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JUDAISM AND MARXISM: ON THE NECESSITY OF DIALOGUE

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Given several decades of fruitful dialogue, it should be possible for Judaism to benefit from some of the theological and political developments which have transpired in Christianity, especially in terms of the bridge of dialogue and communication being built between Christianity, Marxism and movements of liberation. World War Two and post-war upheavals impacted directly upon Christian theology which was radicalized through its exposure to Hitler, Vietnam and the Third World Revolutions. As a result of this experience, radical Christian thinkers entered into a dialogue with atheistic and revolutionary Marxism. Both sides agreed to overlook the profound structural differences between the two systems of thought. Both sides, theists and materialists, agreed to overlook the difficult problem of God's existence, and to concentrate instead on the paramount struggle for human dignity.¹

This dialogue has been initiated successfully because in the contemporary world, radical Christianity and Marxism have shared a common set of theoretical assumptions. Because radical Christianity has de-emphasized the theistic and focused instead on the political, both Marxists and radical Christians can talk of the future, of a world in the state of transformation. A doctrine of immanence has become common to both. Marxism speaks in terms of unalienated labor. Work should be the active relatedness of individual to nature, the creation of a new world, including the transformation of the individual himself through creative work. Radical Christianity speaks in terms of ethical praxis, the belief that only human action can redeem the world. Marxism's aim, fundamentally, is the "spiritual" emancipation of the individual, of his liberation from the fetters of economic oppression and determination, of reconstituting the individual in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature. Radical Christianity's aim is the achievement of both spiritual and temporal liberation. Both stress the role of human activity, of man as the responsible causal agent, the motivating force behind either the spiritual or temporal reconstruction of the world.

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It is in this spirit that it may now be the appropriate moment for a Jewish-Marxist dialogue, a conversation between Jewish theism and Jewish radicalism, made even more imperative because of the Holocaust. Philosophically, an opening to the left is necessary. In spite of the fact that Marxist theorists have made significant contributions in such fields as historiography, economic and political theory, philosophy, psychology and literary criticism, a glance at even quite contemporary scholarly and influential works of biblical and talmudic criticism, Jewish history, theology and philosophy, suggests that Jewish thinkers and scholars do not regard it as incumbent upon them to take the "fact" of Marxist theory seriously into account. In a word, there is a curious disparity between contemporary Jewry's practical, political obsession with Marxism in terms of global politics, world revolution, the Palestinian problem, etc., and its theoretical indifference. This neglect is doubtless partly attributable to the implacable hostility with which Marxism and Judaism have usually confronted each other, beginning with responses to Marx's essay, "On the Jewish Question." In it, Marx argued that the emancipation of the Jews depended on the emancipation of mankind from Judaism. Marx was for socialism and against capitalism. The final enemy in the final conflict was the bourgeoisie, and the Jews were the paradigm of the bourgeoisie. The Jew reduced everything, he noted, including God, to the level of practical need. Their interests were exclusively material and money was their God. "Money is the jealous god of Israel before whom no other god may stand. Money debases all the gods of mankind and turns them into commodities... The god of the Jews has been secularized and become the god of the world. Exchange is the true god of the Jew. His god is nothing more than illusory exchange." These passages represent a theme which runs through Marx's writings, on the basis of which he has often been charged with anti-Semitism. There is undoubtedly some substance in the accusation, but the situation is more complex than might appear at first glance. In the first place, Marx was not the only person to suggest that something in Jews "took to" business and commerce and that they were indeed quite skillful at operating within a free market system. In fact, it was probably Moses Hess who first suggested to Marx the connection between religion, Judaism and economic alienation. For a time, such statements incurred charges of bigotry but in this era of pluralism it should be possible to
think in terms of group characteristics without being accused of harboring prejudice. Nor need one be a Marxist to see a correlation between Jews and free enterprise; some present-day Jewish neo-conservative thinkers argue along surprisingly similar lines. In the second place, we should notice Marx's claim that what we discover in Jewish commercial practice is "the secret of religion," and not just the Jewish religion. His critique is thus more universal.

Be that as it may, this strain in Marxist thought has engendered a degree of suspicion if not hostility among many scholars and articulators of Judaism. This has been exacerbated in recent years. Jewish thinkers have apparently assumed that they had little to learn from the "enemy" and they further supposed that they "knew" what the theoretical structures of that "enemy" were without submitting them to close scrutiny. The irony is that Marxism has exerted an indirect and "unnoticeable" influence on Jewish thought as one of the formative influences in the development of what might be called "sociological awareness": the recognition that the worlds of meaning and relationship that we inhabit are social, historical constructs and are affected by our material realities. Even the use, by theologians and others, of concepts such as "alienation," "ideology," and "determinism" owes something to the influence of the Marxist tradition, even though it may be difficult or impossible to specify that "something" with any precision. What I am suggesting, in other words, is that the influence of Judaism on Jewish affairs and Jewish life is still such, given the importance of the Middle East for example, as to render it dangerous for Jewish theology to be allowed to go about its business in real or imagined isolation from the forces that shape our culture, our intellectual traditions and our history and amongst these forces, Marxism certainly occupies a significant place. 

This encounter is particularly germane in the twentieth century, as Richard Rubenstein has noted. The peculiarities of our times is that although God is absent he is nevertheless rediscovered as the one "problem" which focuses the task of man, the crisis of thought and the dilemmas of time and history. Sartre may repudiate him with confidence, affirming "he is dead." He spoke to us and now is silent. Heidegger, with a calmness in striking contrast to the proclaiming zealot of Nietzsche's, may observe: "Because we hark back to Nietzsche's saying about the 'death of god,' people take such an enterprise
for atheism. For what is more logical than to consider the man who has experienced the 'death of God' as a Godless person." C. G. Jung, modifying the atheism of Sartre and the ontic paganism of Heidegger, may make God a "function of the unconscious" a projected reality which "does not exist 'absolutely,' that is independent of the human subject and beyond all human conditions." Yet it is clear that the death of God is but a metaphor for more profound death, for this God did not die a natural death—he withered, contracted, starved to death. He is no longer a constructive power in human existence, he is among the displaced and unemployed. Not only are the traditions of Judaism and Christianity discarded—this could be tolerated, I suppose, for historic forms, to the extent that they are merely historical, can be reviewed and amended. It is rather that God as the Other, He who in His being is wholly independent of the world and yet related to it as creator, revealer, and redeemer, is dead. The death of God is the death of the absolute. Henceforth each man is considered free to authenticate his own existence according to Sartre, each man is responsible for the rescue of Being according to Heidegger, each man fashions his own God according to the deepest requirements of his psyche, according to Jung.

There is a pathos in the concept of the "death of God" which cannot be ignored. The 20th century—the century least able to dispense with God—has, in fact, dispensed with God. It is understandable for the 18th and 19th centuries to have abandoned God—the enthusiasm of the Age of Enlightenment and the complacent self-assurance of 19th century society could well destroy religion. The 20th century, however, is the century of tragedy, of genocide, of a threatening nuclear holocaust, the century that has demonstrated what man can do if left to his own desires. Unfortunately, it has become a post-religious century, a century which has seen the end of religion. Rational religion is gone; God is not a function of the mind, an object of feeling, the foundation of ethics, the buttress of values and standards. The conventional God may be dead. But Sartre and Heidegger dispense not only with the God of convention and the God of religion, they dispense with the God who is Absolute Other. We find similar manifestations of theological despair in the Jewish tradition occasioned by the shock of Auschwitz.

