given that God is defined as infinite, such that many have argued that there can only be one infinite, meaning that God is all-inclusive. Following Cantor, Badiou posits that there is an infinity of infinities. There is no whole or set of all sets, and thus God as the single infinite cannot stand. If God equals the infinite unity of all things, then such a God (if Badiou and post-Cantorian set theory are right) cannot hold true. As Hallward notes, “No one, perhaps, has taken the death of God as seriously as Badiou” (BST 7).

But God need not be identified simply with monism. In fact, this is only the pantheistic determination of God. And if Badiou’s theory demolishes pantheism as a viable option, then so much the better, as discussed above with regards to how the cash value of the critique of onto-theo-logy referred in part only to pantheism. Now Badiou seems to think that mysticism and theism, when they posit God beyond being, are only positing a One-All that does in fact exist:

I often come across this path of thought. It is well known that, at a conceptual level, it may be found in negative theologies, for which the exteriority-to-situation of being is revealed in its heterogeneity to any presentation and to any predication; that is, in its radical alterity to both the multiple form of situations and to the regime of the count-as-one, an alterity which institutes the One of being, torn from the multiple, and nameable exclusively as absolute Other. From the point of view of experience, this path consecrates itself to mystical annihilation; an annihilation in which, on the basis
of an interruption of all presentative situations, and at the end of a negative spiritual exercise, a Presence is gained, a presence which is exactly that of the being of the One as non-being, thus the annulment of all functions of the count of One. Finally, in terms of language, this path of thought poses that it is the poetic resource of language alone, through its sabotage of the law of nominations, which is. \(BE\ 26\)

It is true that even some versions of Kabbalah read as pantheistic in orientation (and we hope here to show why they should be rejected).\(^{10}\) But Badiou himself

\(^{10}\) Here is a famous quote from Kabbalah that suggests pantheism: “Do not say, ‘This is stone and not God.’ God forbid! Rather, all existence is God, and this stone is a thing pervaded by divinity” (Matt 1996, 24). Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbai said: “Everything is in him and he is in everything” (Michaelson 2009, 44). But none of the quotes the pantheistic Kabbalist brings forth need be interpreted in this manner. For instance, Isaiah professed “I am and there is none else,” but this could simply refer to the unicity of God. Jay Michaelson argues very directly for simplistic pantheism (if God is infinite then God must be all inclusive [Michaelson 2009, 27]). This observation of course would also count for Deuteronomy 4:35: “There is none besides him.” In Everything is God, Michaelson claims a straightforward pantheism relives one of the “burden” of monotheism (Michaelson 2009, 98). For us, it is the truth of infinity that relieves us of the burden of the pantheistic temptation. Michaelson is of course interested in defining Judaism as pantheism both to render its religious commandments as optional and to make it appear to be the same as so-called Eastern wisdom and thereby more attractive to those born Jewish and who unfortunately reject their own religion (Michaelson 2009, 202-8). Spinoza is of course a famous pantheist, and I will return to a critique of his position via Badiou in another context. Of the many
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claims pure presentation of inconsistency (multiplicities of multiplicities, infinity of infinities) is itself not something we can encounter, but rather only posit. In this way, Badiou cannot apply his critique to negative theologies as long as they are not positing God to be the all-inclusive whole of all. Badiou’s theory also requires an unpresentable. Badiou will later posit something that is not being qua being, the event, so arguing that negative theology does so and (just on that basis) can also not hold as a critique. Mysticism does yield an insight into the absolutely other, but this does not mean it is necessarily positing that God is a set of all sets. It could be that the mystic is simply experiencing the pure inconsistency of which Badiou speaks. But God

problems of pantheism, one is also that by making all things one with God things they lose their individuality. Diversity becomes an illusion. This is the view of Hinduism as articulated by Shankara. One then has the problem of making sense of all the diversity we see and experience. Monotheism takes it as real as it is created. God also becomes nothing as God is nothing in particular. Some think that the idea that all is God including myself opens up the idea that acting as God commands is just to do as God desires, which means to be true to oneself, and rather than begin against God, one is with God as part of God (Aaron 2005, 151). But the idea of a command includes any instinct, etc. in a pantheism, thus rendering it not only incompatible with divine commands, but also as traditionally noted an amoral doctrine. Also, David Aaron here wants to state that we appear as a form of God, but that we are not God; however, his position metaphysically implies it and states it later as he says we exist within God (Aaron 2005, 134, 138). Besides being an interpretation of the infinity of God, I take pantheism to be arguing that there is no God without the world (and in many formulations that God without the world is nothing). Hence, the earlier engagement with process theology also counts as an engagement with pantheism.
is also not the world or the whole, but rather beyond it, according to monotheism. God is not the one of being.

That being is not a totality does not imply that God, as that which lies beyond being (as for negative theology, for instance), also falls to the wayside. Monotheism is posting that God is one. But God’s oneness does not mean that God is one in any numerical sense (one rather than three) (Seeskin 1991, 7). What is asserted is something qualitative rather than quantitative: God is absolutely other, unique, beyond: “To whom will you liken Me, that I should be equal?” (Isaiah 40:25). In fact, to make a Lacanian point, God is that one point that in-exists or insists and is not part of the whole and is not included in it (showing that totality or the whole is always a sham and illusion). God as impossible from the perspective of being puts the lie to the whole or one-all. The whole cannot recognize God, as for it God does not exist, since from the perspective of the world God cannot possibly be part of it. When God is defined as absolutely other, it is not being as such that is being defined, but that which transcends it. After all, Gödel already showed us that there will always be axioms and statements fundamental to a system that cannot be proven within it.

Now, before continuing, we can say that rather than showing that God is not, Badiou’s thesis concerning the one actually confirms a first Kabbalistic idea for us: the notion of shvirah (which literally means ‘breaking’). Shvirah names the mystical experience of creation’s imperfection, its not being perfect. Or, as Joseph Dan puts it, “Existence does not begin with a perfect Creator bringing into being an imperfect universe; rather, the existence of the universe is the result of an inherent flaw or crisis within the infinite . . . and the purpose of creation is to correct it” (Dan 2007, 75). In this context, the
imperfect universe is itself imperfect precisely due to the excess of the infinite. It is not so much the purpose of creation to correct the infinite; rather creation itself is shattered and broken due to its relation to the infinite for Kabbalah. Lurianic Kabbalah posits the notion that we exist in a universe that is made of scattered and broken shards, due to its being created by and in relation to God as absolute infinity. Isaac Luria presents the results of his experience in this manner: “Afterward, Grace merged and shattered, /and the vessel collapsed and fell; / meaning, he also was unable to bear the light” (KC 16). Creation’s inability to bear infinity breaks it into pieces and renders it incomplete. The world is not closed. Dov Baer said: “God cannot be clothed in you, for God is infinite and no vessel can contain God—unless you think of yourself as ayin [nothing]” (qtd. Raviv 2008, 82). All vessels of creation and creatures are exploded by what they cannot contain—the absolute infinite as such. Shvirah names the mystical experience of the world being shattered and made inconsistent precisely due to its being related to the infinite. Here then, with Badiou and post-Cantorian set theory, we have a philosophical confirmation of this experimental insight much more so than a denial of it, despite Badiou’s assertions.

§12. THE INFINITE MADE FINITE: THE MEANING OF THE TRANSFINITE

Given that much of the argumentation here depends on the Cantorian notion of the infinite, it is best to lay this idea out in some detail. Cantor actually does not talk only about the infinite, but rather defines something he calls the “transfinite (transfinitum)” or “supra-finite (suprafinitum)” which is an infinite determined and well-ordered as much as any finite number (Cantor, qtd. Rioux 2000, 120). By inventing this term, Cantor wishes to emphasize the difference
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between his definition of the infinite and the notion of the infinite as some indeterminable and inconceivably large number. Cantor believes he has discovered a new type of number—an infinite kind. The concept of number is thereby expanded by the introduction of a new set of well-defined and distinguishable numbers (Rioux 2000, 117). What is key is that Cantor can propose the transfinite as a new kind of number by treating the infinite itself in finite terms.

Unsurprisingly, there are finite sets that can be put into one-to-one correspondence with each other in terms of the amount of elements each includes. The set including A and B is in a one-to-one correspondence with the set containing C and D. Rather than numbers being something that one counts up like fingers or heartbeats in some intuitive act, for Cantor, “it is to sets or to collections that numbers are assigned” (Tiles 2004, 96). We do not determine that there are “as many cups as saucers by checking to see that there are no saucerless cups,” rather, a set has a determined number of objects and can be compared to another set (Tiles 2004, 96). If the two sets correspond, they have the same number. In this way, one can simply extend the notion of number to a set with an infinite collection such that we know that the set of all natural numbers has the same ordinal number as the set of all even numbers due only to seeing whether they correspond or not and not by counting one by one each element of each set (Tiles 2004, 97). This is what Cantor means by the suprafinite. It is a set with an actual infinite number of elements that can be put into correspondence with other sets of the same ordinality, just as a set with two elements can be known to have the same number as a set with corresponding elements. Since we could never sit down and count to infinity, the transfinite is known not by counting, but by correlating one set with another, one series with another. All the even
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numbers correlate with all the all odd numbers. This is a determination we can know just by the act of putting the two sets into correspondence, and thus we have transfinite numbers that are ordered and understandable.

For Cantor, there will not be a largest transfinite, but there is a smallest transfinite, and it is precisely the set of all natural numbers. Cantor thereby can treat the infinite as countable and orderable by treating the infinite as finite. Cantor here differs radically from all previous philosophical thought. By stating that there is a set of all natural numbers, Cantor is not saying that such a set might one day in some vast future be articulated (it is not a question of what Hegel called ‘the bad infinite,’ where we just have a sequence of one number after another and thereby a constant bounding and limiting of what is supposedly infinite), but rather an infinite that it is given all at once in reality and in thought and not by succession. The mere act of stating and marking that one has a set of all the natural numbers and showing how it corresponds to the set of all even numbers means it has been determined here and now. If we simply counted things one by one, we would only have non-infinite numbers. But since number can also be determined by comparing sets, we can have transfinite numbers as well.

From Aristotle onwards, the infinite was only seen as something potential (and never actual or given). It was something ideal that one could say possibly exists or that in principle exists, but not something that could be treated as a number in the same way that the number 5 could. But if the number 5 is simply a set with 5 elements and any set corresponding one-to-one with that set also counts as 5, then the same operation can be performed on the infinite. The potential infinite of Aristotle is always finite, since one will always only have counted a finite
amount of numbers on one’s way to counting infinity. But if one discusses an infinite set in correspondence with another, one has already before one the set itself.

For Aristotle as well, the infinite was “unbounded,” whereas Cantor’s transfinite numbers “are not entirely unlimited” as they exist in classes (all the even numbers for instance) (Rioux 2000, 119). Now some might say that even the posting of an infinite set is a conjuring trick of mathematical writing. Here the objection would consist of noting that when a normal set is written, one lists all of its elements and what it includes and contains. But here one does not of course list all the natural numbers. Rather one lists a certain number and then puts an ellipsis (…) or an ‘etc.’ or states ‘and so on’ or some other stand-in for the actual infinity of numbers. But then one will one say one does not have an infinite set, but only a marker of one. I agree. But I do not think this is purely a conjuring trick that undermines the Cantorian points here. Quite the opposite. The transfinite depends on the power of the signifier and itself encapsulates and names one of the key powers of the signifier, its power to always exceed and at the same time include itself. The signifier via an ellipsis names the infinity of numbers just by doing so. That is to say, one has a set of whatever can be marked as such. And it is the act of marking itself that shows how the signifier can both be used to hold a place and mention or refer to the content of that place in the absence of itself. It is this very power that makes for the inconsistency of the infinity of infinities that the transfinite will name, as the signifier refers to itself at the same time that it marks a place for itself and another. Once the world is subjected to the signifier, it is already subjected to the difference between frame and content (sets) and to the mark as content itself.

When one writes ‘and so on’, one has all the numbers because all the numbers are themselves
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differences from each other. A signifier as pure difference (if only in the sense of not being any other signifier) allows it to take on any meaning in its negativity. An ellipsis is a perfect concretization of this power. Numbers themselves are differential in a similar way. And one can have them all by knowing their process of generation and thus can mark them all down in a signifier alone. The meaning of one signifier is always determined by another and so on. All numbers at once mark themselves and the rule of their formation, the very way in which the act of meaning-definition through metaphor implies an endless regress and progress. The signifier is itself infinite insofar as it defines itself and its other without end. The signifier is always in excess of itself and always a surplus. It is already a transfinite set marking itself as set/frame by way of the space it requires and infinite via its endless production of meanings through other signifiers. The signifier bursts open and fractures all in this way. A signifier always contains more than it contains, just as the cardinality of the transfinite via the power set does.

What we mean to say is always exceeded by what we say to mean. The lesser contains the greater that exceeds it. That is its infinity. This is in some ways another way of stating the sheer power of defining number in terms of one-to-one correspondence, for it is by stating ‘and so on’ that we have all the numbers since it is just a matter of what can be stated and not enumerated one by one. Only the signifier in its power of marking and defining can have all at once without having it. And because the signifier is self-referential, it exceeds itself in the same way (as we will show) the transfinite does. The signifier always has more in it than it initially has and leads to more signifiers. A book for example can lead to many books. The signifier “…” can contain an infinity of numbers. We are thereby arguing that what Cantorian set theory
does in essence is to formalize the very power of the
signifier itself. The transfinite defines the infinite as
literally that which has no end or bound, the incomple-
te. Cantorian theory writes out via the signifier and
makes explicit the incompletion of the signifier. In
this way, a transfinite set is a conjuring trick, but one
that demonstrates the power of the signifier itself and
how the transfinite is another name for that power.

To return to the explicit content of Cantor’s
views, there is no such infinity in an ordinal sense. If
we name the set of all even numbers \( w \), then we can
always add another number to it and have \( w+1 \), etc.
That is to say, when we take the set of all natural
numbers, the last number would have to be larger than
any of the preceding ones. But any natural number, no
matter how large, is still finite such that what would
be greater than the largest number is infinite. In this
way, new infinites can be formed by adding finite
numbers to an undetermined infinite set (Aczel 2001,
142). In other words, based on the same principle of
generation one uses in counting, a succession of
infinites can be counted beginning with \( w \). \( W \) names
the idea that in an infinite set there is no greatest
number. There is no limit. \( W \) names the limit of that
which is limited only be being named as a whole set.
One then simply adds a number and obtains the next
greater number than \( w \).

However, Cantor is not really interested in
identifying the transfinite with what we have called \( w \)
or even \( w+1 \). There would be no greatest in this series
as well. Rather, the transfinite is identified by Cantor
not with ordinality but with cardinality. Every finite
number does not have the same ordinality and
cardinality except the numbers 0 and 1, where one has
just as many subsets as the ordinal has sets, for
example. In any event, no matter the ordinality of a
finite set, its cardinality as marked by its power-set is
also finite. The power of a finite set is as finite as its
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Ordinal number no matter how one renders the elements it contains, even if the power set is larger. One could count all the elements. But with sets of infinite numbers, the power set (the total number of subsets that can be produced) is bigger than the amount of elements in it. This means that an infinite set, such as the set of all natural numbers, can be seen to lead to a power-set that contains more than infinity or a larger infinity. Cantor interestingly names the ordinal set with the Hebrew letter aleph (the first infinite—for instance, the set of all natural numbers) and names the power set produced by it the second aleph. Here, we truly have two infinities, and one is larger than the other. Aleph thus basically refers to the infinity of natural numbers and any set that can be put into one-to-one correspondence with it and all those sets have the same cardinality. This is the infinity we are familiar with (although we mostly thought of it as only potentially infinite). And it is not clear that beyond the infinities produced by taking power sets we can speak of any other numerical infinite. But now Cantor has shown via the power-set that we can generate ever larger infinities of larger cardinality. This process is endless. Just as we took the power set of aleph to reach the second aleph, we can take the power set of the second aleph to articulate yet another and larger infinity and so on. To speak then of an infinity of infinities is to truly speak of the infinity of ever larger infinite cardinalities.

Whereas before one might have thought there might be only one infinite (and pantheists took this idea and the definition of God as infinite to posit that God is all), now we have an infinity of actual infinities. Not only is the first aleph without limits, but there is an infinity of infinities without limits. These infinities are distinct and distinguishable. The notion of the power-set also shows that even a part of an infinite set can be greater than its whole (Tiles 2004, 63), whereas
earlier the use of one-to-one correspondence showed that a part cannot be equal to the whole. This is in many ways the two distinct revolutions Cantor brought to the idea of the infinite. On the side of ordinality via correspondence, one can see a part being the same as the whole, whereas on the side of cardinality the power set leads to ever larger and distinct infinities. And it is the latter that demonstrates the shvirah, the infinity of infinities, the lack of the one-all whole.

That Cantor named the first transfinite cardinality with a Hebrew letter constitutes a not-so-secret wink towards how Kabbalah is at play here. As Amir Aczel writes, “Kabbalists seem to have had a firm grasp of the concept of infinity . . . They understood that infinity could contain finite parts, but that the whole, infinity itself, was immeasurably larger than its parts” (Aczel 2001, 36). And insofar as Lurianic Kabbalah sees the containers of the world shattered by the relation to the infinite, it already hinted at Cantor. Now, I do not know if Cantor knew Kabbalah. He would probably not reveal that any more than he would want to reveal that he and his wife were both descended from Jews who had converted to Christianity, but continued to marry only people descended from such Jews. In any event, “a kabbalist would appreciate . . . Cantor’s decision to symbolize various types of infinite with the alef” as “the alef is the uncarved black, preceding the shaping of words, the verbal formulations” (Matt 1998, 109). This idea for us will have even further implications and show the implications of Kabbalah for philosophy. For example, Badiou thinks being is in excess of language due to the infinity of infinities we have laid out here (Badiou 2005, 22). There is no reason that language could not be put into one-to-one correspondence with the set of all natural numbers via letters and their combinations that form words. It is in fact being’s very
subjection to the signifier that enables it to be transfinite and to express an infinity of infinities. In this way, the issue is not being exceeding language, as all things are subjected to the signifier or differentiality and are thereby able to express the transfinite. As long as a word can be any length of letters, then letters can be treated in the same way as numbers. In this way, we will be able to use set theory to confirm the Kabbalistic idea that creation was made from letters and numbers.