Because the Jewish God has always been a creative God of history, Auschwitz destroyed for many Jews the faith in history. YHWH acted at the Red Sea. He also acted at Sinai.
But Auschwitz too, is an historical event. Are the covenant and gas chambers dual aspects of the same God? How is it possible to reconcile the saving God of Abraham, Richard Rubenstein queries in *After Auschwitz*, with the God who was witness to the death of six million of His Chosen people? Were the Nazi murderers doing God's work? Unable to accept that possibility, Rubenstein resurrects the Lurianic God of nothingness who, having created the world and emptied Himself in this act of Tzimtzum, contraction, then withdrew from His object. After Auschwitz, the God of history is dead for Rubenstein, replaced by a God of absence, thus leaving temporal social existence devoid of divine encounter and intervention.⁶

Post-Holocaust Jewish thought was thus faced with a God who was inscrutable. God became a puzzlement and ambiguous, if not obnoxious; Jewish thought became heavy with despair. Classical Jewish thought and Jewish mysticism were optimistic, were generated by faith in an activist God and man who intervened and moved history. Post-Holocaust thought, in contrast, sank into anger and emptiness. It lost faith in history and could never trust the future again. Human action seemed helpless against the blind forces of fate. There was little that the individual could do and life was seen as being empty and tragic. The times may thus be ripe for a theological negotiation between Judaism and Marxism since Marxism, as Robert Tucker has argued, has as its core the "redemptive idea" that people can and will transform their history.⁷

It might be useful, at this point, for me to reflect briefly on the concepts and assumptions that I think are of essence in the Marxist intellectual tradition, particularly as they relate to what I believe is central in Judaism. It should be emphasized that Marxism is upheld here less as a doctrine than as a method.

In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio describes a Jew named Abraham who travels to Rome to examine at first hand the claims of Christianity. Finding corruption rampant in the Papal Court, Abraham thereupon converts to Christianity, reasoning that if the Christian religion survives and prospers despite the efforts of the clergy to destroy it, it must have divine support.

A 20th century Abraham would likely become a convert to Marxism. Marx's doctrines survive and flourish despite all that is done in his name. An apostle of liberation, Marx is invoked by admirers of Stalinist terror, and Marxism has given the world more than a half-dozen repressive and anti-libertarian regimes.
Marx was a militant atheist; there are religious Marxists. Marx was virulently anti-Zionist and anti-nationalist; there are Zionist Marxists. Marx was relentlessly rationalistic; there are existential Marxists and Freudian Marxists. Marx advocated action—praxis; there are pacifist Marxists. Marx despised, above all else, parliamentary liberalism; yet Western Europe is witnessing a boom in Parliamentary Marxism.

Why? Is there in Marx's teaching some elusive core of truth, some transcending historical value that enables it to flourish?

"A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police spies." It is now about 135 years since Karl Marx and Friederich Engels wrote that resounding first paragraph to the Communist Manifesto, and time can hardly be said to have dulled their words or to have relegated their ideas to the backburner of history. I want to emphasize again that I am not talking about the Soviet Union or the spectre of a worldwide Red Communist revolution. What I will be focusing on is Marxism as a way of looking at the world, as a social theory, as an intellectual tradition. To reject or ignore an important intellectual tradition of criticism, as much of contemporary Jewish thought seems to be doing, because of the Soviet Union, Cuba, or the P.L.O., for example, would be intellectual self-defeatism.

Now Marxism is an intellectual tradition, one of social analysis. The Greeks and Romans were asking one basic question—change. How do you explain physical change? Marxism asks a different question—how do you explain social and economic change? As such, Marxism is truly a modern political philosophy. It is one of the most important of the post-Industrial philosophies for it seeks to understand the structure of the contemporary world. And it has had a profound influence on how we view our world, whether we know it or not or whether we agree with it or not. Marx's essential theory which asserts that the most important question to be asked of any phenomenon is concerned with the relation which it bears to the economic structure, has created new tools of criticism and research whose use has altered the direction and emphasis of the social sciences in our generation. All those whose work rests on social observation are necessarily affected. Not only the conflicting classes and their leaders in every country, but
historians and sociologists, psychologists and political scientists, critics and creative artists, so far as they try to analyze the changing quality of the life of their society, owe the form of their ideas in part to the work of Karl Marx and those laboring in his tradition. His thought was, and continues to be, revolutionary.

Marx remained all of his life an oddly isolated figure among the revolutionaries of his time, hostile and opposed to their basic methods and their objectives. No matter how widely the majority of European democrats, utopians, even anarchists differed in character and aims, they basically agreed on two fundamental principles: that society was reformable and that it could be achieved by the determined will of individuals. Marx rejected both of these assumptions. He was convinced that human history is governed by laws which cannot be altered by the mere intervention of individuals and that change cannot be achieved from above by applying temporary structures to fundamental problems, but must be achieved through a total transformation of society, occasioned by the inevitable class struggle that Marx saw as the generating energy of history. It was therefore important for Marx to understand the nature and laws of the historical process, and that is why he spent thousands of hours pouring over documents in the British Museum which described with stark reality the industrial world of 19th century England. What he found in the documents and what he personally observed was a world in which working people lived in wretched homes; whole families, sometimes more than one family living in one room; relatives sleeping together, often without beds to sleep on; ill nourished on flour mixed with sawdust; poisoned by ptomaine from rancid meat; doping themselves and their wailing children with laudanum; spending their lives, without a sewage system, along the piles of their excrement and garbage; spreading epidemics of typhus and cholera. Marx needed to understand how an economic system could get this way. His theory of historical materialism provided the answer.

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." This eleventh "Thesis on Feuerbach," written in 1845, bears witness to a conviction already discernible in the "Paris Manuscripts" of 1844. In these manuscripts, we find Marx reflecting on man's alienation from the work of his hands, from his fellow men and from the world of nature. This insight was hardly innovative since it set him alongside Feuerbach and much of the complex
tradition of post-Hegelian German philosophy. What was new was his claim that the contradictions in the human tradition demand resolution. Not a theoretical or philosophical resolution in thought, but rather a resolution in fact.

"Hitherto," Marx says in the opening words of *The German Ideology*, "men have always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relations according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The products of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pine
ing away. Let us revolt against this rule of concepts." It seems clear that this "liberation", this "revolt", must take the form of an inversion of the present state of reality: it must be such to allow people to arrange their ideas about "God" and of "normal man", according to their relationships, rather than the other way around. In this way, people will be liberated from the idols they have made; idols which stand over against them as alien and alienating powers.

If the goal is truth and freedom, Marx urged that we avoid the illusions of "the German ideology". Our focus must not be on ideas, but on people, on their activities in the material conditions of their lives. "All historical writing must set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of man." And the history of the "modification" of nature by human action is the history of the modes of production.

In these ideas Marx is laying down two fundamental features of what he will call "historical materialism". The first, which is one of the most important concepts in Marxism, is that man produces himself through labor, through physically and mentally "working" the conditions of his existence. The second is the insistence that, if we pay attention to "real individuals", to what they produce with their hands and minds, and to the modes of production, then we must proceed historically, or else we will find ourselves suffering from the illusion that contemporary modes of production are timeless and immutable. Materialist method is thus historical method or, better put, historical method is a matter of perceiving the process of human action in the material world.

History, for Marx, is thus the struggle of people to realize their full human potentialities. Man's effort to fully realize
himself is a struggle to escape from being the plaything of forces that seem capricious and arbitrary, that is, to attain mastery of them and of himself, which is the state of freedom. People attain this subjugation of the world not by an increase in knowledge obtained by thinking as Aristotle had supposed—but by the activity of labor—the conscious moulding by people of their environment and each other—the essential unity of theory and praxis. Labor transforms the world and the individual himself, too, in the process of the activity. The history of society is the history of the inventive labors that change people, alter their habits, outlooks, relationships to other men and to nature. Among man's inventions—conscious or unconscious—is the division of labor which increases the possibility of productivity, thus creating wealth beyond our immediate needs. This accumulation in its turn creates the possibility of leisure and culture; but also the abuse of this surplus by those who have, to coerce and exploit those who don't, thereby dividing people into classes—the controllers and controlled. History, for Marx, is the interaction between the lives of these two actors on the human stage. The complex web can only be understood and controlled if the central dynamic factor responsible for the direction of the process is grasped. For Marx that generating factor is the class struggle. The character of the age in which Marx lived was, in his view, determined by this class war; the behavior and outlook of individuals and societies was determined by this factor—this was the central historical truth of a culture, anticipated by Defoe's Crusoe, which relies on accumulation and by the battles to control this accumulation. But precisely because it is an historical predicament, it was not eternal. Nothing is eternal—history moves, history transforms itself. The only permanent factor in the history of humankind is people themselves, intelligible only in terms of the struggle which is part of their essence, the struggle to master nature and organize their productive powers in a rational fashion. Work, in the cosmic vision of Marx, is what makes men and their relationships what they are; its distortion by the division of labor and the class war leads to degradation, dehumanization, exploitative human relationships, and conscious and unconscious falsifications of vision to conceal this reality. When this has been understood, and action, which is the concrete expression of such understanding takes place, instead of dividing and enslaving people, unites and liberates them: gives full
expression to their creative capacities in the only form in which human nature is wholly free—in common endeavor, social cooperation, etc.

So for Marx, what gave its specific character to any given society was the system of economic relations which governed that society. In a much celebrated passage, he summarized this view as follows:

"In the social production which men carry on, they enter into definite relations that are indispensible and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these productive relations constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness . . . It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution with the change of the economic foundation the whole vast superstructure is sooner or later entirely transformed . . . . No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have developed, and the new higher relations of production never appear before the conditions of their existence have matured in the wound of the old society . . . . , the problem itself only arises when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation."12

Marx's use of the image of birth invites us to see the entire process of human existence, past and present, not merely as the history of society, but as a prolonged and often agonizing process of gestation: as the process of man's prehistory. And he says precisely this: "The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production . . . . The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation."13 All history before the emergence of communism is "prehistory" for Marx since it is not yet the human history of man. There is in this notion an element of eschatological prophecy not unrelated to Jewish Messianism, which may have been born with the destruction of the Second Temple or may already be inherent in the Genesis account of Creation.
It is not only that Marx's language concerning the "birth" of humanity from the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism announces a state of affairs in which human existence will be "redeemed," in which man's alienation will be healed, that justifies the description of such language as eschatological. It is, rather, Marx's apparent conviction that once achieved, this state of affairs will be irreversible. Whatever changes and modifications individual existence and social organization may experience after the post-revolutionary "birth" of mankind from "prehistory," these changes will not carry the risk of reversal or the re-emergence of class struggle. Conflictual "prehistory" is over and human history begins. This conviction indicates the presence of an eschatological element in his thought.

For Marx, no less than for the anarchists, people are potentially wise, creative and free. If their character has deteriorated beyond recognition, that is due to the long and brutalizing class wars and exploitation in which they and their ancestors have lived ever since society ceased to be that primitive communism out of which it has developed. However, Marx is the eternal optimist. History has been moving in an inexorable, progressive fashion. The gradual freeing of mankind has pursued a definite, irreversible direction: every new epoch is inaugurated by the liberation of a heretofore oppressed class; nor can a class, once it has been eliminated, ever return. History does not move backwards, or in cyclical movements: it moves straight ahead and forward. A knowledge, a consciousness of this process is essential to effective political action. Implicit here is the notion that people can, people must act, must participate in their own liberation. So the ancient world gave way to the medieval, slavery to feudalism and feudalism to the industrial bourgeoisie. Each of these changes was an improvement.

And now only one stratum remains submerged below the level of the rest, one class remains enslaved, the landless, propertyless proletariat, created by the advance of technology and industry. The proletariat is on the lowest possible rung of the social scale: there is no class below it; by securing its own emancipation the proletariat will therefore emancipate mankind. It has, unlike other classes, no specific claim, no interest of its own which it does not share with all people as such: for it has been stripped of everything but its bare humanity--what it is entitled to, is the minimum to which all
people are entitled to. Its fight is thus not for one class, but for the natural rights of all. And while history is determined and the victory will ultimately be won, how rapidly this will occur, how efficiently, how far in accordance with the popular will, depends on human initiative, on the degree of understanding of their task by the masses.

Such, briefly summarized, is the theory of history and society which constitutes the metaphysical basis of Marxism, of the preconditions of that definitive, unsurpassable and eschatological transformation of human society which he sees as implicit in the logic of the development of capitalism. What will be the outcome or aftermath of such a revolution, Marx does not disclose. He is in the business not of predicting the future, but of analyzing current trends. It is by no means a wholly empirical theory, since it does not confine itself to an empirical description of any phenomenon and the formulation of a hypothesis based on this data. Often the data is bent to fit the theory. The Marxist doctrine of movement in dialectical collisions—change comes through clash of opposites—is not a hypothesis wedded to particular facts, but a pattern, uncovered by a non-empirical, historical method, a historical hunch, so to speak, the validity of which is never questioned.

Why is the theory so impressive, then? In the sharpness and clarity with which this theory formulates its questions, in the rigor of the method by which it proposes to search for the answers, in its passion to critique, in the combination of attention to detail and power of wide comprehensive generalization, it is without parallel. Even if all its specific conclusions were proved false, its importance in creating a wholly new attitude to social and historical questions, and so opening new avenues of human knowledge, would be unimpaired. He set out to and did refute the proposition that ideas or religion decisively determine the course of history. He replaced this with the scientific study of historically evolving economic relations and of their bearing on other aspects of the lives of communities and individuals. If nothing else occurred, this would be a revolutionary achievement.

Now Marx's philosophy, like much of existentialist thinking, represents a protest against man's alienation, his loss of his identity and his transformation into an object, his reification; essentially it is a movement against the dehumanization and automatization of man inherent in the development of Western industrialism. In this sense, Marx's philosophy is very much
rooted in the Western humanist philosophical tradition; it may even be seen as part of the prophetic Judeo-Christian tradition because at its essence, when you parce away the economic materialism, is a concern for man and the realization of his potentialities.

It is clear, then, that an anthropology, a conception of the essence of nature of humanity, occupied a central place in Marx's thought. According to this conception, the essence of man is to be found in work, sociability and consciousness.

The central issue is that of the existence of the "real" individual, who is what he does, in other words, whose life is an extension of his work, and who is defined and shaped by his society. One of Marx's greatest insights, as has already been emphasized, is that he sees man in his full development as a member of a given society and of a given class; aided in his development by his society and class, but at the same time its captive. For that higher form of society to be realized, it is essential that not only our alienation from the process and products of our labor be overcome, but also our alienation from ourselves and from our fellow human beings. It is, in other words, a necessary condition of the emancipation of the world that human beings achieve self-mastery. And such self-mastery is not to be construed in purely individualistic terms: it must refer to the emergence of a society which is free from the external alienating forces, be they class, state or idea.