§13. CREATION FROM NUMBERS (SETS/LETTERS): THE SEFIROT

The Kabbalah firstly insists on seeing divinity and creation revealed through what it calls the sefirot. This term literally refers to counting, to numbers. And just as numbers work on a base ten, so there are ten sefirot: “The ten Sefirot are the basis of all that is defined numerically; thus you see that the total quality of numerals is more than ten as mathematicians well know” (Rav Yehuda Hayyat, qtd. Hallamish 1999, 127). While clearly one can list numerals beyond ten, the meaning and nature of them is already determined as they repeat what was determined in the first sequence. As number, such sefirot are like candles lighted in that no change occurs as the power of each is passed onto the next (Hallamish 1999, 158). If God is nothing or nought insofar as God is beyond human comprehension, God and God’s creation can be revealed through the procession of the divine numbers: “According to Lurianic thought, the structure of the ten sefirot also presents the basic structural characteristic of everything that exists, be it spiritual or material” (Dan 2007, 71). God does not manifest himself, but he does create through a universe that has been coded and decoded in numbers and numerical terms. These sefirot are the language of God.
As opposed to Neo-Platonism, which sees emanation as a process proceeding outwards from God or the One, Kabbalah sees God’s creation not as emanation, but rather as a textual enactment. God created the world using numbers, and its nature and meaning can be found by understanding the basic nature of numbers themselves. And if the world is made of numbers, then it shows not only a structural and combinatorial aspect, but also that differentiated beings are interconnected just as numbers are. Each number is bounded and limited by another in an immanent development. The later sefirot are contained in the previous ones until they are manifest as something new and independent. Such a development shows what many theoreticians of science call ‘emergence’. Emergence occurs when, for instance, atoms come together to produce an entirely new thing. Hydrogen and oxygen combine to form water. But water is something with new properties that cannot be found in the hydrogen and oxygen atoms. It is the sefirot that express and found this aspect of being. Entities may appear and seem independent, but they are still connected with the whole out of which they emerged. The world of nature expresses itself in this way and the sefirot explore its opening. Natural entities are founded on self-organization, one that can be understood with reference to numbers. Thus, for Kabbalah numbers are just as natural as an organic entity. The complexity of the world is like the complexity one finds as numbering increases in the divine matrix. This is its self-differentiating enactment in creation via numbers and letters.

It must be emphasized that these numbers exist independently of any numerals that code them. It is for this reason that zero itself will not simply be a mark, but the mark of the void itself that insists on itself. Such a stance should not be surprising given
that set theory wants to speak about things in themselves, and numbers are the most primary things it can relate to. Number is not something we count and bring into existence. Sets collect together something already existing. But that does not mean the numbers already exist in those things themselves. In set theory, numbers are built out of the empty set and thereby presuppose only that set. That one has before one 2 apples does not mean the number 2 arises from the apples, but rather that number exists outside of the apples collected and is put into one-to-one correspondence with the two apples. That is, the number two both adheres in being itself (there are two apples) and is not dependent on the apples to exist.

This position is Pythagorean in nature. Whether Pythagoreanism influenced Kabbalah or vice versa cannot be determined here, but what is clear is that the position of Badiou, set theory, and the idea we are developing is neo-Pythagorean in nature. As Aristotle explains, Pythagoreans devoted themselves to mathematics, they were the first to advance this study, and . . . they thought its principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they seemed to see many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being—more than in fire and earth and water (such and such a modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and reason, another being opportunity—and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible); since, again, they saw that the attributers and the ratios of the musical scale were expressible in numbers; since, then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be molded after numbers,
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and the numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number. And all the properties of numbers and scales which they could show to agree with attributes and parts and the whole arrangement of the heavens, they collected and fitted into the scheme; and if there was a gap anywhere, they readily made additions so as to make their whole theory coherent. (Metaphysics AF, 985b, 24-333; 986a, 1-7)

Numbers enable one to know things, and more importantly, they compose the very ontological substance of things. It is not just a matter of things having to be numbered to be apprehended, but that numbers make up what things are and thereby are real in themselves. We have already noted how Badiou’s position that set theory expresses being qua being entails that anything countable can count as an entity. But this means that numbers themselves are entities in their own right as well. While we can say that anything that is known is numerable, more fundamentally, we have been saying that anything that is is numerable and expressible numerically. The whole world is structured in and through number. We do gain knowledge of the world via numbers and sets, but also have to recognize that numbers are things as well, forming what is and forming entities themselves.

Cantor himself upheld that numbers must exist outside of the mind: “Reality can be ascribed to numbers in so far as they must be taken as expression or image of the events and relationships of that outer world which is exterior to the intellect, as, for instance, the various number-classes (I), (II), (III), etc. are representatives of powers which are actually found
in corporeal and intellectual nature” (Cantor, qtd. Rioux 2000, 122). The power of numbering does not depend on a human mind to count or enumerate them. For Cantor, the set of all numbers exists from eternity in God himself. The problem with this idea is that we are arguing that God insists beyond being. If we place numbers beyond being, then it is not clear how their inhering in God helps on this side of the equation, in accounting for how numbers compose being or how they exist independently of being.

As Mary Tiles notes, Cantor uses an argument similar to Pascal:

In order for there to be variable quantity in some mathematical study, the ‘domain’ of its variability strictly speaking must be known before through a definition. However, this domain cannot itself be something variable, since otherwise each fixed support for the study would collapse. Thus this ‘domain’ is a definite, actually finite set of values. Thus each potential infinite, if it is rigorously applicable mathematically, presupposes an actual infinite. (Cantor, qtd. Tiles 2004, 29)

As Tiles notes, this argument presupposes that “mathematical entities unlike physical ones” do not “change over time nor come into being and go out of existence” (Tiles 2004, 49). But as we will argue, the numbers such as the sefirot arise and are created. If they exist already in God, can it be said that they are created? What can count as a number has a definite and specified definition and rule for membership. For this reason, Cantor can argue that even the idea of a potential infinite (that we can go on indefinitely counting from any number onwards simply by adding another) already presupposes an actual infinite. “No last number can be named” by us, but we also cannot
“compute and therefore write down names for all the numbers” (Tiles 2004, 50). If all the numbers do exist they cannot exist in this world as such. The universe contains a definite (although mind bogglingly large) number of atoms. In addition, numbers cannot be our own creations as we only discover their nature. We are one person counting even before we count ourselves. They precede us. But if they precede the existence of the world, then God does not create them. God does not need to create them to create with them, but if they are eternal ideas, it is not clear how they create the world itself since the world would only be a reflection of something already given.

If the domain of ideas that Cantor speaks about is simply a divine idea, then these numbers only exist imperfectly for us in our own minds. This was the position of Augustine in *The City of God*: “Every number is known to Him whose understanding cannot be numbered. Although the infinite series of numbers cannot be numbered, this infinity is not outside His comprehension. It must follow that every infinite is, in a way we cannot express, made finite to God” (Augustine, qtd. Aczel 2001, 140). God already comprehends all numbers including the ones Cantor calls transfinite. This view also holds that anything God creates must already be known by God. Something cannot be known by God as uncreated, since as God knows it is known perfectly and exists in the same way it would be for us in the world as all it is: “My thoughts are not like your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8). Additionally, even when God is not referenced, numbers are taken to be unchanging and eternal, as are the laws for their production and definition. Only our minds grasp them, as only our minds could grasp such entities, since numbers could not be discovered through empirical investigation. The senses only speak of multiplicities and never something as distinct as unity. We also perceive only ever a partial list of all
the possible numbers that do exist around us. Since numbers are eminently cognizable, they must exist as one would not be able to know so well what was merely a product of minds. This view holds that for anything we do define sensibly, mathematics ultimately discovers something already there in transcendent reality.

In this way we will have to hold that even if God knows something or something inheres in God, it can still be created out of nothing in this world. In this world, there are only 10 books on my desk. There could not be an infinity of books since there are not an infinite amount of atoms. Physical being is not synonymous with being as such. While being as such is incomplete and marked by the signifier (the transfinite), physical being might be finite and totalizable in some ways. The way in which this world is marked by the transfinite will have to be accounted for in another way. It will have to speak to the nature of the signifier, the incompletion of the world, etc. The Kabbalah hints at this idea when it claims that the sefirot are not truly separated from God, they are revelations of God, but God already includes all possible numbers. But not every number is created. However, numbers in their created form are not arbitrary or imperfect. They are just as they are for the divine and divine in themselves as they express it. While we cannot know these numbers as fully as God does, we have knowledge of the created world through numbers precisely because these numbers are the same as they are for God.

When we study the Book of Nature, a book written in numbers, we decipher the structure given to it by the divine and thereby also what is known by God. The names and numbers of things have an ontological status of their own. It is therefore not only a question of Pythagoreanism, but also of Platonism. The essentials exist eternally. This is a realism no
correlationism would tolerate. But at the same time, all the numbers that are cannot be written down in this world; they can only be noted and written in God. God can then write them out of nothing in this world—a limited amount. This divine writing itself marks the world as infinite, but in and through the world’s incompletion and by its very subjection to number itself. The transfinite is the infinite as finite, since it occurs here. Cantor is not putting forth that there is an actual infinity of, for example, atoms in this created world. Rather, he is showing how our own ability to count seemingly endlessly depends on something (and will lead him to an ontological proof of God) and that the infinite in finite garb, the transfinite, marks the radically finite and incomplete nature of a world that is composed in and by writing itself. To be realist, then, we do not need to argue there is an infinity of objects or things or numbers in this world. But an infinite of numbers must at least obtain somehow and/or somewhere if only in the mind of God.

It must be clear that we are not saying that Cantor came up with a convention for merely speaking about numbers. Numbers obtain outside of any inscription. It is not a matter of ideal statements only, nor of mathematical norms. It is a matter rather of both holding that God obtains outside of mind along with an actual infinity of numbers and also maintaining that God as creator creates out of nothing in and through numbers and thereby creates what already was for Him out of nothing.

§14. CREATION FROM LETTERS (SETS/NAMES): SEFER YETZIRAH

In Hebrew, each letter is also a number. And in many cases these numbers are just aspects of each letter. Not surprisingly, the Kabbalah also says that letters are part and parcel of creation itself. The book
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of Kabbalah which best expresses this idea is the Book of Creation (*Sefer Yetzirah*), which the Kabbalah claims Abraham himself composed. It reads:

> With 32 mystical paths of Wisdom / engraved yah / the Lord of Hosts / the God of Israel / the living God / the King of the universe / El Shaddai / Merciful and Gracious / high and exalted / Dwelling in eternity / Whose name is Holy- / He is lofty and holy- / And he created His universe / with three books (Sepharim) / with text (Sepher) / with number (Sephar) / and with communication (Sippur). (*SY* 1:1)

The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters such that combining them with the 10 basic numbers leads to 32 paths: “Ten Sefirot of Nothingness / And 22 foundation letters” (*SY* 1:2). If there is an argument that Hebrew is truly the holy language and the language of creation (and not just another language), then it is largely on the basis of this aspect. *Sefer Yetzirah* insists on calling the ten sefirot the “Ten Sefirot of Nothingness” and we will later connect this idea to the notion of the empty set and void as the basis of number. But at this point we can also mention that for Kabbalah, “Their limit has no end,” again echoing set theory (*SY* 1:4). And this text insists that God is “singular” and “has no second,” thereby emphasizing that we will have to philosophically confirm the thesis of God being located outside of number as a unicity (*SY* 1:7).

At this point, we need to point to set theory and Badiou’s use of it, so as to confirm a way of seeing being as numbers. For letters are themselves pure differences like two sets, differentiated only by one lacking an element the other has. In this way as well, letters are not just marks, but the very vehicle of
creation: “these are the twenty-two letters . . . And with them He made three Books / And with them He created his universe, / and He formed with them all that was ever formed, / and all that ever will be formed” (SY 6:6). With these letters and their combinations, one can produce the infinities of Cantorian set theory, such that we can see all as a book infinite in length, even though it is formed on the basis of letters. This is the ontological function of letters and through letters the ontological structure of the world can be found. To know how to permute these letters and their basic rules is to know how “heaven and earth were created” (Brachot 55a).

Now, if we simply want all the permutations of the entire Hebrew alphabet we arrive at the number $1.12400073 \times 10^{21}$. Such a number is not infinite, but it is certainly overwhelming and would be an index of infinity itself for those unable to articulate precisely its power. But even this number of permutations does not restrict the series from being counted ad infinitum. In this way, it may be very directly the infinite as the infinity of things themselves and the transfinite in particular characterizing the world. From the infinite One (God) comes itself an infinity, and an infinity of infinities as expressed by way of creation via letters.

These letters are not atoms as indivisible, hard physical substances. But even a theory of atoms ultimately has to see letters as expressing the fundamental nature of things, as Lucretius did: “Thus easier ‘tis to hold that many things / Have primarily bodies in common (as we see / The same letters common to many words” (Lucretius 1977, Book 1). This reference is not arbitrary (NKS 861), but unavoidable given that any basic element, in order to be basic, will have to exhibit the characteristics of letters: “Compounded out of different elements- / not since few only, as common letters, run / Through all the words, or not two words are made, / One and the
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other, from all like elements. / But since they all, as a
general rule, are not / The same as all” (Lucretius
1997, Book 2). Once one admits a basic matrix, one
will have to find a way for combinations to take place
in the same way that one finds with letters. And
letters form words not through individual units, but
only in combination. The ancient Greeks emphasized
this with the word *stoicheion*. It reflects the common
way in which letters and physical elements both have
an atomic character. But the atomic nature of letters is
not to be hard, indivisible substances, but rather pure
differences with their substantiality arising by being
related to each other. Letters express basic ontological
qualities and show how the physical should be
perceived from a differential perspective.

The structural character of letters reveals the true
atomism. This structural character again comes from
having no intrinsic substantial properties. Letters are
seemingly purely conceptual entities except that they
have form and sound. As phonemes, they are pure
differences. They are almost nothing, without any real
material, except that in opposition to each other they
take on form and sound. They do not have any
meaning in and of themselves, except if they are taken
as numbers. But if they are taken just as letters they
disappear as meaningful. They recede into visual
marks, into images and pictographs. The letter thereby
erases itself. This is why letters also relate to what
cannot be said. Now, most would simply say that
individual letters just represent phonetic sounds we
hear. The shape of the letter is thereby totally arbitrary
and bears no apparent connection to what we hear. In
this way, letters have again no intrinsic meaning. They
can only take on meaning by being related to other
letters and in opposition to them. Alone, a letter is just
a mark or sound without purpose or significance. It is
for this reason that “the rabbis declared that writing
must compose at least two letters” (Faur 2000, 28). To
take one of the most classical examples in English, the phonemes b and p are opposed. However, in Hebrew, p is opposed to f. In English, one is voiced and the other not, but this difference in and of itself allows us to know that ‘bore’ is not ‘pore’. And it is via such differences that God signs the world with his own signature.

Recall that for Badiou the elements of a set can themselves be represented by letters and the difference between the members of a set is “the difference of the same to same, that is, the pure proposition of two letters” (Badiou, qtd. BST 172). And this is also partly the basis for saying that sets are made of sets, as the differences between sets is just such a minimal difference. These members themselves do not intrinsically belong to a set as the set is just a collection. For this reason, set theory can make all the claims it wants simply by saying that the elements of sets are pure differences, letters. What is interesting is that despite this aspect of pure difference, Lacan relegates letters to the register of the Real rather than to the Symbolic. The letters are excluded from symbolization for Lacan. The letter is a foundational exclusion of language. While language requires it as a condition, it is not read when one reads and understands a text for instance. If one were to focus on the letters, one would have pictures and lose meaning. Letters are thereby transcendent to what they give rise to. They are a nonsense out of which sense comes forth. It is thus only when a text becomes opaque that the letter insists and asserts its force.

This is particularly true for Lacan concerning scientific and mathematics texts. They are composed of formulas, equations, etc. consisting almost exclusively of numbers and letters. These letters are not signifiers, but the “material structure that creates the possibility of the signifier” itself (Weiss 2009, 117). Letters have “no referent” outside the register of
signification itself (Weiss 2009, 117). But the letter insists in Lacan as an “exception to the chain” (Weiss 2009, 117) and returns to upset it if only by way of slips of the tongue where one letter might substitute another and through a difference point to something. Since meaning is ideal, the letter is identified with materiality. And this material is opaque and resistant, but insistent insofar as it can destroy meaning. But it is not the materiality of the ink on paper. It is of the Real, which means it always returns to its place, is impossibility, and names the gaps or fractures of meaningful networks. For Lacan also, one can overcome fantasy precisely by turning to math and its way of reducing reality to letters, whereas in physics, letters often refer to something (the E of $E=mc^2$ is energy). But letters as pure differences cannot be replaced by another signifier, as they note the absence of a signified. Mathematics is thereby purer than physics insofar as it is a formal language with only letters: “A mathematical letter marks, not any positive entity, but the lack of objects and objectivity” (Clemens 2003, 89).

For Derrida, Lacan’s idea that the letter is thereby something in-divisible is wrong insofar as there is always a “divisibility or internal difference of the so-called ultimate element (stoikheion, trait, letter, seminal mark)” (Derrida 1996, 69). But it is not clear that for Lacan letters are not differences themselves. Letters, even if elementary, are not in one sense divisible except as pure difference, which is itself founded on nothing (as we shall see). More importantly, modern science, for Lacan following Alexandre Koyre, became possible once the real was reduced to the mathematical and that means to letters. Science thereby devotes itself to an analysis of purely differential being. It literalizes reality such that it can see it as diverse and multiple. This is why infinity arises in the world at the moment when modern
science begins investigating reality in this way. This view also contends that the mark or letter creates space rather than space preceding the mark: “To inscribe a mark is to posit two things: the mark (its materiality, as a trace of ink, for example) and its place. If one affects the mark, its trace remains, in the form of place” (Miller 1997, 46).