Now there is a great deal of misunderstanding and misreading of Marx. Because much of Marx's writings deal with matters economic, with "materialism," Marx is supposed to have believed that the paramount psychological motive in people is their wish for material gain and comfort. Complementary to this idea is the equally widespread assumption that Marx neglected the importance of the individual; that he had neither respect nor understanding for the spiritual needs of man. This view of Marx then goes on to discuss his socialist paradise as one of millions of people who submit to an all-powerful state bureaucracy, people who have surrendered their freedom and their individuality.

This view of Marx's materialism, his anti-spiritual tendency, his wish for uniformity, is incorrect. Marx's aim was to liberate the individual from the pressure of economic needs, so that he can be fully human; his aim was that of the spiritual emancipation of man, of his liberation from the chains of economic determination; of reconstituting him in his human
wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature. And this would only make sense once we had liberated ourselves from subsistence.

Marx's concept of socialism follows from his concept of the individual. It should be clear by now that according to this concept, socialism is not a society of regimented, automatized individuals. It is not a society in which the individual is subordinated to the state. Instead the aim of socialism is people; it is to free people. It is to create a form of production and an organization of society in which people can overcome alienation from their product, from their work, from their fellow man, from themselves and from nature. In a socialist society, people produce in an associated, non-competitive way; they produce rationally and in an unalienated way, which means that they bring production under their control, instead of being ruled by it. Marx expected that by this form of an unalienated society man would become independent, stand on his own feet; that he would truly be the master and creator of his life and hence that he could begin to make living his main business, rather than producing the means for a living.

Does not all this mean that Marx's socialism is in a fundamental way the realization of the deepest religious impulses in man? Is not his concern for the individual a deeply felt non-theistic kind of religion? This is how I read Marx and in this sense he is very much a modern extension of the prophetic, messianic impulse. The prophets of the Old Testament, of the Tanach are not only spiritual leaders, they are also political leaders. They not only describe what they see, but give a vision of how things should be—a normative perspective. The Hebrew prophets share the idea that history is important, that people perfect themselves in the process of history, and that they will eventually create a social order of peace and justice. Man lives in the world and salvation, for the prophets, begins in the here and now, not in a state of transcending history. This means that man's spiritual aims are inseparably connected with the transformation of society; politics is basically not a realm that can be divorced from that of moral values and of man's self-realization. Marx and socialism are very much part of this tradition. It took history seriously, it was optimistic about social change and it returned to the idea of the "good society" as the condition for the realization of man's spiritual needs.
The Marxist notion of praxis, of critical activity, is consonant with the prophetic ideas of human participation in creation, in the redemptive quality of human action. In addition, the Marxist commitment to historicity, to future, to societal transformation, corresponds to the prophetic faith in history. Lastly, the conceptions of objectification, of action, which are so central to Marxist ethics, overlap and cohere to the prophetic notion of human decision, of the individual who must act because human deed is a necessary component of Divine action. These ideas are not alien to certain intellectual and theological traditions within Judaism.

Classical Jewish theology and Jewish mysticism abound in ideas that can act as a bridge between Judaism and Marxism.

Now what is central in Judaism? The most obvious answer is the Torah. The Torah is God's drama—the blueprint of a moral world waiting to be realized. Judaism is Torah—"teaching." The Aramaic Targum correctly translates it Oraita, while the Greek Septuagint incorrectly renders it nomos—law. Torah is more than law, it is a rule of life for all people, a pattern of behavior, a "direction" revealed in the life of a people through prophets and sages, which if properly followed, leads to the well-being of the individual and of society. The term Halachah which the Rabbis employed for laws based on the Torah, means the proper way in which an individual should walk. "The Lord will establish you as His holy people . . . if you keep the mizvot of the Lord your God and walk in His ways" (Deut. 28:9). Judaism's "way" is designed to sustain and advance life, not to escape or transcend it. Rabbinic Judaism elucidates this principle.

R. Hama . . . said: What does the text mean: you shall walk after the Lord your God? . . . The meaning is to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked . . . so do you . . . clothe the naked; as the Holy One, blessed be He, visits the sick, . . . so do you visit the sick; as the Holy One, blessed be He, comforts mourners, . . . so do you comfort mourners; as the Holy One, blessed be He, buries the dead, so do you bury the dead. (Sotah 14a)

Its roots are set deep in the practical needs of man and it is fully responsive both to his instincts and his highest aspirations. So the Torah is God's play and the physical world with its necessary imperfections, is the stage on which the drama will unfold. This world—existence, reality, matter, pain, enjoyment—is, in a poetic sense, a divine necessity. It is the raw material through which the creative urge is satisfied and finds form. Life is good and a gracious gift of God. One
should not experience any sense of guilt in the legitimate enjoyments of life. They are of God. Man must worship God with his entire being—with body, mind and soul.  

This drama implies that God, although free from the physical limitations of time and space, nevertheless acts as if motivated by a spiritual need, by a need to realize a moral order. It implies that God who is free from the limitations of the world, is nevertheless limited in a Heschelian and Buberian sense, in his dependence on a human partner, the actual builder of the moral world. God does need man for His fulfillment; the I-Thou divine dialogical relationship is a two-way street. To use the superb imagery of Judah Halevi, "When I go forth to seek Thee, I find Thee seeking me."

There are dangers in this situation. For man to be a partner, he must be free. But freedom without the potential of rebellion, sin, even the ultimate evil of an Auschwitz, is no freedom at all. Evil may destroy creation and the possibility of partnership. However, the inner dialectic of God's plan requires a free human being, armed with intelligence and the potential of becoming evil. A computer devoid of impulses, a being like the angels, would lack the capacity to create. The Bible contains this principle in the notion of Hester Panim (The Hiding Face of God): the view that at times God, mysteriously and inexplicably, hides from man, that God's hiddenness is required for man to be a moral creature. God's hiddenness allows man free will. God has to abstain from interfering if human action is to possess value. Unfortunately, it is this very creative factor that often subverts the plan.

According to the Talmud, God was well aware of this difficulty: He was torn between his desire to realize the Torah and His knowledge that a man armed with freedom could create chaos and destroy the world. But in an act of divine "bravery" He created man.

In the basic thought of Judaism then, good and evil are not cosmic forces in eternal conflict, wherein one must destroy the other. Judaism rejects Manichaean dualism. They are complementary attributes of God's creation, which are reconciled through a living Torah.

Like some volatile chemicals before adequate preparation, the yetzer haRah in its raw state is dangerous and potentially explosive. However, when processed by the Torah and sublimated by the rationality of the law, it becomes a vital and indispensable element in human life—"the very impetus of the
world of creation. As energy in the raw, it destroys; structured and channeled, it creates. Once man becomes aware of his epistemological nakedness, God Himself must help him to fashion a conceptual garment. The Torah is that conceptual garment.

Law, Halachah, is essentially a limit and boundry. Our biological being is subject to the laws of nature and the law of death; our intellectual grasp is restricted by the limitations of our cognitive abilities. Religions of radical mysticism rebel against these limits and in their hubris, create intellectual Towers of Babel to storm the heights of the spirit. By Gnosis, knowledge, reason, man can transcend his biological finiteness, become one with the spirit and achieve immortality, in short, become like the gods.

Judaism is not a religion of radical mysticism but one of law and limit. God created the world with these limitations; man must comply with them whether he understands the reasons or not. He may, like Maimonides and others, try to rationalize the Halachah, but he must approach any reform with great care. This has appeared to many philosophers and social critics as an expression of spiritual bondage; this has induced many to accuse the Pharisees, the representative teachers of Judaism, of a lack of individualism and extreme subjection to the rule of law, but it is the necessary consequence and intrinsically consistent form of historical Judaism. The religious Jewish experience is a vital, unique, process-phenomenon involving the very essence of being, the very meaning of existence. It implicates God and a people of individuals committed to act out the convenantal relationship. The awareness of God's word, the Torah, and action denote a transformation of the self. To the moment when God is present, the Jew responds with a specific conduct, a way of being, a Halachah that translates into action the encounter with God. That constitutes praxis: the individual's and communities' committed actualization of God's word and religious experience into prayer, ritual, customs and ethical action. Praxis is the living experience of God.

In cultures where man thought that he could become like a god, knowledge—either in the form of a secret gnosis or a philosophical discipline—was often considered as the key to eternal life: Gilgamesh comes to Utnapishtim and individuals joined mystery religions—all in search of knowledge which made men like gods, immortal. Our current fascination with the redeeming possibilities of science and technology, what T. S.
Eliot described as the effort "to devise the perfect refrigerator and work out a rational morality," are in the same spirit. It is the hypostatization, the reification of knowledge and reason. Systems of thought and technological innovations and the toys that they create for us comprise the new idolatry of the age. Marx, of course, was very sensitive to this trap. He insisted that there is no "pure" consciousness, pure thought. They are affected by the material conditions of society, as in language. "Language itself is the product of a community, just as it is in another respect itself the presence of the community."20 It follows that, if the community is, in fact, rent with class divisions, structures of domination and alienation, then the language or languages in which the community expresses itself will be similarly distorted. The users of language, however, are commonly unable to perceive its distortions. Hence the folly of those philosophers who imagine that one can "think" change into existence. However, in Judaism, where the gap between man and God is ultimate, absolute, nothing—not even knowledge and study which are venerated in the tradition—can bring about such a transformation. As long as Judaic man accepts the authority of God, he is forced to make peace with the limitations of his mind, not for the purpose of being like God, but simply to listen to His commands and to live justly and humanely in an imperfect world.

Where there is no belief in the reality of progress, there is no summons to social action. One finds a mature, philosophical concept of ethics among the best classical writers, but there is no passion for justice among them, no activist urge to improve the social and economic conditions of life of whose inhumanity they were fully aware. In Judaism we find this passion to improve the world, we find this social revolutionary ethic. Judaism has always concerned itself with social change. Every religion that projects a vision of a better world in the manner in which Prophetic Judaism does, will always be critical of existing conditions. It is not enough to know what justice is: one must seek justice. "Zedek, Zedek Tirdof—Justice, Justice you shall pursue," the Deuteronomist proclaims. It is not enough to know truth; one must "seek truth," Jeremiah implores. Judaism, because it is a this-worldly religion, preached social progress as a reality, as necessary, and as the supreme challenge and mitzvah. This is the very meaning and essence of Judaic prophecy. Judaism did
not approve of a spiritual egocentrism which sought fulfillment not in humanity and social enterprise but in a detached salvationism, non-action or other-worldliness. It demanded inner change, of course, but it did not lightly dismiss the social imperatives. In matchless eloquence the prophets of Israel called upon men and women to think less of their rituals, and more of the weak and wronged in their midst, the disfranchised and the oppressed. They talked of the world as in the process of becoming, of creation as an ongoing process with humankind having the responsibility for its completion. They urged people to believe that society can be improved if they will just act. The good society can be built here on earth, free from war, from exploitation, from fear (Is. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:104).

The Messianic hope of a this-worldly revolution is, indeed, a feature unique in occidental thought. The Hebrew prophets of the Tanach are not only spiritual leaders; they are political leaders. They not only describe and critique the world as they see it, but they show humankind a prescriptive version of how it ought to be. They share the idea that history must be taken seriously, that it has a meaning, that it is in constant motion, that humanity realizes and perfects itself in the process of history, and that through its actions, it will eventually create a social order of equality and justice. In the Jewish Bible, God is revealed in history as a creative actor ("the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob"), and in history, not in a state of transcending history, lies the salvation of man. This means that humanity's spiritual aims are inseparably connected with the transformation of society; politics is not a realm that can be divorced from spiritual values and humanity's self-actualization.

The doctrine of redemption in Judaism thus proclaims the transcendence of man's alienation from God, from nature, and from his fellow-man. To the extent that man is alienated from nature, from his work, his humanity and his fellow human beings, he is thereby alienated from God. It makes no sense to speak of man at peace with God and in enmity with man. Nor does it make sense to speak of man estranged from God and reconciled with his humanity and his fellow human beings. If the Marxian moral protest is registered in the name of a conception of the human, of non-alienation and the threatened process of seeking to critically understand the historical circumstances of its occurrence, the Jewish moral protest is, or should be, registered
in the name of a conception of the human derived from the practical process of the following of the Halachah, and the theoretical process of seeking critically to interpret the history of sin and redemption in the light of the Torah.

To a varying degree, the Jews of modernity are still heir to this tradition. Secularism has clearly made substantial inroads and today there is no normative religious expression of Judaism accepted by the entire community. Nonetheless, there is an important continuity evinced in Jewish attitudes towards politics. Jews continue to insist that reality match up to ideals of social justice and human fellowship. Such was the case for the Hebrew Prophets, but also for the Jewish Marxists, for Bundists in Czarist Russia and Jewish members of the "New Left" in the 1960s, those associated with Breira in the 1970s and New Jewish Agenda in the 1980s. Thus it can fairly be maintained that one attitude which is distinctly non-Jewish is the complacent acceptance of stasis, the willingness to countenance injustice or even the status quo for the sake of quiet security. Ernest Renan was correct; Jews possess "a thirst for the future."

Judaism was thus never induced by despair to succumb to the religious perspective which regarded human life as evil. Judaism, certainly in its Rabbinic formulation, did have a doctrine of immortality, but it took the form of a resurrection of the body not of an escape of the soul from the prison of the body to live in another world. Believing that the human body is the creation of God, not of some evil Gnostic Demiourgos, the Jews could not detach themselves from earthly existence. This is fundamental to Judaism and accounts for its continual concern to develop a halachah, a law to cope with the exigencies of ordinary human life. This too is the basic reason why Jews could not give up their communal ideal and accept enslavement, be it spiritual or political.

Judaism thus did not shun the world; it was committed to living in it with a passionate attachment to social progress. "The Hebrew Bible," writes Abraham Joshua Heschel, "is not a book about heaven—it is a book about the earth. The Hebrew word, eretz, meaning 'land,' occurs at least five times as often in the Bible as the word shamayim, meaning 'heaven.'" Rabbi Kook, the mystic and late Chief Rabbi of Israel, defined the essence of Judaism in terms of an existentialist philosophy which minimized dogmatic affirmations or ritual practices. For him the essence of Judaism which flows from Jewish monotheism is the
passion to overcome the separatism which severs man from nature, from his fellow man, and from God. It is the passion to perfect the world through man's awareness of his links to all else in existence. It is the rejection of the alleged antagonism between the material and the spiritual. It is the rejection of naturalism as an ultimate center of moral values. "The Jewish outlook," he says, "is the vision of the holiness of all existence." The world is not to be escaped from nor exploited; it is to be shaped, transformed and experienced even with all its shortcomings and evils, utilizing the insights of the Torah. The accent, however, is on a socially meaningful project.

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The Jewish concept of Messianism was also infused with this worldly, historical considerations. For Judaism, salvation traditionally is a physical not a purely spiritual concept. The Messianic age, to the Jews, is to be the culmination of human history on earth. Even the world to come, to the extent that it was described by the Rabbis, is to take place on earth, and the rebirth of the righteous is to be a resurrection of not only the body but the body politic in an earthly paradise—not a ethereal Heaven.