More importantly, one should not forget that letters are ultimately linked to names and compose them. But it may be that a letter can also function as a name. In particular, this issue will arise relative to the mark for the empty set. That occurs, as Badiou reveals, by identifying being qua being with the letter. The letter insists in its power by the mark that, while unfolding the infinite, also leads back to the unique one. For it is by way of the name that creation via letters finds one of its most powerful expressions: “This is a sign / [Alef with them all, and all of them with Alef] / he foresees, transforms and makes / all that is formed and all that is spoken / one Name / A sign of this thing / twenty objects in a single body” (SY 3:7).

And as has already been argued, “What is not a being is not a being,” and that implies that every being is a set, named/numbered. Being qua being always occurs as counted as one. But to be counted means anything that is is already named and numbered. And this means that being itself consists of names and numbers at its most fundamental level. We already attempted to show what it means to speak to the world’s ontological constitution as letters, but letters already can be counted as numbers. When the Kabbalah says that things are composed from letters and numbers, it means on one side pure difference, and on the other, the numerable and nameable. Of course, many might suspect the Kabbalah to have a view of names as being natural and expressing the very essences of things. If things are divinely created,
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then its name is as well. First, Kabbalah only makes this claim for Hebrew names. That is, insofar as Hebrew is the divine language of creation, only the Hebrew name of a thing can reveal its true essence. Second, it is not clear that names do not often reveal such an essence. It is well-known that the numerical value of names of colors in Hebrew corresponds to the same proportions as the proportions between the wavelengths of colors when arranged properly. The word for water in Hebrew, for instance, has three letters—two of the same and one of another type apparently mirroring the molecule formula of water. Whether or not such a theory of essential names can be fully supported is not our concern here, as for us all that matters is that all that is is named and that name captures its transcendental unity and status as a being as such. In addition, the qualities of any given thing can be articulated by names, such that even if the names were arbitrary, taken all together they figure each thing. That is, one would not want here to claim that the map is the territory, or that a name is the thing named. But the name names a fundamental aspect of the thing no matter what the thing is, and no thing can go without name. Even if we name something ‘whatchamacallit’ or ‘unknown’, we still have given it a name and thereby shown that it is a being. Anytime something is named a new existence is carved out of the world. All of this is to say that the materiality of language embodies essence.

The transcendental nature of being (for instance, the transcendental unity each being requires) is apprehended only through names. It is not a question of names imitating something greater than them, but of names themselves forming the fundament of being. All that can be named can be truly known. We do not just label things, but rather true knowledge of the world arises by way of the name itself. Names are not then arbitrary in terms of their structure and function. Here,
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one has a nominalism in which universals such as whiteness are seen as themselves names, but therein lies their power to reveal being rather than merely abstract from it. Each name has an ontological status of its own as name.

From the perspective of Badiou’s ontology, every situation is rife with names. If it is possible that there is an infinity of names, then a specific situation might even be condensed into less than an infinite number of names. But this is no more than to say that it is made up of sets (names/numbers). And these names can be named by others without any reference to the nature of the thing named, just as a person can belong to a state simply by way of an “identity card” (BST 85). As Hallward notes, “the only form of predication involved here is belonging itself,” such that a name is always a proper one (BST 85). Even if I simply refer to the pen and my keyboard, this designation numerates a being and offers it a proper name. Each being is individual—related to itself and differentiated from all others. But in speaking thusly, we are not restricted only to names, as each thing so named is numerable at the same time. We have then something larger than a mathematics. We have an ontology wherein the minimal constituents of any possible situation are noted. We do not need to ask what is re-presented by the name, but can just by names themselves learn about the being of it. The name finds itself in itself and not in something else outside of it.

One might here than say that by looking at being as purely nameable/numerable, one simply brackets “the material qualities (this shape, purpose, history, and son)” and does not speak to the specific nature of a particular object (BST 57). But I do not think this is truly a worry, as we will later discuss how mathematization of things (which itself expresses the fundamental ontological thrust we have been articulating) captures these qualities. If anything that
is, even in its material particularity, can be mathematized, then to seek out its being in this fashion is to seek out its very substantiality and nature. One can have a set of all relations, qualities, etc. of one marked-out thing. And that set of relations or properties can itself be marked by sets of further complex mathematical properties. Particular beings are not thereby truly excluded by this approach, as their nature will find itself captured by names, numbers, and letters given that reality itself is fundamentally informed by them. “[T]he concept of name is absolute,” such that any particular thing is a proper name first and foremost (BE 378). Before we ask what makes this car what it is or attempt to deal with it in its particularity, we know some basic things about it—such as that it has a transcendental unity as expressed in and by its name. We can also say that such names are, as Kripke called them, ‘rigid designators’. Such designators capture the transcendental unity of a being and what amounts to its substantial substratum. They are necessary components of any being. Without such rigid designators, anything would simply be dissolvable into its components. But at the same time, what is individualized can always be part of a larger set.

It is important to note here that letters are sets even if they are purely differential relations. That is, when we are forced to account for numbers, letters, etc. as ontologically fundamental, we are forced to note that they too are sets and not just elements of sets (sets are after all made up of other sets—any element also plays the role of set). In doing so, it cannot be that objects or things are what is most fundamental. Letters are not clearly independent substances that exist in their own right solely. Rather they only exist as pure differences and as differences linked together—as a set. As we will argue later, this relationalism shows why letters are related to bits: “So what this means is
that in a computer numbers are represented by sequences of 0’s and 1’s, much like sequences of white and black cells in systems like cellular automata” (NKS 117). Of course, in computer code bits make up letters and numbers: “But in a computer, numbers are not elementary objects. Instead, they must be represented explicitly, typically by giving a sequence of digits” (NKS 116). But this is true only insofar as these bits are themselves such relational entities—meaning that bits themselves are a form of lettering. Once you admit that numbers, letters, sets, and bits are fundamental, then one’s very outlook on the world and its inherent differentiation changes. It is no longer a matter of the world being differentiated into chairs, moons, and frogs as substratums underlying all other qualities and properties. As letters become included in the list of fundamental things, the world is differentiated into sets as the objects we are used to are themselves sets and come into being through letters, numbers, bits.

Also, two things may have all the same qualities, making them indiscernible. But there will always be at least one aspect that keeps them apart and shows they are two—their names themselves as two different collections. Names/numbers (sets) are themselves the very medium in which the nature of things is grasped in their being. Since Galileo, nature itself, in its diversity, reveals itself in a writing system that at its most basic is about what is numerable. Number is the form of being itself. When we reduce the plurality of what is to number, we retain its plurality even if its material qualities will have to be articulated at a latter point. Take here as an example my voice (and this will be an example we will return to). First, in its very being, my voice expresses itself as a being, as one thing numerable as such (and that is here expressed in its proper name as ‘my voice’). But my voice has or may have many qualities—hoarse, scratchy, quiet,
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depth, etc. When we determine my voice in its being as such, we do not treat it as a thing, but precisely as its name. It merely notes a set of which these qualities could belong. If we were to concentrate on my voice as a thing, then we end up describing how it appears to the perceiving subject or attempt to pinpoint which qualities seen are truly parts of the thing. But it will be our contention that only the mathematicization of the thing can reveal this ultimately. Also, treating a voice as a thing means attempting to understand its qualities—what makes something deep. Only an analysis of sound waves and the nature of sound could reveal this, as just describing the sound or contrasting it with other sounds adds nothing new. Finally, in treating it as a thing, we may be forced to search for a substratum that names that which underlies all these qualities and divides them between essential and accidental. But such a substratum always ends up only being a reification, hypostatization, and projection of the name itself into a shadowy thing in itself that haunts what is right before us: a named set of properties, relations, etc.

The most famous attempt to achieve such a theory, Aristotle’s, reveals this. For Aristotle, substance is ultimately that of which all is said, but it is not said of anything else. Here, the very grammatical nature of things is taken for granted as naming being. In particular, substance cannot be anything other than proper names (all substance is treated as a proper name). My voice is not said of anything else, but many things are said of it. But while my voice can be said to be deep, depth itself can in turn be given the same status once it is seen as a name. In addition, when we will want to deal with its qualities, then we can express them as sound waves, etc., which means the same thing as mathematical relations. A recording of my voice is not a representation of my voice. It is my voice. And this
recording is possible precisely since the voice itself can be expressed strictly in terms of mathematical relations pure and simple. This math is built out of sets, the sets that first express to us the most basic elements of being.

§15. THE GOD OF CANTORIANISM

First let us clarify the background of this Cantorian set theory, specifically, what it now means to speak of God as infinite. First, as opposed to Badiou who thinks that this theory undermines the idea that God exists by undermining the idea that there is a set of all sets or whole, this theory potentially undermines viewing God as omniscient. That is, if there can be no set of all sets, it is not clear how God can be all-knowing, since total knowledge would presumably require a totality to know. Gary Mar lays out the issue in his essay, “Why ‘Cantorian’ Arguments Against the Existence of God Do Not Work.” Mar summarizes the argument against the existence of God based on the impossibility of omniscience in this manner: “1) If God exists, then God is omniscient. 2) If God is omniscient, then, by definition, God knows all [or alternatively, the set of all] truths. 3) If Cantor’s theorem is true, then there is no set of all truths. 4) But Cantor’s theorem is true. 5) Therefore, God does not exist” (Mar 1993, 430). Mar attempts to refute this argument by showing how “the non-existence of a set of all sets does not entail the impossibility or incoherence of quantification over the universe of all sets” and that a “set of all truths” is not “needed to make sense of the notion of omniscience as knowledge of all truths” (Mar 1993, 433). Following Mar, we can say that God’s not being able to articulate a set of all sets is no more problematic than God not being able to lift something heavier than the heaviest thing or know what color hair a non-existent person had (Mar 1993, 438). It is not required of an
omniscient or all-powerful God to know or be able to do absurd or nonsensical things.

These considerations adhere as well to Russelian set paradoxes. I would also add that the atheist argument begs the question in terms of truths. It is not clear that there are an infinite number of truths about the universe. One could then very easily have a set of these truths. Now some might argue here that there would be an infinite regress that would upset divine omniscience, even if we restrict the set of truths to being a finite set. This regress would occur insofar as the set of all truths would itself have to be recognized as a truth and so on. But even if that were so, there is no real introduction of new content such that to know the first set of finite truths is to know them even if such a regress were started. Second, the only thing so far shown to be infinite and thereby subject to the rule of infinity of infinities is numbers and perhaps letter-combination/words. But in both cases, one has the very rule to know any possible word or number. Even a human can know any possible letter combination except those infinite in length. God could know a word infinite in length given God’s posited infinity.

Mar further shows that the argument against God here undermines itself insofar as if it “were to succeed,” it would show that “there is for example, no universal propositional quantification” and so the argument’s propositions could not themselves be coherently articulated (Mar 1993, 438). To be more particular, to state “for all x, if x exists, then x is not God” is to already presuppose that one has total knowledge of all things (Mar 1993, 438). From whatever angle we look at it, the one key way in which Cantorianism might undermine monotheism is not successful.

Badiou’s assertions and the above considerations might lead us to believe that God is not a part of Cantorianism explicitly. However, it is quite the
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counter. Cantor himself used his notion of the transfinite both to clarify and to attempt to prove a monotheistic position. For Cantor, God is the “absolutely infinite,” and that means an infinity greater than anything one can conceive including the transfinite (Mar 1993, 439-41). Such a conception subtracts God from the order of finite and transfinite sets heretofore considered and places God on the level of that which is greater than anything conceivable. The transfinite can lead to larger and larger infinities via the power-set. But God is absolute. There is no way to show that a part or series of subsets exceed God. In this way, God names a qualitative infinite rather than a quantitative one.

Such a qualitative and “absolute infinite can only be recognized, and never known, not even approximately” (Cantor, qtd. Moore 2001, 128). In some ways, we could say here that the sheer transcendent nature of God places God beyond the transfinite since as Cantor showed those could be measured and ordered numerically. God is not the largest possible number, but rather something qualitatively different from sets and numbering in God’s absolute infinity. God marks the mathematical conception of infinity as itself limited (which was always the case given Cantor’s treatment of the finite as an infinite number). God is without number for Cantor. The divine infinite then exceeds the contours of counting and collections. It inhabits its own space.

If for Badiou being qua being is defined by sets and sets presuppose all that exists, then God does not remain within the field of Being. But rather than say that God does not ex-ist, we should say God in-sists (an idea we will elaborate further). It must be emphasized that God as absolutely infinite is not an attempt to find a set of all sets by other means. God cannot be expressed within set theory, but only as that which exceeds it. In this way, Cantor the mathe-
matician becomes Cantor the theologian the instant he posits an infinity outside the bounds of the transfinite. The greatest cannot be associated with a number. The transfinite as we noted was not perfectly infinite. It was always undermined by its own power set that exposed it as relative. But God is perfectly infinite. Such perfection is hidden from set theory. The absolute infinite is also one as unique. There cannot be two absolutes.

Absolute infinity is not truly knowable. We still might say that we partly comprehend it and not just as that which cannot be known, but rather we gain partial insight into it via the infinity determined by the transfinite. For instance, the transfinite tells us what the entirety of all natural numbers would look like as a set and how that set can itself be exceeded. In pointing that out, we gain a sense of what the absolute largest would have to refer to. At the same time, God as absolutely infinite is a necessary presupposition and condition for conceiving the transfinite that is now exposed for Cantor. As has been noted, the identity conditions of sets are determined by their elements. A transfinite set, such as the set of all natural numbers, therefore presupposes the actual existence of all the natural numbers. For Cantor, “All these particular modes of the transfinite have existed form eternity as ideas in the Divine intellect” (Cantor, qtd. Mar 1993, 440). It is God as absolutely infinite that could guarantee the transfinite. Cantor has thus proposed a unique ontological argument for the existence of God using mathematical conceptions alone. Ignasi Jane writes:

Indeed, the existence of the absolute is said by Cantor to be inferable from the limitlessness in the realm of the transfinite of the sequence of ordinals, in a way similar to that which one infers the existence of ω, or
equivalently, the sign of the set of all natural numbers, from the *limitlessness of the realm of infinite*, of the sequences of natural numbers. The inference principle here at work may be aphoristically expressed as: *no potentiality without actuality.* (Jane 1995, 385)

For Cantor, the potential infinite (the ability, in principle, to count endlessly) actually presupposes an actual infinite in order to make any sense. Cantor says:

> But there is another viewpoint from which one can irrefutably prove the occurrence of the actual infinite and its indispensability both in analysis and in number theory and algebra. There is no doubt that we cannot do without variable quantities in the sense of the potential infinite; and from this the necessity of the actual infinite can also be proven, as follows. In order for there to be variable quantity in some mathematical inquiry, the ‘domain’ of its variability must strictly speaking be known before hand through a definition. However, this domain cannot itself be something variable, since otherwise each fused support of the quantity would collapse. Thus, this ‘domain’ is defined, actually in a set of values. Thus, each potential infinite, if it is rigorously applicable mathematically, presupposes an actual infinite. (Cantor, qtd. Jane 1995, 385)

The domain of all numbers must already exist for there to be a transfinite set of them. But for them to actually exist, they must exist in the mind of God. Of course, earlier it has been argued that the transfinite itself is founded on the power of the signifier (and later we will argue it is identifiable with the void as its
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point of departure). But Cantor’s point here resonates. Even to discuss the transfinite one needs to presuppose God (and the void and the signifier, as we will show, make the same presupposition). What this view opens up is the possibility of viewing creation itself as not strictly finite, but transfinite in nature.

An absolutely infinite Creator can create and render a transfinite infinity of infinities in creation. There is something infinite in creation even if creation is created by number, because there are transfinite numbers. God is therefore not the only infinity, as traditional theology has asserted, as from God there can be an infinity of infinities without God’s status as absolute and creator being violated. But insofar as God names that which is greater than what can be conceived, God also is unnamable in his ineffability. Insofar as in Kabbalah the letter aleph names the finite nature and oneness/unicity of God, Cantor should have named what he is calling here the absolute infinite by aleph rather than the transfinite, unless we see the aleph as the first creation of God rather than God himself. Cantor may have intentionally chosen the letter aleph to hearken to Kabbalistic ideas, but insofar as the aleph is the transfinite, God is not aleph. God creates alephs and via alephs.

All things that are finite or can be shown to have something larger than themselves, like the infinite itself, are all equally far away from the absolutely infinite. The transfinite, from a divine perspective, is as finite as any other number. God as eternal is not created, but the transfinite itself is created, created by the signifier, the void, the act of collection, etc. We can also here return to Levinas and say that the infinity associated with the human face is also not mathematical, but rather associated with the absolute infinity of God. After all, humanity is created in the image of God. But this is not an incarnation, it is rather the infinite in the finite as it relates first and
foremost to what exceeds us in confronting the human face, rather than, as with God, what is absolute in itself. In any event, the holy one is withdrawn from the transfinite as much as the face of the other is withdrawn in its holiness from the grasp of the self.

Such considerations also return us to the argument against God’s omniscience. God as absolute infinite has access to the infinite in a non-quantitative way. God does not need to enumerate things. “Every infinite, in a sense, is finite to God” as God’s “intelligence has no number” (Cantor, qtd. Jane 1995, 399). Here, we also have the complete inversion of correlationism, as Cantor attempts to see numbers as they appear not only to us, not only as they are in themselves via the idea of sets and one-to-one correspondence, but also as they appear to an absolute infinite intelligence. For us, of course, it is most intuitive to see numbers as succeeding each other through basic counting. For God, all numbers are one finite number essentially since all are contained in each other. Perhaps, it was inevitable that God would appear precisely here, since one cannot simply ignore the idea that the infinite is that which nothing is greater than and the transfinite seemed to overturn that idea.

Such considerations also overturn the idea that God is just a container of the infinite (like the infinity of positive integers) or of several infinites—that we are positing again a set of all sets or giving into the pantheistic temptation which Cantor himself at times did not resist (Newstead 2009, 545-50). Rather, since the transfinite appears finite to God (and even to us in writing it), all numbers (at least all positive integers) appear as derivable at once from one rule. As Anne Newstead puts it, “only if one held that God’s absolute infinite were fully realized in another would one truly be a pantheist” and that very possibility is restricted through God’s radical transcendence (Newstead 2009,
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549). Now, as Newstead points out in great detail, if Cantor places the actual infinite in God, it not only appears, that a set of all sets is reintroduced, but that there can be a Spinozistic collapse of the possible and the actual (Newstead 2009, 545-50). In other words, if all is actual and the possible presupposes it, then Cantor, under the influence of Spinoza, believed that all possibilities must be seen as being actualized. But if all that is possible is actual, then God does not create as with Spinoza, but rather necessarily produces all possible conceptions. But Cantor resisted this Spinozistic detour, not just because he posited God as absolutely infinite and transcendent, but also due to his very idea that the possible presupposes the actual. All that is possible is actual only in God and from God’s perspective. The absolutely infinite can only be acknowledged by the finite. And even if the absolutely infinite contains the actual infinities that the transfinite presupposes, God need not be necessitated to actualize any except those God freely chooses.

Badiou is directly critical of many of the propositions put forth here. Firstly, Badiou would say that for Cantor, God “in-consists” rather than in-sists, as we do, since for Badiou the absolute infinite is the name of an inconsistent multiplicity, one that cannot be contained (Badiou 1996, 35). We will return to this idea via the void. But here it can be said that for Badiou, Cantor turns back on the ideas that he founded by posting the idea of an absolute infinite. However, it is not a matter of where the “count-as-one-fails” that God appears, as we have argued (BE 41). Rather, Cantor posited God necessarily due to the need for the actual infinite that the potential presupposes. It is not a question of something that cannot be totalized, as much as preserving the idea of the infinite as that which nothing can be greater than. It is also precisely another way of preserving the idea
of nature as infinite, which Badiou thinks is modern (BE 143). That is to say, Cantor runs against Badiou’s view by showing that God alone, via the transfinite, can mark nature as infinite through creation and via what exceeds set theory. Cantor also does so through an ontological argument, rather than via a cosmological proof, which alone can show nature to be infinite. Cantor, rather than closing off the transfinite, moves beyond thinking creation as purely finite and thereby does not repeat the finitism Badiou attributes to traditional theology (BE 142).

Hallward contends that Badiou sees Cantor’s absolute infinite as a mathematical God who is “altogether-Other” (which is true), but his idea does not imply “an endless enlarging of the universe,” as the absolutely infinite marks the point at which enlargement is no longer possible (BST 216). Cantor is also not positing the absolute infinite relative to the transfinite or its cardinality by proposing names such as “inaccessible cardinals . . . inaccessible cardinals, eventually ineffable cardinals, and beyond,” since number itself does not apply here (BST 216). In short, Badiou confuses Cantor’s God with the infinity of infinities of the transfinite. God, according to Cantor, is not an absolute being as God transcends the realm of being and is not the inconsistency and that which inconsist as God is not the same as the ever larger cardinality of transfinite alephs.

§16. THE ONTOLOGICAL/MODAL PROOF OF DIVINE INSISTENCE

One of the most important things about Cantor is the manner in which he refreshed ontological arguments by attempting to prove the existence of God via notions and concepts alone. In particular, Cantor’s very identification of God as that which is maximal clearly reverberates with Anselm’s famous ontological proofs. Ontological and modal arguments (which I
take to be often the same thing and already a key modal argument for God has been used here as part of a critique of process theology) are the strongest and most convincing arguments for divine existence. Cosmological proofs depend on the impossibility of an infinite regress. But already with Cantor, we have seen that potentially undermined as far as being qua being is concerned. For cosmological proofs, one cannot infinitely regress without a beginning, as that would imply that an infinity of time would have to take place before we arrived at this moment. And that ultimately means this moment would not arrive. And yet it does. However, the Cantorian transfinite opens up the possibility that an infinity is already given all at once.

As Maimonides already noted, arguments from design always presuppose that we know what the purpose or goal of a thing is. But that knowledge may be hidden to us, in particular, when it comes to what God intended. Second, teleological arguments are always either arguments from analogy (from design we can infer a designer due to how other things are designed) or credulity (is it more or less believable that the world could be as it is and not be created by God?). However, all arguments from analogy are problematic, because one has to select the features in common that are relevant given the non-identity of the two members of comparison. But at the same time, the very non-identity will always undermine the relevance of the features chosen, given that other features will show disanalogy. As for credulity, the most famous argument here is what is now called the ‘fine-tuning’ argument. But here, not only is there dependence on measurements that may be imprecise, but also on a statistical view: there is a low probability of things being otherwise. However, as long as there exists even a possibility of being otherwise, the argument is only partially persuasive.
Modal reasoning deals with possibility as such. Now, what is interesting is that Hartshorne showed us how to treat the ontological proof as a modal proof. I think this proof is stronger than Cantor’s ultimately, since Cantor’s depends on showing that the actual infinite could only exist in God. But it is not clear that, for instance, a Platonic heaven could not serve the same function. Hartshorne translates precisely Anselm’s own argument concerning that than which a greater cannot be thought. Now, Anselm’s argument, as is well-known, attempts to show that the concept of that than which a greater cannot be thought exists already in mind. Anselm shows that this idea in mind, also by its very nature, shows that which is conceived must obtain outside of mind. The proof here is deceptively simple. If the idea is confined only to our minds, then there is something greater that can be thought—that which is outside the mind. But once we entertain this idea, we see that that which obtains outside our minds is greater than that which only obtains in the mind. We cannot think something greater than can be thought. For this reason, that than which a greater cannot be thought obtains both in mind and in reality.  

Kant famously criticized this argument. He argued that no concept can show that the thing conceived exists. For example, my concept of a dollar has all the same properties as a dollar I hold in my hand except for one—that the dollar I hold in my hand exists. For Kant, existence is not a real predicate. It is only something known empirically. The dollar one conceives cannot be used—only the dollar in hand can. This is why, for instance, conceiving of a unicorn does not show there are unicorns. But God is different

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11 I am drawing heavily here on the work of Gary Mar, in particular his essay “The Modal Unity of Anselm’s Proslogion” (1996), in order to elaborate these arguments.
in nature from dollars or unicorns, due to His non-contingency, perfection, and infinity. And as Marion shows, Anselm is not necessarily using a concept, but rather a “non-concept” since God is defined as something we cannot conceive (anything greater than it cannot be thought) and thereby indicates “transcendence”: “Anything ‘conceived within fixed limits’ will not be God as a result of this view” (Marion 1992, 208). The question of God exists at the limits of conception. It is when conception “cannot go further” and one experiences limitation when attempting to conceive God that our finitude, for Marion, is supremely indicated (Marion 1992, 209). For Marion, Anselm’s key point is that God remains outside of our understanding (Marion 1992, 212).

But Marion’s point still should be noted. As opposed to Kant, the issue here is not how existence is derived from a concept, but rather how God’s existence is inferred from the inability of producing a concept of God that would not exceed us (Marion 1992, 213). I would say that the issue here is not our not being able to think God, but rather that the concept exceeds itself. For Marion, the key is showing that Anselm’s argument is not ontological, since God exceeds the order of being (Marion 1992, 217). But the key should be to still affirm that God obtains outside of mind or conception, despite or because of the excess of the concept itself. First, Anselm himself argued that one who denies that there is the greater than which cannot be conceived already admits the thing he denied, for in denying the thing we attempt to think it and conceive of that than which a greater cannot be thought. That is to say, it is for Anselm a matter of confirming that the conception takes place. But the denial of this concept works to show the truth of Anselm’s proof by taking it modally as Hartshorne showed us.
A perfect and infinite being that is also contingent is a contradiction in terms (*LP* 50). Anything contingent must by its very nature be imperfect. Perfection can only obtain necessarily. For Hartshorne, “Kant misled thousands by his blurring of the distinction between saying, ‘there may not be an idea of perfection’, and saying, ‘there might not be anything perfect’. If the idea is not logically possible, then there could not be anything perfect; if it is possible, then there must be” (*LP* 97). Hartshorne’s key point here is that insofar as the idea of perfection is conceptually possible, it must obtain. And even the one who denies the argument must conceive that which he is denying in order to deny it. When one denies that that than which a greater cannot be thought obtains outside of mind, one denies that if that than which a greater cannot be thought were to obtain, it would not be able to not be, either outside of or in the mind. But one cannot deny such a thing as logic dictates such possibility must be granted to all things. In other words, assuming that it were not true that that than which a greater cannot be thought obtains outside of mind, if it were true that that than which a greater cannot be thought obtains outside of mind, it would be impossible for that than which a greater cannot be thought not to obtain outside of mind. If God obtains outside of mind, then it is impossible for there not to be God. A key condition here is that one agrees that if God obtains outside of mind, it would be necessarily so as noted by definition above.

When it comes to God, God’s obtaining outside of mind is either impossible or necessary conceptually. But one cannot show that it is impossible that that than which a greater cannot be thought can exist outside of mind. In fact, one constantly has to posit that, since one will posit that what obtains outside of mind is greater than what is just in the mind. That is
to say, the modal version of Anselm repeats the standard version. This argument has then attempted to show that the possible non-existence of God is contradictory in modal terms. As for Kant’s idea that existence is not a real predicate, that only holds for contingent things. The necessity of God means that the predicate is included. If we say God is possible, but may or not be, we have a contradiction. The very idea of God’s possibility shows God’s necessity. This is why it is so important to Anselm to show that even the denier of God agrees that God is not impossible. On the basis of that idea alone, one can show God must obtain outside of mind. Now, Meillassoux argues that the necessity here claimed is only a “necessity for us” without any basis for saying it holds in itself (AF 53). But there is no reason to say it is for us, as the proof here does not concern what is possible for us, but what is possible by definition alone. As Marion suggested, it may not even be strictly possible for us to conceive of God.

In his articulation of the modal proof, Hartshorne lists several well-known objections. Many believe that all claims about what obtains outside of mind have been contingent (LP 45). But this claim has shown not to be such that just claiming all others have been does not necessitate all future ones will have to. Some find this proof to be tautologous. But the existence of God is not presupposed, just what is conceived, definitions of contingency, perfection, etc. Some also say that this proof only shows “if he exists, he exists necessarily” (LP 45), but the whole proof is that the opponent has to show it is impossible to say God exists, otherwise the proof holds. Some also argue that “logical necessity does not prove real necessity” (LP 45), but not only does this criticism presuppose that the real is not logical, it also seems to think physics deals with necessity or that something other than logic shows necessity. There is also a criticism that this proof
would open the door to saying that any perfect instance of a thing would exist \((LP \ 45)\). For instance, the perfect apple exists. But that is why the concept here has to be absolutely maximal. An apple itself is not something greater than which a perfect apple can be thought. Some think what has been shown to obtain outside of mind here is a property rather than an individual \((LP \ 45)\). This is perhaps the strongest critique. But properties can themselves be things. If we call God the perfect one, it is the same as saying there is perfection. And only contingent things are individuals on this conception.

The most interesting criticism is one Hartshorne attributes to Kant and calls the mystical paradox: “If God’s reality followed from our idea, then this idea must be (or contain) God himself” \((LP \ 46)\). Here again Marion’s points find their importance, for this conception always exceeds us, such that it shows why this critique could not hold. One also here might assert a pantheistic critique: “If God necessarily exists, then it can only mean he is reality itself” \((LP \ 47)\). But we have already endeavored to show why pantheism does not hold. The final critique worth considering is that there is “no need that perfection be perfect” \((LP \ 47)\). This critique ultimately takes the argument as saying that perfection must exemplify itself. But this proof only says that the contingent is imperfect and cannot exemplify it. But God is not contingent. God relates to necessity. And it is by this necessity that we can again assert that God in-sists (necessarily so) as only the contingent ex-ists. Gods obtains outside of mind not because he is understood, but irrespective of the fact that he is not. God obtains outside of the mind due to his not being in the understanding.

§17. Divine Insistence

Such divine insistence places God beyond being. This means in turn that God is beyond all predication.
God is nothing from this perspective, as the human cannot contain what God implies. It is partly for this reason that the first name for God for Kabbalah after infinity [Eyn Sof] is ayin [nothingness]. But ayin refers to perception first and foremost. For this reason, the Kabbalah calls it the eye, which is also ayin in Hebrew. One here has a vision of nothing. Undifferentiation is the same as nothing, such that God as unique is not able to be differentiated from something else. God is one simple essence without diversity, duality, complexity, etc. It refers to the unique one. God, then, refers to an ineffable mode superior to existence as such. God refuses predication and contingent existence in order to insistently remind us of something beyond these things. God is the one who does not manifest or reveal himself in this world on the order of the things of this world (Ouaknin 2000, 50).

Many might challenge these remarks by noting that when Moses encountered God in the burning bush, God says ‘ehyeh asher ehyeh,’ which many translate as ‘I am that I am’ or ‘I will be what I will be’ (Exodus 3:14). But it is precisely the tautologous nature of the statement that should be emphasized rather than any reference to being or existence. The bush is both burning and not burning at the same time. The bush is aflame, but is not consumed. It is by this contradictory phenomenon that God names himself. In this way, if there is a contradiction, God’s name is a name that cannot name. God is nameless. God is ineffable, and such an ineffability can only be spoken by saying that it is what it is. This is not a name (although the names of God will play a role) as much as a lesson in the namelessness of God. It is revealed to Moses at this moment that God remains in God’s essence despite what anyone will say—determined there without change. God transcends all and is determined by himself, but in this way God is
only something that can be acknowledged in the same way we say ‘it is what it is’. God alone states what God is, and it is something beyond.

Now all these formulations echo what negative theology long determined. For Plotinus, the One is beyond being. It is other, absolutely other, than any definition of it. It cannot be revealed, not due to the limits of knowledge, but due to the limits of being itself. But such negative theology always admits that one still must say something about God and cannot avoid doing so. Here, one such insistent and unavoidable designation has been God as creator, as infinite, and as the maximal. In this way, negative theology itself admits that its very goal is always necessarily undermined. God can only be defined negatively (as not a being), but in doing so we implicitly say what God is and risk freezing our understanding in a false image. Negative theology also acknowledges the limits of language. Our languages themselves do not offer us any more than difficult phrasings, since to say God is not a being means we still have to say what God ‘is’, as the ‘is’ intrudes in the very grammar and syntax itself.

Negative theology understands itself as caught in this double bind of saying what God is not (God is not a being) in order to say what God is, while at the same time attempting to affirm that as such, God transcends even being itself. God does not know like humans, but God knows all or maximally in a way that exceeds our very understanding, for example. Negation therefore implies and leads to eminence. It is for these reasons that deconstruction, even as it attempts to criticize negative theology and to distance itself from it, cannot succeed in doing so. Negative theology already knowingly engages in its own deconstruction and by doing so thereby achieves its purpose. Negative theology, in denying God on one order only to affirm explicitly or implicitly God on another, performatively
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enacts at one and the same time the realization of God’s transcendence and eminence. But it also enacts the necessary unavoidability of God and our failure to think God. One cannot avoid predicating properties to God and discussing what God is at the same time one realizes a relation to a holiness greater than what can be thought and beyond the limits of conception. God can be named and conceived only in the very same instance that such naming is necessary overturned.

This is why when Derrida, in “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” acknowledges that “language is inadequate to the hyperessentiality of God” and that the “possible absence of a referent still beckons, if not toward the thing of which one speaks (such is God, who is nothing because he takes place, without place, beyond being), at least toward the other (other than Being)” (Derrida 1992, 97). But whereas Derrida wants to say that negative theology is ultimately false, he truly has no grounds for doing so. Negative theology accepts its failure as its very proof. It is deconstructionist avant la lettre insofar as it notes that the conditions for the possibility of engaging with God are also what make it impossible. And it is superior to deconstructionism, since deconstructionism would only see it as the moment “a logos necessarily speaks about something it cannot avoid speaking of, something it is impossible for it to refer to” (Derrida 1992, 103). But negative theology is still willing to say that this shows that God insists and that that insistence is not a transcendental illusion, but the real proof of transcendence.

Deconstruction would prefer that we remain stuck insisting on the impossibility of a God that insists and suggests its possibility. But it is time again to twist and turn this rhetorical figure to see how, beyond the double binds of thought, there lies a reality created and brought before us, and necessarily so, by what we can only reach indirectly. Derrida knows that
his own statements about deconstruction sound like negative theology (Derrida 1985, 6-7). But Derrida insists that \textit{différance} is not the same as God. For Derrida, the very difference between God and the contingent order of being can only be understood by way of \textit{différance}. But this is once again to insist that ultimately all there is is our conceptions of things rather than anything lying beyond these conceptions. Negative theology might agree that in conception this is true, but as seen in the ontological argument, God obtains outside of mind precisely due to our inability to conceive of God as such.

Derrida may believe he has the very principle for making determinations, but these determinations are only ever conceptual in nature. It is our contention that at some point these conceptual determinations give way to a realism, and God marks the first opening. Via divine creation, the rest will appear. In one way, what makes it possible to even show conceptual determinations requires that there be something in excess of what these conceptual determinations note as existing and a part of being. God names the most fundamental excess.

\section*{§18. Nothingness/The Void and Its Mark: The Holy Name of God}

It is not enough for a God beyond being to be proved or grounded, given our critique of contemporary philosophy. Rather, in addition to asserting God in himself as infinite, one needs also to demonstrate that God is creator, insofar as this was also a key dimension missing from contemporary philosophical theology. Now, to approach God as creator is necessarily to approach the question of creation \textit{ex nihilo}, creation out of nothing, since true creation only takes place in this fashion.\footnote{For Maimonides, there is another model of creation—that...}

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creation from nothing, one first needs to have the nothing itself. It is here that one need re-enter post-Cantorian set theory, along with its interpretation by Badiou, in order to establish the nature of the nothing out of which God creates all things.

Set theory treats the question of the nothing first and foremost via the notion of the ‘null (or empty) set.’ This is a simple set that has no elements. One need not presuppose anything in order to posit this set since it contains nothing positive. One can simply assert its existence. It proves itself in its own writing. While any other set is an aggregation of something else including other sets, the empty set merely aggregates nothing itself. It presents nothing and nothing but itself. The null set thereby gives being to non-being. This may seem odd since the one thing that should not be, per the philosophical tradition since Parmenides, is non-being. But the empty set allows for the appearance of non-being itself. And in order to put forth set theory itself, one only need assert this set, the existence of the zero. If set theory is ontology, being qua being is an axiomatic system of the void. To think being is to think the implications of this existence of the void.