There is less individualism in the Jewish concept of the Messiah than in the Christian concept. While the Christian concept centers around the person of the Messiah--Christ who descends from an extra-historical dimension to save the believer, the Jewish Messiah represents an era rather than a person; he is the culmination of a particular stage in historical development. This messianic perspective arose out of monotheism.

Jewish monotheism unified human history into a cohesive process moving inexorably towards one final aim, the fulfillment of God's purposes on earth. Monotheism also carried with it a revolutionary social message. Since all people were created by the One God, all people were brothers. Monotheism began as a religion determined not to submit to any oppressive individual or class. It outlawed the cult of the god-priest-king. It stressed the concern of the one God for each individual, without intermediary, priests, demigods or gods; and one of its chief preoccupations was social justice. Polytheism, in contrast, provided no such progressive historical drama. Each nation had its own deities and there was no overriding purpose for mankind. History was regarded as cyclic. Judaism, however,
claimed to be in contact with a supreme being who was not indifferent to humanity and who moulded the process of history. This concept of progress in history towards a final Utopia, be it spiritual or secular, has been the innovation of the progressive and utopian traditions in Western culture. We see this in Marxism's emphasis of the proletariat's messianic vocation. The proletariat is the new Israel, history's chosen people, the liberator and builder of an earthly kingdom that is to come. Marxism's proletarian communism is a secularized form of the ancient Jewish chiliastic. A chosen class takes the place of a chosen people.

In addition to these trends in classical Judaism, there exists a body of modern Jewish literature and thought which has also remained true to the prophetic and mystical traditions of Jewish culture and which incorporates such major themes as a hope, openness to future, historical fulfillment, immanence, the potentiality of human praxis, and the value of Being. This body of Jewish literature not only escaped the cultural pessimism and negation-of-history of most contemporary Jewish discourse, but it also offers a bridge, an opening for a Jewish-Marxist dialogue. To repeat, the question here is not about the existence or non-existence of God. The question posed here does not concern the deeper loyalty to Party or to Synagogue. The question before us is the contemporary wasteland. The problem them becomes to find a common conceptual armory, to find notions and themes which are shared by both Jews and Marxists, so that they can join and ally in the process of transcendence, be it secular or spiritual.

Influenced by European existentialism, Franz Rosenzweig, the German-Jewish philosopher, concentrated upon the notions of creation, creation anew, human involvement in creation anew. It was Rosenzweig who first made clear that the ancient faith of Israel was not just compatible with the externals of modern culture, but that Judaism was in fact the only answer to the deepest problems of the Jew's existence in the contemporary world. His magnum opus, The Star of Redemption (Der Stern der Erloesung) written during his service as an Unteroffizier in World War One on postcards and scraps of paper and sent to his mother for transcription, delineates the basis of his religious outlook. He argued that a meaningful religion required more than commandments, more even than ethical action. It required existential thinking that would aid man to understand his purpose. In order to achieve this understanding
one needed faith in God's design. For Rosenzweig such faith could not be other than a divine-human encounter, a dialogue where both spheres interact with each other. Rosenzweig's God is not a remote lawgiver, not a mere synonym for a moral idea. It is a God who actually enters into one's life at every point and thereby gives life meaning. Rosenzweig was convinced that he divined the three basic ideas of Judaism: Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. By accepting these ideas—and their ritual requirements—one brought God into one's daily circuit and communicated with Him. This dialogue prevented religious observance from becoming an uninspired routine. Indebted to Nietzsche, Rosenzweig pictures a world which is ever being created anew, and calls upon man to say yes, to affirm, and to participate in this ongoing process. For Rosenzweig, the world is unfinished. It is Becoming, Eternal Becoming. Man, the Yes-Sayer must collaborate and participate in this ongoing and continuous creation. The role of man is vital: human praxis plays a central, pivotal role in Rosenzweig's thought. Human action is an indispensable component of historical fulfillment. Rosenzweig's conception is essentially historical. Creation is the enduring base of things; that is, history as process is the primal factum of existence. But Rosenzweig welcomes this historicity. It means that the unfinished world requires man to complete it.

Creation is given, the locus of man is defined, the ambit of his acts is described; however, at the heart of Judaism is the insistence that the future is still open. What remains open—what forms the giveness of the beginning to the indefinite but confident expectation of the end—is what Rosenzweig calls "the eternal task" of man. What concerns Rosenzweig is that man should achieve not precision in understanding but sublime involvement in the work of creation and redemption. Theology is therefore restricted by him to pedagogy. A concept is useful only if it instructs life, a doctrine is valuable only if it functions in the ordering of human ends. Judaism is never a problem; but it is always a task.

Rosenzweig's anthropology is dignified, is Promethean. Reflecting the tones of Marx, Rosenzweig speaks of man as something which moved beyond himself, as self-transcendent. In his essay, "Understanding the Sick and the Healthy," Rosenzweig identifies man as one who signifies. Man is a creature who gives names. In short, man is the being who gives meaning to the world around him. Truth does not exist, but man brings
truth into existence. History does not exist, but man brings history into the future. Rosenzweig not only testifies to the activity, but also to the fact that man has brought signification to existence. Man is the generative principle. Rosenzweig conducted an anthropocentric revolution: he made man the center, the axis of history.

Rosenzweig devoted his short life to a sustained effort to thus appropriate Judaism existentially. In the process, he pointed to a new conception of Judaism, transcending the opposition between the fundamentalism of much of Orthodox Jewish thought on the one hand, and the rationalism and humanism of many Liberal and Reform Jewish positions on the other, around which much of Jewish religious discussion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries revolved. Rosenzweig did not share the Orthodox view that the traditional 613 Mitzvot are the eternal laws of God. The Halakhah, in his view, was not meant to be unchanging; it was to be a living, growing process. Orthodoxy had erred in congealing the halakhah into the fixed paragraphs of Caro's *Shulchan Aruch* (prepared table). For the Jew of today, Rosenzweig urged, observance of the traditional law must become a personal, existential, freely chosen act. The Mitzvot must be made to live, must be felt as personally addressed to the individual. For this to occur each Jew must intelligently choose, must discover which precepts of the Halakhah he is able to fulfill.23

Hence Rosenzweig's initiation of a new approach to Jewish learning. With the help of Rabbi Nehemiah A. Nobel, the Orthodox communal Rabbi of Frankfurt, Rosenzweig succeeded in establishing in 1919 the Freie Judische Lehrhaus, a unique institution for adult Jewish studies where the teachers and students would together explore the major sources of Judaism and through free and open discussion seek to learn from them how to be Jews in the modern world. Here Rosenzweig advocated a reorientation in Judaism to result from re-established contact with the original sources and from renewed practice of Judaism. The basic attitude is freedom. No laws can be proclaimed, no rules can be set. But the sincere attempt, he hoped, could not fail in restoring the religious quality to Jewish learning and living. This was not a forlorn dream.

In 1922, at the very height of his career, Rosenzweig was stricken with an agonizing disease, creeping lateral sclerosis, which progressively paralyzed almost every part of his body. Such was the spirit of this remarkable man, however, that the
eight years that remained to him were the years in which he completed the most original of his essays. He sat strapped in his chair, his neck supported by a pulley, using an especially constructed typewriter; all the while his wife served as his secretary. When he died in 1929 at the age of forty-three, he bequeathed a personal religion of faith and reason that could be accepted by the Jewish masses.