Here, being itself is named for Badiou by that which is said not to exist, the void. The unpresentable forms the very condition of presentation itself. The void for Badiou is not a negation, as it is for Hegel. It is not a something that appears once something else is destroyed. However, as the Kabbalah will show, this nothing itself does come into being via God and is

of the demiurge in Plato’s *Timaeaus*. Maimonides thinks both ideas are compatible with a monotheistic view. However, such a Platonic model, as with its latter incarnation in Whitehead’s metaphysics, suffers from a god rendered limited by an eternal matter. However, it seems that God’s perfection requires that there not be something equally eternal in this way.
thereby closer to Sartre’s concept in *Being and Nothingness*, where pure being-in-itself is annihilated by the for-itself. But the world is not made of nothing for Sartre. Only consciousness is. The world itself is the inertness of the in-itself. Without the nothingness of consciousness the world would simply remain in its formless muteness. Only consciousness allows things to be disturbed.

The empty set is the zero whose material is made of nothing, no elements. This empty set subsists in its own nothingness. It is not an object empty of a concept, but rather a concept without an object. Or perhaps even better, the concept of a lack of objects. It is thereby a treatment of and engagement with the noumenal itself, the in-itself as it is in itself. It is an object designated by lack. Negativity itself appears. Reality is thereby not something as much as the appearance of nothing. The empty set happens as nothing. A being itself, the empty set may be contested in its being, but not in its existence. Nothingness has already sublated itself into the empty set and found its being there. But in doing so, the nothing as per the dialectic is preserved and noted.

The empty set, insofar as it includes nothing, is itself “universally included” in any set and in any presentation and is also perhaps unique in that its subset is itself and void (*BE* 86). The void is thereby everywhere and in everything, as much as not belonging to the empty set is universal. In particular, it is “a subset of every set,” insofar as for this idea to be proven false, one would have to show something “that belongs to the null set but that does not belong to a given set” (which is impossible given that nothing belongs to the empty set) (Aczel 2001, 107). As Badiou puts it later in *Logics of Worlds*, the contingency of worlds and beings is marked by each thing possessing and including the “inexistent” (Badiou 2009, 322-33).
Badiou emphasizes how this is true of all things with an example of a cat:

Let’s return to the example of my cat (7.6). It is an element of the set of living beings, and it is composed of cells that are in turn elements of this set, if one grants that they are living organisms. But if we decompose a cell into molecules, then into atoms, we eventually reach purely physical elements that don’t belong to the set of living beings. There is a certain term (perhaps the cell, in fact) which belongs to the set of living beings, but none of whose elements belongs to the set of living beings, because those elements all involve only ‘inert’ physico-chemical materiality. Of this term, which belongs to the set but none of whose elements belongs to it, we can say that it grounds the set, or that it is a fundamental term of the set. ‘Fundamental’ meaning that on one side of the term, we break through that which it constitutes; we leave the original set, we exceed its presentative capacity . . . Now the void is not an element of the original set ((0)), whose only element is (0), because the void 0 and the singleton of the void (0) are different sets. So (0) represents, in ((0)), a local foundation-point: it has no element in common with the original set ((0)). That which it presents qua multiple—that is, 0—is not presented by ((0)), in the presentation in which it figures. The Axiom of Foundation tells us that this situation is a law of being: every multiple is founded, every multiple comprises at least one element which presents nothing that the multiple itself presents. (Badiou 2008, 71)
Here, Badiou exemplifies how anything includes in it something that is not part of it at any other level, just as the empty set is included. And presumably, the empty set is of course included in a cat. Everything that is contains at least one thing that presents nothing but itself and that can only be the nothing itself. These properties of the empty set can of course also be exhibited by numbers themselves, which is the way set theory builds up its own elements.

Given that the empty set has a power-set (itself), “since the [empty set] exists, the set of its subsets exists” (BE 88). The set of its subset can be named simply 1. That is, from the empty set itself, taken in this fashion, one can generate the number one by counting the empty set itself, its subset. This then formulates again how Peano defined numbers. For Peano, zero is the empty set, and one is the set containing that empty set. Two is the set containing both the null set and one (which is the set that aggregates the empty set): “The process was then assumed to continue ad infinitum, defining every whole number” (Aczel 2001, 109). Infinity here contains nothingness insofar as the nothingness of things leads to the infinite of numbers “starting with nothing at all” (Aczel 2001, 227). All numbers are a finite form of being, precisely because each contains nothing and is formed out of it. But there is no reason in principle that things like cats do not contain the same nothingness. After all, atoms themselves have been discovered to be almost all empty space.

In any event, numbers show themselves to be precisely the presentation of nothingness. Almost nothing, they remain in being by counting nothing into themselves. They separate the void from the infinite itself by interposing themselves. The matter of numbers is zero, while their form is the remarking of emptiness. Absolute zero itself is the void that numbers and anything else is. And the difference
between the empty set and any other number that follows it is always only the empty set itself. Derived from the void, pure sets merely double and recount the empty set. This model of the production of something from nothing will also be the model for how God himself realizes things out of absolute zero. But God is not the number one and is not oneness in any numerical sense. God remains without second and thereby cannot be included in these sequences, as God’s unity is before the one itself. But it is important to note that the empty set is not already one, but itself zero. Things do not arise from the one, but rather from nothing. The empty set is not a first, but only part of a sequence—one it is cut out and distinguished from. This cut distinguishes an always already initial primordial negativity that the empty set then embodies.

This theory of number only gives ontological confirmation of the mystical nothingness from which all things unravel and unfold according to Kabbalah. The sefirot emanate from the divine and from nothingness itself as Sefer Yetzirah emphasizes:

Ten Sefirot of Nothingness / their vision is like the ‘appearance of lightning’ / their limit has no end / And his word in them is ‘running and turning’ / They rush to Him saying like a whirlwind / And before his throne they prostrate themselves / Ten Sefiroth of Nothingness / their end is embedded in their beginning / and their beginning in their end / like a flame in a burning coal / For the Master is singular. He has no second. And before One, what do you count? (SY 1:6-7)

Absolute being is nothing for Kabbalah, and nothing can change for it without contact with this absolute.
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For Kabbalah also, this nothingness is a primordial point that, at this point, can be identified at least with the empty set (Scholem 1995, 218).

For Badiou, the empty set does not just present nothingness, but also presents the unpresentable as infinity of infinities. Badiou names this infinity of infinities ‘inconsistency’ and identifies it with the void. The void belongs to all. It thereby names the inherence of what allows for any situation to change or be re-configured. It opens up and allows for an excess that the power set axiom names. The infinity of infinites itself derives from how an infinite set implies an even greater infinity via its power set. But this action is itself established via the empty set that shows it can take itself as its power set. The empty set is counted as one, but remains as something not yet counted in its status just of itself. This is true because the void itself cannot be presented as such (BE 93). It is only ever remarked by and through the empty set. What is counted as one is always a remark of the empty set, and the empty set itself is only ever the collecting of nothingness. But the insistence of the void, as that which cannot be counted or presented, makes possible and names an inconsistency always there that will inhere through the need for counting. In this way, for Badiou, the infinity of infinites is the same as the void in and of itself. We only ever experience or interact with consistent presentation wherein all things are counted, named, and numbered. But the empty itself, in its necessary reference to the void, presupposes that prior to counting and numbers there is a pure multiplicity, a non-being, an inconsistency that inheres as unpresentable. The empty set presents nothing and confirms its existence even as it does not form a one (that occurs via the power set). In this way, we have an identification of zero with infinity.
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This identification should not be totally surprising given that all numbers are made up of the empty set ad infinitum. The empty set, via presenting nothing, enables there to be a relation between non-being and being without interfering with their identity. Badiou’s thesis that ‘the one is not’ is thus identifiable with the idea of both non-being and being-nothing, as the two cannot be distinguished conceptually (BE 93). What is presented and counted, such as numbers, only ever makes sense of an inconsistency that at any moment will shuffle all the cards and upset things into a mess of infinities. This inconsistency itself is prior insofar as the being-nothing of numbers can only arise out of a remarking of the presentation of this unpresentable inconsistency. But one always encounters this nothing in numbers or anything else that is presented.

It must be emphasized that set theory implies that the void is; “there is a being of nothing” (BE 54). The void may not be something presented or presentable such as a number, but it is not non-being in the sense of the opposite of being. Just as sets aggregate things they presuppose, once one can demonstrate the existence of the empty set, one has demonstrated the existence of nothing as the empty set presupposes it. All numbers are a result of an operation, meaning that they presuppose the empty set. But this empty set in turn presupposes and is based on the being of the nothing. This nothing cannot be presented as it is in and of itself, but that only means that it is not a being: “there exists that to which no existence can be said to belong” (BE 67). It thereby also in-sists as God does (although we must be careful not to confuse it with God). This void that obtains outside of mind and independent of any marking is unique, as two voids could not be identified in the same way two somethings could be, since difference already requires
that the nothing be remarked via the empty set (BE 68).

Nothing can differentiate the void. In other words, “it is because the one is not that the void is unique” (BE 69). This means that we could say that there is a necessary vacuum. It is not a vacuum in nature, as nature can only consist of beings already delineated like numbers. Posting that there is a being of nothing runs directly against the idea that substance in its indivisibility or fundamental nature precludes it (think here of the substance ontology of Spinoza for example). For such substance ontology, a vacuum could only limit a substance, but if substance cannot be divided, then there is no room for it. Here, on the contrary, the empty set itself grounds an existence of the void. This is not a phantom of language, insofar as sets only act upon a pre-given domain. We then also have here an ontological argument for the void, just as we had one for God. We deduce the existence of the void (non-belonging, ‘there exists that to which no existence can be said to belong’) from its very nature, just as God could be deduced from his. Again, it is precisely by asserting the opposite of this idea that helps to form the proof. If we deny that there exists that to which no existence can be said to belong, then we deny that that there cannot be an empty set. But to deny nothing is to deny nothing. Non-belonging must obtain since to deny that it does not is to already posit something that does not belong. It is not a question here of concepts, but rather of what obtains independently of concepts and what concepts presuppose. The nothing obtains extra-discursively.

Many do not think that Badiou or set theory requires that there be a physically existing vacuum or lack. However, it cannot be simply a name and must refer to a nothingness that is and obtains outside of mind, outside of beings, and outside of sets. It is also not simply something that cannot be presented or is
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not part of the field of beings such as numbers are. Nothing in-sists prior to these presentations. This in-sistence refers to and requires something that is more than simply an impasse of thought or product of the way set theory is written. It does not name a human inability to think the totality of all that it is. It is not just an index of failure. On the contrary, it is positing a real lack that, although it cannot be presented itself, is that from which presentation arises (the lack of lack makes real). We should not, as philosophy has done since Parmenides, posit that nothing is a mere illusion based on the impossibility of presenting it as a being. Negation cannot appear as such, but that does not mean it is a dream. There is an appearing of nothingness in the empty set, but even though it is not nothing as such, it does not mean nothingness is only the empty set. While the philosophical tradition since Parmenides has said that nothing does not exist due to the seeming inherent contradiction in the idea, these considerations lead us to conclude that the nothing in-sists.

As Badiou suggests, here poetry (and mysticism is itself a form of poetry) is able to present a truth that philosophy itself has avoided (BE 54-55). Aristotle argued that the void is not possible due to the impossibility of movement in a void (Physics IV.7). In a vacuum, there would be no resistance. Things would move infinitely fast. Thus, anything near a void would immediately move into it at an infinite speed. If all things near move towards it at infinite speed, then it will not be, as all things will immediately overlay it at the speed of infinity. But we here speak of a metaphysical void that necessarily cannot be presented, even though what is presented presupposes it.

Also for Aristotle, something in a void has no reason to move, and yet we always see things in movement. Aristotle also takes the non-differentiable
nature of the void as proof against it. But rather than its non-differentiable nature showing that we can just fill up the world with voids where ever we like, it rather shows that the void is unique in nature. There is only one void. The absence of things may not be a thing or being, but that does not mean it is not. The void here should not be confused with empty space, as space itself may only be a product of the relation of beings themselves rather than a background upon which they occur. If philosophy has asked repeatedly ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’, then we will now begin to be able to answer that there is nothing, and that is also why there is something.

Heidegger also posits that the nothing is and not as a being. But for Heidegger, the nothing is treated only in correlationist terms. Dasein encounters the whole of beings as an idea. The nothing is thereby a question only for Dasein, wherein Dasein discloses to itself the possibility of the negation of all beings (Heidegger 1993, 98-108). In experiencing such a disclosure, Dasein then experiences anxiety, but only by way of taking the whole of beings as given and then negating this whole (Heidegger 1993, 98). The nothing nihilates insofar as it allows Dasein to accede to itself. But nowhere does Heidegger speak of a nothing independent of how things are disclosed to Dasein or outside of the anxiety Dasein experiences.

Even if Cantorianism is premised on the nature of the signifier and is a function of writing, the nothing still obtains, for the signifier itself is the presence of absence as much as numbers are. God, as we will see, creates by writing and creation is being written. This is why creation is always marked as infinite as it is always marked by writing. The void is real. It posits itself and shows itself in the empty set. And the absolute in the sense of the infinity of infinities and not the absolute infinity does not exclude nothing in any way.
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It is important not to confuse God, the absolute infinity, with the void or nothingness. This is something Scotus and Eckhart do by speaking of the nichts or as John of the Cross does of the nada. Hallward presents Badiou’s position that “in the absence of God, what there is is indeed, as we shall see, purely and simply the void” (BST 7). But this view is one that holds that the void is the ultimate. However, this cannot be, as the void in and of itself cannot lead to anything other than itself—from nothing comes nothing. In order to have creation, God must necessarily be posited. Even the sequence of numbers we noted that arises out of the empty set are not possible unless an act of counting or remarking occurs. If left to itself, the void or even the empty set would remain in and of itself. This is why there should be no confusion with what Kenneth Reynhout posits in “Alain Badiou: Hidden Theologian of the Void?” and what we are arguing for here. First, Reynhout takes up Tillich’s idea that God is being—a thesis that we have attempted to render illegitimate (Reynhout 2011, 230). To repeat, God not being a being does not mean God is being as such. Second, and more importantly, we should not posit that “God is the void” as Reynhout does, precisely due to the fact that the void does not give rise to creation (Reynhout 2011, 231). As we have argued, the notion of the absolute infinity in Cantor is distinct from the infinity of infinities deduced from the power-set and cardinality of the infinite. This inconsistency is ultimately not even in being itself, as it is unpresentable.

We can agree with Reynhout when he says that “God is not one,” “is unique,” “cannot be counted-as-one,” and “escapes the count of the count” (Reynhout 2011, 231). But God not being a thing does not make God nothing in the specific sense of the void. God creates the void which, as void, does not limit God
since it is nothing. God creates from nothing. While we argued that the void insists and is unique just as we stated concerning God, if we were to say God is the void, then we would say God creates himself. But this returns us to the pantheistic problems we have attempted to delineate and avoid. Pantheism still is not tenable even if one posits a void. The Kabbalah will offer us another solution to this problem with the idea of the *tzimtzum*. It will also inspire us to conceive of a different relationship between God and nothingness other than a simple identification of the two.

This does not mean that Kabbalah does not say that nothingness [*ayin*] is not a name of God. But *ayin* names primarily the idea that God is not a being, not a thing of this world (thereby no-thing). The word *ayin* is also related by Kabbalah to its Hebrew homophone that means ‘source’. Nothingness is the source of the world. It is created from nothing. Ayin is the zero point. In fact, all that we see that is is really *ayin* for Kabbalah (Michaelson 2009, 85). Nothingness in its primal nature exhibits simplicity due to its lack of differentiation with anything else. It is neither this nor that.

In fact, the Kabbalah says that absolute nothingness is ultimately only thinkable as a “primordial point” that emerges out of the vast empty abyss as being pure and simple (Drob 2000a, 94). This point is thought as being inscribed as the first letter, the “primal letter aleph” (Drob 2000a, 97). Such a conception overlaps perfectly with how the void is thought by Badiou’s set-theoretical ontology. The empty set and zero are themselves nothing more than a letter, “the mark of the void,” ∅ (Badiou 2006, 41). The void always sublates itself into the instance of a letter and insists there. The choice of the symbol ∅ notes how the zero is “affected by the barring of sense” (*BE* 69). It is not meaningful in and of itself, but
only a sign of the nonsense from which meaning will emerge. Nothingness cannot be presented. It insists. And in its insistence the unpresentable is first and foremost merely as a letter, a pure signifier. It defines itself by its lacking any referent. Nothingness is thereby always split from itself and reduces itself in this world to such marking. It will not cease to repeat itself, as once a mark occurs its repetition does not cease. As we have already seen, no whole can be made of it once it is allowed to enact the infinite. It is not totalizable. It is already in its very marking a multiplicity irreducible to a unity and multiplies. It is this insistent and persistent process. It will diverge into other things and disseminate a whole world. And all from just a non-signifying letter.

But the literal existence of the void as a mark is also a name. Badiou notes that for theologies the “supreme being has been the proper name since long ago” (BE 69). And the empty set, $\emptyset$, is also the Name of God. Badiou excludes this possibility as he thinks it is linked to presence and the idea that the whole is. But as we have noted, God is connected to the unpresentable and non-being of the one such that $\emptyset$ is just another name to write the very proper Name of God. As Badiou shows, the very act of marking the nothing in and through the empty set is to present a proper name as a letter (BE 59). The empty set thereby arises in an act of naming itself, but can name itself as nothing, as a pure point. And the purely proper name, pure act of self-nomination, refers to God. The name of the void is the Name of God. This is why God is not the void as the void is the proper name of God. The unpresentable and nameless one could not be named otherwise. And since the name is that from which everything derives, it is by way of the name of God that all is created. All that is is nothing but an elaboration of the divine proper name that names
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itself. It is not yet differentiated from anything, as it is only by it that later differences will be understood.

The proper name here also marks the unicity of God. For a purely proper name is unique in and of itself. The mark of the void, its name, presents the unpresentable by name: “What belongs to this set [the null set] is the proper name which constitutes the suture-to-being of the axiomatic presentation of the pure multiple; that is, the presentation of presentation” (BE 89). And in God’s self-naming, one sees that the Name of God does not belong to God but rather to being, to this world, since this element would not be the void as nothing that it is, as the unpresentable. It would be the name of the void, the existent mark of the unpresentable. The void would no longer be if its name belonged to it. Certainly, the name of the void can be included in the void, which amounts to saying that, in the situation, it equals to the void, since the unpresentable is solely presented by its name. Yet, equal to its name, the void cannot make a one out of its name without differentiating itself from itself and thus becoming a non-void (BE 88).

The Name of God is all we have of God in this world, in being. God insists on it and on God’s transcendence being marked by a purely proper name. This name is not one and it thereby leads to differentiation and becoming non-void in creating the world. The unpresentable is for us only in and by its Name. And by that truth the world is built and founded.

The unpresentable always vanishes into such an act of pure nomination that that act reveals for us that the unpresentable insists. That is why the unpresentable insists on itself in the purely proper name. God is not the void as such, but the void names God, enacts God’s holy Name and gives rise to it, embodies it. As much as for Judaism the Torah is
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composed of endless permutations of the divine name, the tetragrammaton, so is the universe itself. Rav Zadoq ha-Kohen of Lublin said: “Thus I have received that the world in its eternity is a book that God, blessed be He, made, and the Torah is the commentary that he composed on that book’” (ha-Kohen, qtd. Drob 2009, 52). While God insists beyond being, God subsists here by way of the void as the pure name. God only can be present to us as his holy name. The nameless and unpresentable one insists via a name devoid of sense, as pure mark.

If the empty set is the very foundation of pure ontology, of being qua being, it is not because the void is the ultimate, but because the void, through the empty set, names that which is absent—nothingness and God. In the beginning, there is the self-naming, a void name, and the empty set. The void itself must be created and is so by this act of nomination. Since from nothing comes from nothing, the void would not instantiate itself. It insists, but only after its instantiation. This pure designation is pure unicity, which is why God is related to nothingness without being it. God is not God’s Name. Before we speak of any properties or attributes, God is a name pure and simple and founded in an act of self-nomination. This is one reason why, in a play on the Hebrew letters of the word for nothingness [ayin], the Kabbalah says it is also ‘I’ [ani]. But only by a pure act of designation can the ineffability of God be maintained.

Badiou, rather than banishing the logic of negative theology, offers us a way to confirm the most audacious experiences of the mystic. The empty set instantiates the void and thereby forms the Name of God. The Name of God is the mark of the void. But through creation it will become the primary name of Being itself, its subsistence and matter. As rehearsed above, letters are of the real. This name is not a symbol. It is in and of the real, both as the impasse of
what cannot be formalized (and thereby only presentable as name) and what cannot be directly presented. Out of nothing comes the name: “It comes out that all that is formed / and that is spoken / Emanates from one Name” (SY 2:5). But nothing comes from nothing. Only God can be responsible for such an act of self-nomination. But once enacted, it will be included in all and form the material of all that is. It will repeat itself, but only once named. Nothingness, the void, could not do the job on its own without external force.

God is not the void or the name, since the name is what allows for being. And God is not the being common to all things, as that is another name for pantheism and a repetition of onto-theology. Creator and creation remain opposed as one transcends the other. One cannot deduce the name of God. One could not deduce from other ideas the pure act of designation involved here. God, the unnamable as unpresentable, declares it and declared it long ago in events such as Moses facing the burning bush: “The name is then the proper of the proper, so singular in its singularity that it does not even tolerate having a proper name. The name is the point where the situation’s most intimate being is submitted to thought; in the pure presence that no knowledge can circumscribe” (Badiou 2005, 66).

As we will see, God’s namelessness means that even this name of God is in many ways inadequate. For Judaism, one should not even attempt to pronounce the Name of God. The Name of God is the real of thought and prayer. It is also why the name of God is only ever written. For Derrida, writing is an infinity of infinities that disseminates and differentiates. Writing names and enacts the unpresentable. Recall here the nature of numbers and how they were created. They were created out of nothing, which here means created out of the pure
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name of God (Drob 2001, 18). Numbers were produced by empty sets repeating. Out of zero information, out of the void itself in its mark, all numbers appear through their being counted and repeated. The materiality of letters spells out things as they spell out numbers. God is repeating and operating his name as it elaborates itself into more and more complexity:

When it arose within / the will of the Blessed Name / to Create the universe, / in order to manifest goodness, / so all creation would acknowledge / the goodness of the Creator / the Blessed one emanated one point / that included ten points. / These are the ten sefirot / one point included within all ten. (KC 10)

Perhaps, this is what Philo meant when he claimed, “the logos, the divine ‘word’ acted as an intermediary in the process of creation” (Scholem 1995, 114). Philo himself believed, as Kenneth Schenk states, that “God had set his logos as shepherd of the universe. He could call the logos the commander and pilot of the world” (Schenk 2005, 58). But we are not positing that God’s Name governs the world and also not that the world is a representation or reflection of this holy name. In this way, while Philo does say that the logos is used to create, and that the logos is the Name of God, we differ from Philo at the very least insofar as we do not see the world as a Platonic image of some higher order (Schenk 2005, 58-61).

And it is the literalization of the world by mathematics and science that will ultimately bear out this truth. They literalize the world by depending on that which has no sense (letters) to enact sense. This literality of being can only arise if we see it as a weaving of the divine name—a name that insists in each aspect of being. We can do the same. We can
observe the empty set. We can write it out. We can include the name with another. We are again made in the image of God.

Behind difference, there is nothing. The simple nature of the mark of the void shows its relation to the absolute. The nameable name is built from the unnameable one. The infinity and emptiness of the mark, of the letter, of the name, lead one to the unsayable. As separated from God, we can only repeat the name and see this emptiness. The emptiness of our words arises as we depend on the name itself of God. All of these thoughts find their own expression in Judaism and Kabbalah. As Schneur Zalman of Lyadi, the rabbi of the Chabad movement, said: “The purpose of creation of the worlds from nothingness to being was so that there should be a Yesh (Creation, and that the Yesh should be null” (qtd. Drob 2001, 207). The created world on this view is no more than an appearance of the void itself, its elaboration.

We are not saying that creation occurred at some time. It did not happen in time, as time will arise on the basis of creation. We can follow Friedrich Schelling in saying that creation does not happen in a temporal past, but rather in an eternal past that never actually was in time. We can logically and ontologically identify this instant and conceive it, but that does not mean we are locating a moment on a timeline. Creation is immemorial. But that does not mean that the creation is eternal. It was not always the case. It was not necessary and did not need to occur. It has always already happened from our end, but not from the perspective of God. Creation is not an event. It is a divine act.

13 Slavoj Žižek develops the logic of this concept of Schelling’s in detail throughout The Indivisible Remainder (2007).
Edmond Jabes also glosses these ideas throughout his books by seeing the world as an infinite self-emptying of the name. The world is the exile of the name. All of creation is the nomadic wandering of the holy Name in its elaborations. The name is always moving nomadically. God exiled his name into the world to make the reality of creation itself. This name only presents an absentee silence, for our words cannot make present what insists in the holy name. In this way, the proliferation of the Name disperses meaning throughout and gives meaning to what is.

It is not surprising, then, that Jews refer to God simply as ‘The Name’. The name of God is just ‘The Name’. And in Hebrew the word for ‘name’ is spelled the same as the word for ‘there’, as space itself is created only once the name intervenes and not before. As Maimonides famously said in the very introduction to his commentary on the five books of Moses, the whole Torah is made up of divine names. All is elaborated from the divine name—especially a divine text. The name of God is the “metaphysical origin of all language” (Scholem 1972a, 63). All language is just a discourse on the holy Name of God and reveals it. The world itself is the language and writing of God founded on God’s holy name. There is a single name at the center of all that is spoken and all that is presented.

Judaism focuses on the four-letter name, YHVH, of God. These four letters take the idea of ‘I am that I am’ [ehyeh asher ehyeh] and turn it into pure letters, no longer referring even to being. God should not be noted as one more being amongst beings, as a simple name would do. In this way, God’s name should not only not be produced, but should only consist of an iconic sign, a purely written mark. It should be

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14 For a good overview of Jabes’s work see Rosemarie Waldrop’s *Lavish Absence* (2003).
recalled that Hebrew, while being a phonetic language also has aspects of pictography. For instance, the letters themselves refer to images (the letter gimmel is a camel for example). In this way, a word can in and of itself take on purely illustrated form. For Peirce, the divine name is iconic insofar as its very lettering gives rise to its nature and significance. Without its actual articulation, it would not be able to function as it needs to. This sign signifies according to its nature rather than what it refers to. Even if what it presents in its shape or sound is not an object we recognize, the sign itself takes on the form of an object. A circle is such a sign. As Marion wonderfully notes, even the name given at the burning bush only marks a “tautology” (I am that I am), as any name that would describe that which transcends being itself can only be a name that tries to capture the nameless (BG 297). This four-letter name is a pure proper name. It should not be conceived from another point of view. It is peculiar to God alone. Yet one should see this name as just another of writing Ø. This name should not be pronounced. It is made up only of vowels after all. It signals the lack of a name to indicate the unpresentable. In fact, rather than being pronounced, another word is always substituted for it, to hide it. It is only ever written in a divine text or text for religious purposes. It is named to be hidden and written not to be said aloud. The consonants without vowels leave nothing to be said. It is a name that forms its own secret.

This is why, rather than contemplating oneself, one can simply contemplate the holy name to achieve mystical insight:

Peculiarly Jewish object of mystical contemplation: The name of God, which is something absolute, because it reflects the hidden meaning and totality of existence; the
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Name through which everything else acquires its meaning and which yet to the human mind has no concrete, particular meaning of its own. In short, Abulafia believes that whoever succeeds in making this great name of God, the least concrete and perceptible thing in the world, the object of his meditation, is on the way to true mystical ecstasy. (Scholem 1995, 133)

All that is is only by its “participation” in the great name of God. The name manifest itself through creation and as creation:

All creation—and this is an important principle of most Kabbalists—is, from the point of view of God, nothing but an expression of His hidden self that begins and ends by giving itself a name, the holy name of God, the perpetual act of creation. All that lives is an expression of God’s language,—and what is it that Revelation can reveal in the last resort if not the name of God? (Scholem 1995, 17)

This is why Sefer Yetzirah emphasizes how the combinatorial power of letters and numbers is the same as creation itself. It is such that God will take on more names that simply repeat this name, as creation repeats itself in elaborating more and more: “These are the twenty-two letters / which engraved / Ehyeh, yah, YHVH Elohim, YHVH tzvaato, Elohim Tzvaato, El Shaddai. / YHVH Adonai / And with them He made three Books/ and with them he created His universe / and He formed with them all that was ever formed, / and all that ever will be formed” (SY 6:6). Every variety can occur in this fashion.
The name has a simple meaning such that seemingly only a simple thing should proceed from it. But from the simple the complex can arise. As Moshe Idel informs us, there are “mathematical qualities of the letters consisting the Ineffable Name,” and he thereafter writes that “all of the numbers are nine from one direction, and ten from the other direction” (Idel 1987, 28). In other words, the ineffable name of God should not be looked at as a regular name with a referent as such, but taken literally via its lettering and marking alone. As Scholem notes,

In this context the Midrash tells how, before the creation, God and his name existed alone. When the name becomes word, it becomes an essential part of what we may call the language of God, the language in which God, as it were, represents and manifests himself, just as he commits with his creation, which the medium of this language comes into being itself. (Scholem 1972a, 70)

Creation arises out of the name, which means that God, along with his name separated from God, appear at creation itself. God then communicates with this communication by creating it as a communication.

Recall that “one shall not take the name of the Lord in vain” (Exodus 20:7). It must be respected at all turns given its nature. For Levinas, the name of God “is a name” [Adonai] which demonstrates how the name is related to that which is always at a reserve (Levinas 2007, 121). But in turn, that name [Adonai] can also take on a name for itself, as it should not be spoken unless one is engaged directly in prayer. And in prayer itself, as Levinas likes to note, one shifts from speaking to God (‘Blessed are you . . .’) to speaking of God in the third person immediately after
this statement. Here, the moment one speaks to God as though it were a personal relation, one is returned to the name itself as the remainder of the transcendence of God. As Idel argues, “the true name is a dialogue between man and God” (Idel 1987, 84). It reveals the nature of God and creation of the world. The name of God does not tell us what a thing is, but it also is not related to a who. It is a pure call. But even saying there is this name is too much, as it risks thinking that one has captured the unpresentable.

If God did have a name we could know and understand fully and say aloud, God would be limited to that name and thereby seemingly presented and known. From that perspective God has no known name. God is not able to be contained by a name. No word could constitute God. Hence the anonymity preserved in referring to God just as the name. And since God’s name fills all things and names, the entire world becomes the name of God as well: “Kabbalists believe in the ‘unlimited mystical plasticity of the divine word’” (Drob 2009, 33). Even Levinas, who notes he has “avoided conceptions taken from Kabbalah” (Levinas 2007, 122), still quotes Maimonides who wrote, “The foundation of the foundation and the pillar of wisdom consists in knowing that the Name exists and that it is the first being” (qtd. Levinas 2007, 119). The divine one is only ever noted as “‘the name’ a generic term,” for God is not a divine species of thing (Levinas 2007, 119). In fact, as Levinas here emphasizes, Judaism also calls God the Holy one, Blessed be he, in order to emphasize the holiness (radical transcendence and unpresentability) of God beyond being itself. The name of God is not subject to any sense and thereby names that which escapes its very naming in naming itself. The name thereby annihilates itself at the same time that it insists on its naming and in calling us to this name. Ernesto Laclau writes:
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We have spoken about the need for representing an object in its fullness which, by definition, transcends all representation. Now, this is, at its purest, the problem of the mystic. He aspires to give expression to direct contact with God, i.e. with something which is strictly ineffable because it is incommensurable with anything existing. He is the *deus absconditus*, a mystical Nothing. For the great monotheistic religions there is an unsurpassable abyss between the Creator and the *ens creatum*. Mysticism does not deny or overlook the abyss; on the contrary, it begins by realizing its existence, but from there it proceeds to a quest for the secret that will close it in, the hidden path that will span it. (Laclau 1997, 16)

This mystical problem is solved only by invocation of the Name and an understanding of it as pure nomination. As Laclau notes, Scholem distinguishes, on the basis of this mystical problem, between the allegory wherein one represents something presentable by an understandable figure and the mystical symbol itself, which is a name that attempts to repress something that lies beyond expression (Laclau 1997, 16-17). More importantly for our purposes, “The symbol ‘signifies’ nothing and communicates nothing, but makes something transparent which is beyond all expression” (Laclau 1997, 17). This is precisely how the name of God functions for us. But at the same time, its nature in itself should not be forgotten. The name of God is God’s own act of nomination and is connected to the creation of the world and forms its very matter. One cannot remain only with what it is for human cognition. In this way, Kierkegaard was also wrong: while God is not a name, God is also not a concept (LP
To say God is a concept would again restrict God to the approach human cognition takes to the matter and its inherent limitations. Sanford Drob believes that “Ramakrishna states, rather ‘kabbalistically,’ ‘God is the container of the universe and also what is contained within it’” (Drob 2001, 109). Only God’s name is contained in the universe. And God is not a container of the infinity of infinities, but the absolute infinite. In referring to God’s name we should not forget that God transcends even his own holy name, the mark of the void.

§19. **Tzimtzum: Creation of Nothing to Create from Nothing**

God’s relationship to the void is illustrated and explained by what is perhaps the most original Kabbalistic concept: the notion of the *tzimtzum* (this word literally means ‘contraction’ or ‘reduction’). The *tzimtzum* is God’s complete contraction into himself, concealment, and withdrawal. Here, God withdraws in order to allow space and time to come into being. It is the ultimate first act of creation for the Kabbalah. God creates out of an act of an excess of divine love and creation by limiting the divine itself to allow something non-divine to arise. And what arises here is nothingness itself, which is immediately marked by its name, the mark of the void, the holy name. That is, it is a hollow that is made once God withdraws from the world. Before this as it were, there was no ‘before.’ Time and space themselves are only enacted once the absolutely infinite creates an empty space and a hollowing. Before, there is only the unending light of God.

This purely excessive act shows the true absoluteness of the divine insofar as it is able to allow for limitation even in its perfection.\(^\text{15}\) In this way,

\(^\text{15}\) The name of this self-limitation is Sabbath—the rest taken
however, God exiles himself in order for there to be a world. God insists beyond the world that persists without God. A space of nothing is created—nothing precisely insofar as it is devoid of God. Marc-Alain Ouaknin stresses this rather startling aspect of this theory of the divine: “The Kabbalists stress this astonishing fact: The space of the world is a space void of God, an atheistic, atheological space” (Ouaknin 2004, 278). God is not found in the world of being and beings.

Here Kabbalah is at its most ‘Heideggerian’: Revelation takes place via concealment. The space of the universe is created as emptied of the absolute. It is freed for the contingent and for differentiation. Our world is just such a sphere. The first act of creation is thereby negative. It involves the creation of nothing in order for there to be creation ex nihilo. That creation occurs from nothing also contests any Kabbalist or ontologist who claims that creation occurs via emanation. Emanation is always emanation from something already there, rather than from the void via tzimtzum. God lets be something by allowing it to arise from nothing. The beginning of that creation is itself the holy name and nothing more. It is the name itself that is the first foundation. As Zohar Raviv phrases it, “tzimtzum is the initiatory actualization of the zero’s singularity” (Raviv 2008, 418). But the zero is immediately canceled out by its mark. We then have, as Raviv puts it, the “perpetual pulse of 01 01” from creation on the seventh day by God. But it is not clear that we have reached the seventh day yet. In my view, we are still at the end of the sixth day just after the creation of humanity. On the other hand, from the eternal perspective of God, God has rested. In this way, the observance of the Sabbath is not a memorial as much as anticipation of what is to come. The Talmud itself says in a few places that the rest one experiences on the Sabbath is one-sixtieth of the peace one will find in the World-to-Come (Cf. Brachot 57b).
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(Raviv 2008, 419). We will return later to spell out the full implications of this statement, but it is enough to say now that creation takes place via the creation of the primary bit, the act of information.