There were, in fact, thousands of Jews who were searching for a way to return to traditional faith and who were attracted by this "revelation." Because the emphasis of the Lehrhaus concept was not outward from the Torah, but inward from life, it exerted a major influence on the semi-assimilated German-Jewish community. Rosenzweig, through the institution and his works, demonstrated how one could affirm the authentic supernatural religion of Judaism without falling into obscurantism, how one could lead a Torah-true life without falling into legalism and superstition. What Rosenzweig fought against with every fiber in his being was the routinization, the secularization, the sentimentalization of Judaism. On this ground he opposed Orthodox fundamentalism; on this ground he opposed modernism. And he was able to bequeath a personal religion of faith and reason that could be accepted on its own theological terms without reference to Jewish history, peoplehood, or sentimental loyalties. He—along with his slightly older colleague Martin Buber—showed that the ancient faith of prophets and Rabbis was not merely compatible with the externals of modern culture, but was in fact the answer to the deepest problems of existence in contemporary society.24

We see a similar interest in the power of signification in the great German literary critic, Walter Benjamin. Benjamin is an interesting personality to focus on because he moved between and had intellectual affinities to both traditions, Judaism and Marxism.25 In terms of this problem of signification, he was primarily a metaphysician of language engaged in mystical linguistics. Benjamin's theory of language can also serve as a bridge between Judaism and Marxism. Benjamin, like the Kabbalists, believed that language in itself is a form of powerful action: "I do not believe that the word stands somewhere farther away from the divine than does 'real' action." He argued against Martin Buber that there is no sphere of experience which is ineffable: the true task of language, he wrote, using a kabbalistic imagery, is "the crystal-clear elimination of the unsayable in language. Only where this
sphere of the wordless in its ineffable pure power is opened up, can the magic sparks spring between word and . . . act . . . Only the intensive directing of the words into the kernel of the innermost silence will achieve true action." Against Buber's mystical depreciation of language, Benjamin proposed a mystical theory in which language itself becomes an action: to speak is to make, is to create.

Benjamin added a theological dimension to his philosophy of language. In an early essay he deals with the question of how divine language can become human. God's word is equivalent to existence, but God could not have created the world by calling it directly into existence with concrete words, since God's language, by definition, is undifferentiated and infinite. Because Divine language seems incommensurable with human language, Benjamin felt that an immediate, linguistic relationship between God and the world, Buber's "unmediated word of God," is impossible. Creation and, in fact, all interaction between God and the world must be mediated by man. God is the source of language, but it is man who names objects and thereby "brings the world before God." When man names, therefore, he repeats the process of creation and reestablishes the relationship between language and objects. This mystical linguistics obviously reflected Benjamin's view that man and his actions are at the center of the historical process responsible for interpreting and creating events. Without this theological belief in God as the source of language and in language as the mediation tool between the mind, essential reality and action, the work of interpretation is meaningless. Hence Benjamin saw interpretation of which translation is a special case, as in some ways the epitome of the creative process. This notion of a divine language of names which underlies conventional language is very close to the Kabbalah's theory of the divine names as meaningless but meaning-bestowing.

It is in fact in the Zoharic tradition of the Kabbalah that we find within Judaism an articulation and celebration of the role of the individual in history which, conceptually, can provide a structure for the conversation, the bridge, between Judaism and Marxism that I am arguing for. The Zohar, the principle Kabbalistic text written at the end of the 13th century, represents a radical shift in Judaism's thinking about man and praxis. For according to the Zohar, God's relationship with the world is patterned on the model of a continuous flow of energy. God generates the energy, but it is man who must act
like a prism, focusing and returning the energy to God. This energy, then, is renewed and returned to man who again focuses and returns it to God, and so on. It is an elliptical process having two aspects. God does not act independently and unilaterally of man. They each stand in a reciprocal relationship, each benefiting the other, each doing something that allows the other to achieve full existence.

What we have before us is a very powerful, and in some ways new insight into the nature of the man-God relationship, for the Zohar teaches that God is actually dependent upon man. It argues that God, having committed himself to creation, now needs man to complete it. This insight is revolutionary in its implications because more than ever before in Jewish thought, the individual is the active agent in the world. It is man who is responsible for the balance of forces in God. It is man who is responsible for the flow of Divine energy in God and in the world. As God becomes more dependent upon man, man becomes more responsible and powerful, not only for his own welfare, but for Messianic and historical restoration. Later Zoharic tradition increased even further the importance of man in the divine economy in the Lurianic movement with its myth of tsimtsum (the self-limitation of God), shevirat Hakelim (the shattering of the vessels) and tikkun (the restoration of the Cosmos and God to the primordial unity!).

From the small town of Safed, in the upper Galilee, there emerged a revolution in Jewish mystical thought in the early sixteenth century associated with the name of Isaac Luria. Lurianic Kabbalism developed the concepts mentioned above. Tsimtsum means contraction or withdrawal. It means that the existence of the universe is made possible by a process of shrinkage in God. Luria explains the phenomenon by posing a question: How can there be a universe if God is everywhere? If God is everything, how can there be matter which is not God? If God is all, how can man have freedom and choice? According to Luria and Hayim Vital, God was compelled to make room for the world by abandoning a region within Himself, a kind of mystical primordial space called tehiru, from which He withdrew in order to return to it in the act of creation. The first act of En-Sof is therefore not a step outside but a voluntary step inside, of movement, of self-limitation.

Side by side with this doctrine of tsimtsum, we find the doctrines of shevirat Hakelim and tikkun, the mending of a defect. The Kabbalists spoke of a divine light which flowed
from the essence of En-Sof into the primordial space of the tsemtsum. This divine light was involved in the creation process. This light or Godly power was housed in vessels, kelippot. After the Adamic sin, the vessels were broken and the light or Godly sparks, were scattered. The breaking of the vessel is the decisive turning point in the cosmological process of Luria. It is the cause of that inner deficiency which is inherent in everything that exists and which persists as long as the damage is not mended. The restoration of the ideal order, the reuniting of the sparks with their divine source, is the purpose of existence. Salvation means nothing but restitution or re-integration of the original whole, or tikkun. The goal is to restore the scattered lights of God to their proper place.

This brings us to the most revolutionary aspect of the doctrine of tikkun, the point where the spiritual and the political may converge. The process in which God conceives, brings forth and develops Himself does not reach its final conclusion in God. Certain critical parts of the process of restitution are allotted to people. People must help release the sparks; God can not do it alone. It is they who help perfect God. The religious act of the individual prepares the way for the final restitution of all exiled and scattered sparks. Man, through his acts, has it in his power to hinder or accelerate this process. Every act of man thus has cosmic repercussions.

It follows from this that for Luria the appearance of the Messiah is nothing but the consummation of the continuous process of tikkun. Redemption comes when everything is back in its proper place and the blemish removed. It is here that we have the point where the mystical, messianic and even potentially political elements in Luria's doctrine are welded together. Everything that man does reacts somewhere on this process of tikkun. Every event and every domain of existence is dependent on human activity. We are responsible and capable of achieving our own salvation, be it messianic or secular. In a sense, then, we are not only masters of our own destiny, we also have a mission which goes far beyond that. The doctrine of tikkun raised every Jew to the rank of a protagonist in the great process of restitution-redemption.28 The Kabbalah, a suppressed and esoteric tradition, has, according to Gershom Scholem, been the dialectical energy, the motor force, behind the normative tradition. If he is correct, and I believe he is, the conceptual infrastructure exists within the Jewish mystical tradition for the conversation with the Marxist tradition that I
am suggesting is necessary. An additional plank for that bridge of dialogue is provided by the insights of Martin Buber.