The void left by withdrawal is called tehiru or sometimes chalal (this term literally means ‘space’ such as in open, empty space). One can also think of it as an empty circle or sphere, hence making the mark of the void ∅ all the more fitting. This idea also implies that God as absolute infinite prior to creation surrounds and fills all, as it were. It is only with the addition of nothingness that an infinite number of things can take place via the creation that follows this initial moment. Sanford Drob emphasizes this aspect by noting that this “process . . . creates finite plurality through a[n] . . . occultation of that which is infinite and whole” (Drob 2000a, 130). In this way, the whole is not. It is withdrawn as the world is marked by a creation that leaves it incomplete. It should be noted that the Pythagoreans also argued that the void exists (as did the Epicureans) and that it allows for separation and differentiation, as Aristotle related:

The Pythagoreans, too, held that void exists, and that it enters the heaven from the unlimited breath—it, so to speak, breathes in void. The void distinguishes the natures of things, since it is the thing that separates and distinguishes the successive terms in a series. This happens in the first case of numbers; for the void distinguishes their nature. (Physics IV.6)

The issue here is how the unlimited (what we would call the absolute infinite or eyn sof) gives rise to the limited via the void. All things that are and can be known have to combine into being by having a definite shape. Just as a sequence of terms or numbers
are differentiated by the void, they are solely made up of the void. For Pythagoreans, that idea is articulated via a relation between emptiness and limitation, the unlimited and the limited, apeiron and peiron.

God does not require this act despite what some commentators suggest (Drob 2000b, 241). It is rather a gratuitous act of love and giving. Yet God’s self-constriction is necessary for creation to take place, for “if he does not exile himself from it all creation would be overwhelmed by his essence” (TB xxiii). The absolutely infinite would overwhelm creation, but creation itself is still fractured and cracked and left incomplete by its arising from the void and its mark. Ultimately, as Ouaknin notes, the notion of the tzimtzum answers the questions of ‘how can there be a world if God is everywhere?’ and ‘If God is “in everything” how can anything exist that is not God?’, which are the questions pantheism attempts to pose (Ouaknin 2000, 194). We also answer here the question of philosophy and metaphysics, ‘why is there something rather than a nothing?’ and ‘how can God have created the world ex nihilo, if there is no nothingness?’ (Ouaknin 2000, 194). Leibniz, among others, felt that the simplest state of being is nothingness. Given that things tend to simplicity, it is a wonder that there is something, as something requires more energy, effort, etc. That we see something for Leibniz is already sign of a creator, as left to itself things should be in their simplest state. A zero state as a state means there is not even any information to record that there is nothing. In this way, something like God is needed to allow information and things to arise.

This concept also helps flesh out the account of creation given in Genesis. Why does God rest on the seventh day? This act of rest is itself related to God’s creation. The absolute can abstain from creating just as much as the absolute can withdraw itself and add
nothingness to itself. Interrupting creation is an indication of absolute power, the power to delimit oneself. Creation is violated. God does not create the world because God must or requires it to fulfill some need. The absolute infinite can violate creation itself, even destroy it, if need be. There is no better indication of perfection than being limited to the infinite itself. In other words, it is an implication of that than which nothing greater can be for it to be able to limit the maximal. The absolute infinite makes of itself nothing and separates himself from that nothingness to allow beings to emerge and acquire an independence of their own.

Scholem insists that “tzimtzum does not mean the contraction of God at a point, but his retreat away from a point” (Scholem 1995, 260). That is, God is not reducing himself to what is left, the nothingness, the mark of the void, his holy name, but rather retires to allow for that point to emerge. It is thereby not creation by “emanation,” as God here contracts himself to allow creation to occur and offers limitations rather than extension (Scholem 1995, 261). Here one sees a crucial difference between the Kabbalah and neo-Platonist metaphysics, despite so many attempts to see Kabbalah as influenced by or being simply a redundant restatement of, the work of Plotinus, Proclus, etc. Neo-Platonists see creation as ebbing and flowing out of the One, but here it arises based on the nothingness that the One leaves in and by its disappearance. The notion of the tzimtzum also drives another stake into the heart of pantheism and pantheistic interpretations of the Kabbalah (Scholem 1995, 262). For this retreat from the point means that the tzimtzum is connected to the primordial and singular point that arises. For the Zohar, this primordial point is connected to the Hebrew letter yod, which is itself just a line, a pure mark (Zohar I, 2a). Drob identifies this primordial point with “a
thought” (Drob 2000b, 20). We will pursue this idea later via connecting the tzimtzum to information, since this first point is the first registration of information itself. But this point itself is infinite in nature, as it is dimensionless and non-differentiated, the void itself transmuted as it evaporates into its mark, the Name of God. This point, based on the abyss, is the center of the world around which all crystallizes. It is the beginning. The very beginning referred at the beginning of the bible: ‘In the beginning . . .’. Creation takes place in a word, the first word, the name of God—B’reshit bara Elohim. The manifestation of this point conceals God via God’s name. As dimensionless, a point itself is not differentiable from anything else. It is a pure and primitive notion from which spatial notions themselves can only later be articulated. The point is thereby a hole into which all can disappear, but from which all arises. One is none here. The single point based on the nothing’s nihilation. As infinitesimal as this point may be, it is a word created by an action of nomination: ‘Let there be light’.

The world thus suffers from the absence of God. The world exists apart from God as it arises from nothing. God is absent from nothing. And only nothing could subsist independently from God. Here the point that could be written Ø is the ‘trace of the Other’ (as opposed to Levinas’s definition of this concept). And for the Kabbalah, there is residue or trace of the divine that occurs despite the divine contraction. This trace is known as reshimu. This trace does not remain with the void, but the mark of the void is itself this trace. Again the name of God is the trace of the Other. And in this way each thing contains within itself a trace of that by which it is created. Each thing is a trace of the trace. The world empty of God is built of this residue of the divine.
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Here, we have another way of understanding the primordial ooze.

Isaac Luria, the mystic who envisioned the tzimtzum itself, says one should think of this residue like a bucket of water once full. Even though the bucket has been emptied some of the water still clings to the sides. The saturation of the absolute infinity leaves a remainder even after it withdraws. Another way of taking this idea is that the Name is the trace of the divine. God would suffocate all things if God did not withdraw. But the name interrupts this eternal presence and marks its absence. There is a gap then in the eternal one. There is a gap in God. God and his name are not one. And with such an interpretation, time itself as the moving image of eternity becomes possible. This interruption is itself nothing, but nothingness unfolds and turns into a universe of emptiness.

Insofar as there is a trace, we may understand what physicists mean when they say that all vacuums are false, that they are charged with energy. Daniel Matt suggests directly that the Kabbalistic sense of nothingness with its traces of God matches the idea of “zero-point energy” or of the false vacuum that “still shimmers with a residual hidden energy” (Matt 1998, 41). For physics, such a vacuum is a “region of space from which everything has been removed,” including “particles,” “fields,” “waves,” etc. (Davies 1985, 104). A pure vacuum is not truly possible in nature. One always has “a tiny residue of gas” or energy, such as the “universal background radiation left over from the big bang” (Davies 1985, 104). For this reason, physicists speak of a real vacuum as an “idealization” since any empty space they discover in the world is “alive with energy” (Davies 1985, 104-5). What Davies’s description here implies, beyond the idea that a pure void is a metaphysical rather than a physical concept, is that the false vacuum noted by physics is itself a
product of the Big Bang. Since space does not exist
before the Big Bang, the empty space and false
vacuum analyzed by physics is itself made possible by
the space created in and through the expansion of the
universe. However, despite this seeming truth, many
physicists such as Alex Vilenkin “suppose that in the
beginning the universe found itself in an excited
vacuum state” (Davies 1985, 192). The universe thus
arises out of a false vacuum that gives rise to a
“cosmic repulsion” which leads to the big bang. The
energy found in this empty space (they also call it a
“quantum vacuum”), as becoming a “true vacuum,”
suddenly and for a vanishing instant leads to the big
bang (Davies 1985, 193-97).

As another advocate of this view, Sean Carroll,
makes explicit, space and time obtain prior to any big
bang as the big bang is just “a kind of transition from
one phase another” (Carroll 2010, 51). Carroll has to
speculate that space obtained eternally since “vacuum
energy” is a “feature of space itself” (Carroll 2010,
312). Thereby, if our view that space comes into being
with the big bang is right, false vacuums would only
be a function of that expanding space. Carroll explains
that as a “false vacuum decays the formation of
bubbles [occurs] like when liquid water boils when it
turns into water vapor” (Carroll 2010, 328). Each
bubble formed in the void expands via the energy it
retains and thereby forms a universe (Carroll 2010,
329). This void is a “de Sitter space” that allegedly
shows how the energy of the vacuum positively arises
(Carroll 2010, 329-30). But the problem with this view
is not only that we cannot confirm that there are other
bubble universes, but with the very idea of the false
vacuum being eternal along with space. In fact,
Judaism was perhaps one of the first religious
traditions to suggest that our world was not unique, as
a famous Midrash states that “God created and
destroyed many worlds before arriving at the one that
now stands” (Drob 2001, 60). But a key problem is that the multiverse view now proposed by physicists is an attempt to treat the world deterministically. Insofar as there are many universes, it would seem that all possibilities are actually realized. Any contingency that could characterize the world is thereby eliminated. But such an ever-existing eternal world that realizes all possibilities is not possible due precisely to the insights we have explained from Cantorianism. As we will later hear from Meillassoux in our engagement with his ontology, there can be no total set of all possible infinites and we cannot say that one arises. Not only in this way could we not know whether one universe is more likely than another, but we cannot say all possibilities are realized. And if all could be realized, ultimately the possibility of nothingness would arise, again requiring a creator to achieve something from nothing.

This does not mean that God designed the world from a set of perfect and unchanging laws. On the contrary, it is not via laws, but rather a program/name that the universe unfolds. This will mean that any laws that appear to explain the regularity of phenomenon can change at any instant. The laws of the universe are not immutable. A multiverse also does not explain how we have the laws we do have, but shifts the problem to a different level. It says we have the laws we do since all possible laws are realized in some universe. Beyond whether we could ever possibly verify such other existing universes, it seems unlikely given that even in our own world what is possible is not realized. Another version of this deterministic ontological view in physics comes from the many-worlds interpretation of quantum physics. But this view says that consciousness is part of the physical universe, when various aspects of consciousness seem irreducible to the physical world, as many such as David Chalmers have shown.
consciousness is seen as a piece of reality, every possibility is realized in some universe. In one universe Schrödinger’s cat lives and in another it is dead. All that can possibly occur given the wave function does occur. There is no free will and nothing is not realized. But as we will argue, our consciousness, as self-referential, exhibits our own alienation in the signifier just as the world is so alienated via the tzimtzum. This alienation of the world directly implied Cantorian transfinity and incompleteness.\footnote{A reviewer of this manuscript indicated that some may accuse the ontology I develop here of being phallic or phallologocentric. While I want to address the issues signaled by the critique of phallologocentrism in depth in a future work I have planned, let me say this much at this point. First, this critique stems from one of two things as I currently understand it: 1) that the logic here only exemplifies the logic of the male side of the graphs of sexuation as Lacan renders it (cf. Levi Bryant’s \textit{The Democracy of Objects} [2011], section 6.1); and 2) that what is emphasized is that just as the human organism is an alienated signifier so here reality itself is alienated in the letter and via God’s self-negation by way of his own naming. Let me take the second view first. For Lacan, only psychotics are not fully alienated in the signifier. Otherwise, it is part and parcel of our very being. It is not something that can be avoided. It is constitutive. Here, I argue reality itself is literalized, which is the complement of that view. It is therefore no more ‘phallic’ than our reality as speaking beings. One would have to show how differentiality, the binary, etc. are avoidable and non-constitutive. Next, our being alienated in the signifier is the basis for Lacan rendering of the difference between the sexes and for the graphs of sexuation. On the male side, all males are alienated (there is a closed set of males) except for the one who stands outside uncastrated (the primal father). This seems to follow a basic theological model—that God is the exception and withdrawn (something transcendent). But one of the key things (there are others) that is often missed in applications of Lacan is that the feminine side is the}
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consciousness, it means it is ever absent, like the empty set, showing how we are made in the image of God.

Many worlds may have been created, but they were each a unique creation and not the deterministic realization of all possibles. While the universe may have no discernible boundary, such that if we traveled in space indefinitely we would never hit the end or would simply arrive back at what should be the same place we started, it is not thereby infinite. It is limited

logical equivalent (even though irreducible one to the other) of the male side for Lacan. The groupings that form the sexes are logically identical. That is, the rendering of the feminine logic is but the negation of the negation of the male (or vice-versa) in the same way that not not-A is A. They are but two ways then of looking at the same thing—of beings alienated (we are, after all, all speaking beings). The feminine side says that there is no all (no closed set—no essence of woman) of the feminine, but rather each woman is herself an exception, a singularity. That being said, no ontology can be one-sided and true as much as no psychoanalytic theory worth its salt will just be able to describe the desiring nature of one sex. No ontology should present one side of the story (for instance, offering a view of pure immanence). For us then, we will have offered a way of looking at entities as themselves alienated in the letter. We will have shown this in the following way by combining both the logics of the male and female sides (and necessarily so since we will have argued reality itself is marked first and foremost by the letter via the bit for example). On the male side, we have said all entities are equal as beings, as sets, but that the void and God transcend it. On the female side, we will have tried to show that one can also treat this world as incomplete and subject to the implications of the Cantorian transfinite. This meant that any set one can isolate is itself an exception and singular in its being. All that is is immanent to a code iterating itself. Thus, the ontology presented here will have comprehended the male and the female aspects of reality as much as Lacanian psychoanalysis does so for humanity.
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by the Big Bang and by the curvature of space itself, which is seemingly limited to the surface of some shape, such as a sphere or some other three-dimensional volume. In this way, while the Kabbalah may agree in many of its formulations with the idea of a multiverse, it means there are infinite possibilities, but not all occur, as creation itself is contingent and optional. As Carroll himself admits, this story cannot fit the very “universe in which we live,” as one still needs some outside force to allow for the inflation seen in the big bang to arise out of the void (Carroll 2010, 330). In fact, as Carroll notes several times, since “our universe began at the Big Bang it is burdened with a finely tuned boundary condition for which we have no good explanation” (Carroll 2010, 5). The early universe was “in a very special low entropy configuration” (Carroll 2010, 38). These two ideas themselves show that the vacuum is not enough. We can agree that the metaphysical concept of the void is a vanishing instance that leads to a false vacuum or to being, but this vacuum itself requires something from outside, both to come into being and to possibly give rise to entire worlds. The fact that there is a beginning with absolute order could not have developed from a void state, de Sitter space, or previously disordered state, no matter what speculations physicists enjoy indulging in.

We are arguing here that the primeval order and concentration of the universe came into existence through intelligence, God, not because it shows signs of being designed, but due to the metaphysical nature of the void itself. Speculating that space is eternal helps the metaphysics that underlies the physicists’ claims. But there is nothing about space that shows it should always be. Even a de Sitter space is a contingency. However, one may claim that whereas the vacuum is uncaused, the universe is caused by it. The issue here is then whether a false vacuum, empty
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space as space itself, can be an uncaused and eternal entity. But if this space is always there, it is infinitely there. That implies that its energy would have to never dissipate. But since it receives nothing from outside itself, it is not clear how that would occur given that there is nothing necessary about space conceived in itself. What we have then is a contingency that is supposedly uncaused and lasts indefinitely.

Beyond treating a contingency as an eternal necessity, this view treats space itself as a container when space is something that only arises on the basis of beings themselves. We argue, rather, that nothingness itself requires a foundation, the tzimtzum. God created the void or empty space out of which things arose. With Big Bang theory, one posits an infinitely dense singularity out of which things arose. And this model at least empirically lends more weight to our view than the one speculated by Vilenkin, Carroll, etc. In this way, science can give empirical weight, if not confirmation, to a philosophical view, just as we are using philosophy to attempt to confirm the experiments of the mystics. This “singularity has no positive ontological status,” as it is the “limit at which the universe ceases to exist,” and it “originates out of nothing” itself (Craig 1995, 224). This singularity thereby overlaps with the tzimtzum as it has “zero dimensionality and exists for no length of time” and is thereby described by a “mathematical point infinitely dense,” as William Lane Craig explains it (Craig 1995, 227). An ontology compatible with the Big Bang thereby requires not only a theory of the void that vanishes instantly, but also a topology of how a point becomes the finite world of three dimensions and beings that we now see. The tzimtzum forms a key moment of that ontology.

However, Craig also argues that the Cantorian transfinite cannot exist in our world and that “an infinite temporal regress of event is an actual infinite”
(Craig 1995, 3). But even if our own world exhibits finitude, that does not mean it is not characterizable by the transfinite. As we have argued, this view means the world is incomplete. In this way, the Cantorian transfinite does preclude the cosmological argument that Craig wants to articulate. For Craig, since an infinite regress is impossible, then God must be posited as the first cause and cause of the Big Bang itself. What the Cantorian notion of the transfinite shows is that there could be an infinite regress, even if there might not in actuality be one. This possibility is due to the incompletion that characterizes being itself. Such cosmological proofs did not rely on infinite regress, but the idea that if time stretches back infinitely, then an infinite amount of time needed to elapse to reach this moment. But that would mean this moment would not arise, as the infinity would never find completion. However, the Cantorian infinite shows that the infinite is at once, and can be smaller or larger than, other infinites. In this way, the moment we exist in may be part of another infinite series that has already been counted. The infinite for Cantor is not based on successive additions. Arguing that new parts arise increasing that infinity does not therefore count as criticism as Craig thinks it does (Craig 1995, 32). There can be additions because there can be more than one transfinite. Also, the number of events in the past might be characterized by one infinite whereas those in the present by a greater or larger one. In fact, our memories might be a larger infinite subset of present experiences.

Craig also argues that Cantorianism is only related to a mathematical world (Craig 1995, 9). But sets arise on the basis of things that exist and the empty set is the only thing that needs to be posited for set theory to work. Also, Craig thinks set theory is undone by antinomies it leads to, but those antinomies gave rise to an extensionalist view of sets
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that Craig thinks do not relate to the world (Craig 1995, 21). In this way, Craig’s objection can only obtain versus an intentionalist view of sets. More importantly, since Cantor’s view shows that being is incomplete, one cannot bring forth causal arguments to prove God exists. Rather, one can only refer to modal arguments that show that if contingent things exist infinitely, eventually nothingness will arise. Only God can create on the basis of this nothing. It is God’s necessity and the insistence of the void rather than causality that forms proof and is compatible with Cantorianism. If being is incomplete, then it may not ever reach a first cause on a causal chain.

In this way, we agree with part of Badiou’s basic critique of Big Bang ontology:

First of all, it is being as such which we are declaring here cannot make a whole, and not the world, nature or the physical universe. It is indeed a question of establishing that every consideration of beings-as-a-whole is inconsistent. The question of the limits of the visible universe is but a secondary aspect of the ontological question of the Whole. Furthermore, even if we only consider the world, it becomes rapidly obvious that contemporary cosmology opts for its finitude (or its closure) rather than its radical de-totalization. With the theory of the Big Bang, this cosmology even re-establishes the well-known metaphysical path which goes from the initial One (in this case, the infinitely dense ‘point’ of matter and its explosion) to the multiple-Whole (in this case, the galactic clusters and their composition). That’s because the infinite discussed by Koyré is still too undifferentiated to take on, with respect to the question of the Whole, the
value of an irreversible break. Today we know, especially after Cantor, that the infinite can certainly be local, that it may characterize a singular being, and that it is not only—like Newton’s space—the property of the global place of every thing. In the end, the question of the Whole, which is logical or onto-logical in essence, enjoys no physical or phenomenological evidence. It calls for an argument, the very one that mathematicians discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century, and which we have reformulated here. (Badiou 2009, 111)

The Big Bang ontology that Craig puts forth with his causal cosmological argumentation for God therefore presupposes that a whole can be made of the world (for this reason he believes there is only a potential and not actual infinite and must reject Cantor). But God is fully compatible with saying that the whole is not. Even if the world itself exhibits finitude in fact, the transfinite is the infinity as it pertains to the finite. A created world can also be non-whole and finite as we are arguing here via Cantor, set theory, etc. It must also be emphasized that the singularity is not a one in the sense of a whole and no more so than the very empty set and void that Badiou’s own theory relies on. In addition, not every thing is infinite in the Cantorian sense necessarily, unless the transfinite is connected directly to the logic of the signifier. And in that way, again, it is more so about the incompletion of things than an actual infinitude of properties for instance.

God’s absence from the world is also what makes atheism possible. It entails a constant atheistic temptation. But God’s transcendence leaves us without other means. It means also that the least obvious thing will be monotheism and belief in God. That is why it is important to gain awareness of the
pure name in which God is revealed. Badiou himself is already aware how his thesis concerning the nature of the void and its name will provoke theologians to start to draw conclusions as we do here:

The theologians, besides, already knew that the thesis ‘God is One’ is quite different from the thesis ‘God is unique.’ . . . Thus, the name of the void being unique, once it is retroactively generated as a-name for the multiple–of-nothing, does not signify in any manner that ‘the void is one.’ It solely signifies that, given that the void, ‘unpre- sentable’, is solely presented as a name, the existence of ‘several’ names would be incompatible with the extensional regime of the same and the other, and would in fact constrain us to presuppose the being of the one, even if it being the made of one-voids, or pure atoms. *(BE 90)*

To protect it and prevent it from becoming one name amongst others, one must recall the absence of God. That is a precondition for our own being, and forgetting this truth is also always a perennial possibility. We can forget God since in the beginning God leaves only a pure name to remember him by. God is silent except for such a trace. And the mystic, in contemplating, calls us to remember. The ineffable nature of the divine Name also calls us to silence, to preserve how the reference remains outside it, the impossible. But also, then, all names and things is a point in a line. In each point appears the whole precisely due to the whole’s being incomplete. This is how the *tzimtzum* is thereby repeated in a collapse and condensation found at each instance and in each differentiation. The infinitesimal vanishing point enacted in and by the mark of the void, ∅.
The residue of the infinite then is finite, but makes possible the infinite as infinite, the transfinite. The tzimtzum is not a myth. It is no more a myth then the empty set being the mark of the void is. The tzimtzum is confirmed on the basis of the principles of set theory and their implication, on the basis of philosophical argumentation via ontological and modal argumentation and what can be deduced from it. On the other hand, these ideas show that the tzimtzum is a necessary account of things. Once one reaches impasses of being itself, and on the basis of the real one confronts, only such accounts remain. But these accounts are the products of the mystic’s knowledge, the experimental results achieved through contemplation of the divine Name. The Name is a stand-in for God.

§20. THE NAME AND THE NAMES

While we have now explained the holy Name, this Name does not exclude the other names attributed to God. But the holy Name we have emphasized does differ in kind from these other names/attributes. In the first place, the holy Name itself does not describe or attribute some property to the divine. It is a pure name, a pure act of nomination. It is also itself an icon, a name whose very shape and structure take on significance. Most importantly, we are arguing here that this divine name, as mark of the void and primary bit of information, forms the very material of beings themselves. Other divine names we could list either attempt to repeat what this name again does or act as predicates of the divine. The number of such divine names is limited only by what can be said of the absolute infinite. We can name the divine one the ‘perfect one’ or ‘that than which none can be greater’ in order to emphasize some property God has in and of himself. But divine names can only simply name how we perceive God and the effects of creation (‘the
Merciful one’, for instance). There is no one predicate for God, but rather multiple.

When you try to name and describe the absolutely infinite in terms of what it is, one is lead necessarily to an endless diversity that the absolute, which is simple and unique, does not have in itself. While the Name itself, the mark of the void, is the divine itself in this world, the divine names/attributes (in the plural) one can pinpoint are plagued by the problem of referring to and signifying the nature of the divine itself. This is not to say that the mark ∅ is the only possible way to present the absolute name of God. But rather, when we write the Name of God with ∅ or with the four-letter name of Jewish prayer or some other way, we are not writing multiple names, but the same name again and again. This one holy Name repeats in written form the ineffable nature of God, but this can be executed in more than one way. It actualizes the name of God as it is in this world, and the only way in which God is in this world as a being whereas the plural divine names do not actualize the divine, but help us comprehend it.

For Judaism, the tetragrammaton, for example, is not a predicate or attribute that attempts to describe how God relates to what is created or the manner of God’s perfection, as Yehuda Halevi explains his Kuzari (Halevi 2003, 67). But any other divine name/attribute either attempts to describe again the inherent nature of God as absolute and creator or to describe God’s relation to the creation and to us. For instance, God is called “merciful if he improves the condition of any man” (Halevi 2003, 68). That is to say, as God created all, if one’s condition improves, one sees in it mercy. But in no way with this differentiation between the Name and divine names are we trying to differentiate between the God of religion and the God of Philosophers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the God of Aristotle,
etc. For us, there is no distinction between the two. In prayer, one reaches out to a metaphysically understood creator as much as one does to a merciful figure that hears one’s prayers.

The divine names thus answer the questions ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ in way that a pure proper name does not. Marion thinks that “the divine names have no other function than to manifest . . . impossibility,” the impossibly of having full knowledge of God (GWB 106). But even though the names are plural insofar as none fully can comprehend God, only the unique holy Name indicates such an impossibility in its very name. It is only the holy Name that in and of itself notes that God is unpresentable and beyond. We are ignorant of the nature of God, but at the same time are able to form predicates that both indicate that fact and confirm the little we do know. Admitting our lack of total knowledge of God is positive, but even in negatively saying what God is, we still confirm some limited knowledge of how God is in himself or how we relate to God. This view does not deny then that when we try to affirm something of God (some particular quality), that our predication does not fail in many ways. In addition, when we deny something of God (for instance, that God is a being), we speak truth. Also, when we say that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought, we again speak truth, even if we do not fully grasp the implication or meaning. In this way, while negative theology must always risk appearing as atheism insofar as it denies, for instance, that God is a being, this is but a consequence of negativity which still in its negativity contains a positive determination. Negative theology still affirms and must do so. It contains not only a desire for God, but also an affirmation, for instance, of this transcendence as such, of negativity as such. While it affirms an absolute Other, it affirms the necessary tension between denial and attribution.
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This is also the danger of any name. A name makes it appear as though we have a thing. But any name of God denies and annihilates this possibility at the same time as God is truly nameless. And this namelessness also is what necessitates that we will have names that will both describe God and God’s relationship to us and to all creation, for no name is truly ever able to capture God. It may be an attempt to say how God is or how God is for us. In this way, divine names as adjectives may not be truly names. They are not proper names as such. One’s proper name does not describe one. However, when we call a person ‘Shorty’ we do not so much attempt to describe them as to refer to them via term of endearment or insult. However with God, we turn properties into attempts at names, dissimulating names, because we seek a way to address God, also to discover more importantly how we are addressed. The only unique and proper name is the Name whereas the names are inadequate and yet reveal truths concerning the divine.

We are here taking issue with Maimonides’s engagement with divine names. Maimonides wants to preserve at all costs, in any act of philosophical argumentation, the idea that God is unique and beyond anything that can exist in this world. For this reason, whenever we say something of God (for instance, that God is merciful) we do not say what God is, but only that God is not merciful the way a human is for instance. We only say that God is not cruel. For Maimonides, directly affirmative statements concerning God are secretly denials about God. Given the manner in which God exceeds human knowledge we can only continually say what God is not. If we were to compare God to humans more directly for Maimonides (for example, if we were to say that God is more merciful than humans), then we risk seeing God as one being amongst others and on a scale that
goes from highest to lowest. For Maimonides, God is off the scale itself. But even negation here has a positive dimension, it tells us something true.

Maimonides also wants to emphasize that God is beyond all emotions as God is not corporeal in any way. In this way, when we say that God is ‘compassionate’, then we are only deriving this idea of compassion from what humans know and do and thereby risk hiding that God is totally different from us precisely due to God’s perfection (Guide I.XXXXV). God cannot be compared with creatures made of flesh and blood that exist in space and time. Our understanding is very limited to negating whatever we think of God (Guide I.LVIII). But Maimonides still affirms that we can know God by his effects, by his creation, even if for Maimonides this is true because these effects follow from God’s nature, rather than truly being part and parcel of God as such (Guide I.XXXIV). In this way, we can derive certain truths about God via the world and its very existence, even for Maimonides. This means that saying God is creator is already to know something true about God that can be affirmed. For instance, to say that I am a human already negates that I am a leopard or house. Also, for Maimonides it is positive knowledge to say we know that certain terms must be understood negatively. We do increase in knowledge when we say that God is not a creature or like a creature or being, even if we deny that God exists as a being or like a spatially extended substance. If, by saying that God is merciful, we really mean that God is not cruel we have increased our knowledge. But if we speak only of how we are affected by the world, we have also spoken of God as well.

\[17\] Citations of Maimonides’s *Guide for the Perplexed* are cited throughout by part and chapter numbers.
For Maimonides, part of the danger is that by affirming any attributes of God we will also think that God is complex rather than simple. But this is not a problem when these attributes are a matter of how we apprehend him. As for God himself, any attribute recorded would only have to be compatible with pure simplicity. Maimonides also believes no property we speak of is truly identical with God. That is, God is not mercy itself. God is not necessity itself (recall here one of the criticisms of the ontological argument). But if we say God is all-knowing, we do not say that God is knowledge itself since there can be imperfect forms. And if we were to say that God is Goodness itself, it is only due to Goodness being transcendentally interchangeable with the other key properties of God.

Our position here is closer to Maimonides than to Aquinas. Aquinas sees divine names as showing how creatures are analogous to God. A person can be merciful; God is most merciful or perfectly merciful. The term ‘merciful’ is here used in two ways (that is, equivocally). For Maimonides, it is a total equivocation such that one should not really even say God is merciful. For Aquinas, it is more so a question of how one and the same term can be said of creatures in a less than maximal way and for God in the most exemplary way. And in this way, Maimonides is right as the total transcendence of God must be perceived. The holy Name marks God’s withdrawals. The divine names would describe only something they truly cannot. Aquinas thus still places God on the scale (Seeskin 1991, 30-31). There is only a difference of degree for Aquinas whereas there is a difference of kind for Maimonides (Seeskin 1991, 30-33). But that does not mean we cannot say how God is. When we look at creation, we do not say that it is not that God is creator, but just that things are created and in their creation call for a creator. We say that God created. In this way, not every discussion of God’s properties can
be a discussion of God’s effects on the world (Seeskin 1996, 35-36).

In addition, Maimonides does not listen to the mystics of his own religious tradition (and it was partly for this reason that Kabbalah exploded discursively after Maimonides) who reveal to us in part how God does in fact create the world. God’s creation may be good and therefore God is good, but we can also say that God created the world using numbers and letters. Also, God does not depend on creation. God insists beyond creation. It is for this reason that the *via negativa* of negative theology has already required three steps. First, one says God is merciful. Then one negates this name by noting how God is not merciful like a human, as God is not a being, not corporeal, etc. In the final step, one negates that negation by noting how this mercy follows from God’s creating and that God has only one pure proper name. Here, the path of negative theology attempts to have names as both attributes and proper names at the same time (the Merciful one or most Merciful one) by turning adjectives into names.

Divine names are problematic for they attempt to enact a language for the unnamable. They therefore try to name without naming. But this problem does not escape the Name. As a purely proper name, it also has the problem of never belonging essentially to what it names. No proper name of a person belongs to that person. And the Name of God also is not God and separate from God. This is yet another reason that the tetragrammaton is not pronounced, since it is not fully appropriate to God. For this reason, we try to note who a person is by describing them. We attempt to do the same with God. But in the case of a person, their otherness as other escapes, as Levinas points out. So does God as absolute other. The proper name indicates and adds on, even to a person. But whereas the proper name marks how the individual remains before us.
even though their otherness is hidden, God’s name marks that God is fully withdrawn and only leaves behind a point, a name, a mark of the void. The pure name marks God’s withdrawal. The name of a person however can evoke that person and call them forward into presence. When they come upon us, we can greet them with it. But in prayer when we list divine names of God, we do not call God forth to us in this way. Rather, the very iteration and reiteration of names empties them of meaning and predication to the point that God’s very absence and insistence beyond them is marked. Laclau uses an analysis by Scholem to make this point:

Now, how is it possible to express the inexpressible? Only if a certain combination of terms is found in which each of them is divested of its particular meaning—if each of them does not express but destroys the differential character of that meaning. We already know the way in which this can be achieved: through the equivalence. I will take as an example one of the cases studied by Scholem: the litany haadereth veheae-munah Zehay olamim, to be found in the “Greater Hekhaloth” and included in the liturgy of the High Holidays. I quote its beginning: “Excellence and faithfulness—are His who lives forever Understanding and blessing—are His who lives forever Cognition and expression—are His who lives forever Grandeur and greatness—are His who lives forever Magnificency and majesty—are His who lives forever Counsel and strength—are His who lives forever” etcetera. The other attributes of Him who lives forever are lustre and brilliance, grace and benevolence, purity and goodness, unity and honour, crown and
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glory, precept and practice, sovereignty and rule, adornment and permanence, mystery and wisdom, might and meekness, splendour and wonder, righteousness and honour, invocation and holiness, exultation and nobility, song and hymn, praise and glory.
(Laclau 1997, 17)

This is another way to achieve the desired goal of negative theology. In repeating divine attributes, we do not grow in knowledge, but rather, as Laclau emphasizes, all the terms are made “equivalent” and made to refer to a God that transcends them—something beyond these names that can only be accessed and indicated for us by listing these failed names (Laclau 1997, 18-19).

For us, God can only be noted via particular experiences of names that fall short of the absolute itself (Laclau 1997, 19). It is not enough to say God is transcendent, but one must insist on repeating divine names. This is the way that the philosophy and religion differ, as philosophy would be content with just noting a thesis. But the same God is at stake. These divine names/attributes do not tell us what belongs to a thing, but indicate the absence of a thing that has withdrawn from this world and that insists beyond it. However, the properties of a thing that belong to a thing are supposed to explain it. God’s not being a thing makes this action problematic. But we can still say what reason requires us to of God in himself (e.g. perfect, necessary). If we could not, we would risk having many gods. It is the monotheistic intervention that says that all the different possible attributes we truly attribute to God and that we refer to God based on God’s effects refer to one and the same thing and in many cases are interchangeable. Otherwise we might have those who think there are multiple gods. We can also say we know of God based
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on the fact that there is a creation and it requires this creator. And we can also discuss how God relates to us even if we do not truly understand God.

Kabbalah calls God nothingness [ayin] because of a lack of proper attributes. God, in order to reveal himself, does so only through a pure name and through creation via numbers [sefirot] and letters that follow from this name and themselves involve infinity in their finitude. Calling God absolute [eyn sof] means God is not determinable as something finite. The finite can in many respects be understood and fully so. God’s infinity lies in being unfathomable. For Kant, things in themselves are unknowable, but that view risks disseminating a negative theology of all things. However, a thing itself, as extended, will have limited known properties. Also, saying that God is not often leads us already onto the right path. We take the Kabbalistic determination of God as infinite [eyn sof] not to mean that all things are God. And in fact, all did not proceed from the one, but rather from its withdrawal.

Also, many want to see God as a unity of contradictions. God would then be both the whole union of beings and nothingness at the same time. But against this view we have argued that one must make choices. God is not both all-knowing and ignorant at the same time, for example. God is not the union of all including the opposite. If God’s being eyn sof means there is nothing physical or corporeal about God, then God does not have presence in a physical world but is thereafter withdrawn from it, rather than filling all places. There is a place empty of God. God’s Name may be present in all things, but not God himself. All things may be connected due to their being created in through the tzimtzum, but that meant there is a distinction in all between the universe and God. All is not one. One cannot predicate everything of God, even if God has a long list of divine names/attributes. As
opposed to Spinoza, God is not an infinite extension,\textsuperscript{18}
but his Name may be.

\textsuperscript{18} I agree completely with Badiou’s critique of Spinoza and
have nothing to add to it (\textit{BE} 112-22). While I will later take
up a Spinozistic viewpoint on the irreducibility of matter
and mind, I reject Spinoza as a pantheist in general and in
particular due to his inability to think the transfinite and the
void.