It is evident to those who are acquainted with Buber's thought that he was influenced by this tradition and that the parallels between Rosenzweig and him are remarkable and that Buber carried this theology of inwardness and personal communion to its completest formulation. Not only do they share a common existentialist thinking, and a common opposition to idealism, but they also emphasize alike a philosophy of dialogue: the inter-relationship of God, world and man; the interworking of creation, revelation and redemption; and the I-Thou interaction between man and God. It was Buber's contention that man could discover his own personality, his own "I" by saying "Thou" to God, by entering into a kind of equal dialogue with God. By addressing God as "Thou," by maintaining the tension of a conversational attitude with God, man could approach the essence of God; and by encountering that essence as an equal, man exalted himself to the full extent of his divinity. 29

The main formative influences on Buber during his early years were the two great German mystics of the Middle Ages, Meister Eckhart and Jakob Bohme. From them Buber derived his concept of pantheism, the need for a deeper link with the outside world, the unity of all living matter in God. There was a God-given harmony in the world. Man had become alienated from this harmony, but could return to it by listening to the voice of inner experience, to intuition. Later on Buber discovered in the ecstasy of the Hassidic sects of Eastern Europe, the genuine mystical experience which led to unity with God and the world. He deeply admired the "Hitlahavuth," the rapture with which the Hasidim worshipped God, the compulsion which drove the Hasidim to search for God in the recesses of emotion rather than through the process of reason. The Hasidim had learned a wondrous truth; it was possible to enter into communion, indeed, into dialogue with God. Buber introduced the forgotten Hassidic legends to Western Europe, and provided a new Weltanschauung for the young intellectuals seeking to return to Judaism. 30

Never wavering from his philosophical beliefs, Buber throughout his life stressed human action and human deed, human participation in creation. In his book, The Prophetic Faith, he writes of a divine-human "conjunction"; about the "partnership" between man and the divine in the on-going creation of the world. 31 In another work, the Eclipse of God, Buber talks about human "participation in creation." 32
Both Rosenzweig and Buber began their philosophizing from the idea of God as Creator. Theirs is not a God of commandment, not a God of the Midrash, but a God who is the ground of the ever-renewing basis of life. Human independence and human responsibility, according to Buber, are twin themes which complement this openness to the future. In the *Eclipse of God*, Buber states that God established man with "an independence which has since remained undiminished." He repeats similar concepts in *The Prophetic Faith*, where he asserts that God "works through the independence of man"; and, again, that "God acts through man." Freedom, independence and responsibility are all allied concepts. They are important concepts because they have added dignity and generative power to human existence. Furthermore, it is impossible to stress the importance of human deeds, human actions, unless one also assumes human freedom and responsibility.

In the spirit of the prophets, Buber stresses the notion of historicity. For Buber, the historical is not reduced to a succession of concentration camps. Through human decisions taking place in time, man can "cooperate in the redemption of the world" ([*Israel and the World*] 33. Buber likes to talk about human "beginnings," and when he does so he touches again upon the central concept of on-going creation. But it is impossible to talk of continuous creation, without assuming the dignity, as well as the redemptive power, of the historical. One of Buber's basic themes is the saving mission of history as it proceeds and emanates from the source of human deed and decision.

The theology of Rosenzweig and Buber, as well as the insights of the Kabbalah, can thus serve as a bridge between Judaism and Marxist thought. The paths of 20th century Jewish theology and 20th century Marxist theory cross and meet at several conceptions. The Marxist notions of anthropological immanence, of praxis, of critical activity are consonant with the Rosenzweig-Buber ideas of human participation in creation, in the redemptive quality of human actions. In addition, the Marxist commitment to historicity, to future, to societal transformation, corresponds to the Rosenzweig-Buber modern Messianic faith in history. Stressing the goodness of God in creation, Rosenzweig-Buber relate to the historical as continuous becoming-into-being, as renewal, as beginning, and such ideas mirror the Marxist dedication to hope, to the transcending power of negation. Lastly, the conceptions of objectification, of externalization and of value in Being, which
are so central to Marxist ethics, overlap and cohere to the Rosenzweig-Buber idea of human decision, of man who must act because human deed is a necessary conjunction with Divine. For Buber and Rosenzweig, people are required to act, because only through their action is creation reaffirmed and supported in its continuity; in this co-sponsorship in creation, man finds encounter with the divinity.

A Jewish-Marxist conversation would bring needed renewal to Jewish thought. It would also reveal how the post-Holocaust Jewish fear and retreat from history could be transcended. Through this encounter, Jewish thought would be helped to return to its classical and mystical dimension, to a Messianic expectation of the future. Living in history, instead of history being seen as an endless grave, would again become a redemptive exercise.

Furthermore, Jewish thought would again be redevoted to the prophetic quest for social justice. A Judaism which confined itself to interpretive activity, to study and analysis alone, would either be idealist in character or, by laying all the emphasis on the transformation of consciousness, would leave untouched that dualism of life and thought that Marx criticized in Feuerbach. History demands not merely to be interpreted, but to be changed. And it is not only our consciousness that needs to be changed, but the circumstances in which that consciousness finds expression. Judaism is not redemptive if it merely interprets. It is our circumstances and not simply our states of mind, that cry out for redemptive transformation. Only a form of Jewish life and activity which contributed, in fact, to the liberating transformation of the material circumstances of human existence could be said to be materialist in the Marxist sense.

There is no doubt that Judaism is, in principle, compatible with commitment to revolutionary struggle. For a number of reasons, however, Jewish participation in that struggle should be ambiguous. In the first place, the Jewish community should always include elements which insist on standing aside from the struggle to bear witness to the partial and provisional nature of the historically realizable transformation of social reality. There must always be a divine input as well. In the second place, in the course of the revolution, Jewish participation should include the reminder that the use of force is always morally ambiguous and infected by corruption and evil (killing is not, and can never be, an act of compassion and
love), and that not all means are appropriate in pursuit of even the most admirable ends.

If the foregoing argument is correct, there still do exist strong threads of continuity with the Jewish past. As much as ever, Jews should insist with the confidence of their tradition, that the exercise of power be tempered by a moral and by a politically transforming vision. Judaism, like Marxism, looks forward to the total redemption of humanity. Both Judaism and Marxism refuse to accept the insurmountability of human transcendence. Karl Marx, despite repeated attacks upon the Jewish spirit, may have been more responsive to his Jewish antecedents than he realized. He believed as a matter of faith that the complicated world of social and economic phenomena could be subsumed under general scientific laws. He interpreted history not as some aimless and haphazard succession of events, but as embodying a pattern that should be understood dialectically and teleologically, as progress from lower to higher levels of social organization leading ultimately to liberation. Finally, he predicated his activity in a prophetic mode on the certainty that eventually a new age would be ushered in which political domination would cease and each person would experience full creative potential and exercise full authority over himself. Marxism thus is more than a mere strategy of political action, more than a program of economic and social reconstruction, more even than a comprehensive theory of history and society. As traditional Judaism declines in impact, many Jews may divert their Messianic urges into Marxism as a kind of surrogate religion. The secular Jew with a misty background of Talmudic dialectic and infused with a tradition of Judaic social justice might be seen as intellectually predisposed to Marxism to a degree that s/he rarely appreciates. Marxist thought may become for them an ethic, a theology; it is cerebral, almost Talmudic in its logic; a vast, all-embracing doctrine of man and the universe; a passionate faith endowing life with meaning; an optimistic view of man and the future that can jell very well with the prophetic and mystical impulse in Judaism. As I have attempted to argue, this is a political vision not entirely foreign to the Jewish experience.