A Rational Mystical Ascent: The Coincidence of Opposites in Kabbalistic and Hasidic Thought

The doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the interpenetration, interdependence and unification of opposites has long been one of the defining characteristics of *mystical* (as opposed to philosophical) thought. Whereas mystics have often held that their experience can only be described in terms that violate the "principle of non-contradiction," western philosophers have generally maintained that this fundamental logical principle is inviolable.[1] Nevertheless, certain philosophers, including Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhardt and G.W.F. Hegel have held that presumed polarities in thought do not exclude one another but are actually necessary conditions for the assertion of their opposites. In the 20th century the physicist Neils Bohr commented that superficial truths are those whose opposites are false, but that "deep truths" are such that their opposites or apparent contradictories are true as well.[2] The psychologist Carl Jung concluded that the "Self" is a *coincidentia oppositorum*, and that each individual must strive to integrate opposing tendencies (anima and animus, persona and shadow) within his or her own psyche.[3] More recently, postmodern thinkers such as Derrida have made negative use of the *coincidentia oppositorum* idea, as a means of overcoming the privileging of particular poles of the classic binary oppositions in western thought, and thereby deconstructing the foundational ideas of western metaphysics.[4]

In this paper I explore the use of *coincidentia oppositorum* in Jewish mysticism, and its singular significance for the theology of one prominent Jewish mystical school, Chabad (or Lubavitch) Chasidism. It is the achievement of Elior[5] and other modern scholars of Jewish

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[1] See W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (London: MacMillan Press, 1960), esp. Ch. 5, Mysticism and Logic.

[2] N. Bohr, "Discussion with Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Physics. In Mortimer J. Adler, ed., Great Books of the Western World (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1990), Vol. 56, pp. 337-55.Bohr wrote; "In the Institute in Copenhagen, where through these years a number of young physicists from various countries came together for discussions, we used, when in trouble, often to comfort ourselves with jokes, among them the old saying of the two kinds of truth. To the one kind belonged statements so simple and clear that the opposite assertion obviously could not be defended. The other kind, the so-called "deep truths," are statements in which the opposite also contains deep truth" (p. 354).

[3] For example, Jung, in Psychology and Alchemy, p. 186, writes "The self is made manifest in the opposites and the conflicts between them; it is a *coincidentia oppositorum*." Carl Gustav Jung, Psychology and Alchemy. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. 12. R. F. C. Hull, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). Originally published,1944.

[4] Amongst the oppositions to have come under the deconstructive gaze are word and thing, knowledge and ignorance, meaning and nonsense, permanence and change, identity and difference, public and private, freedom and necessity, God and humanity, good and evil, spirit and nature, mind and matter, etc.

[5] Rachel Ellior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism, J.M. Green, trans. (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1993); R. Elior, Chabad: The Contemplative

mysticism to have brought the philosophical use of the *coincidentia* doctrine by the Chabad Chasidim to our attention. In this paper I introduce two models through which we can begin to understand the Kabbalistic and Chasidic conception of the coincidence of opposites in rational philosophical and theological terms. These models each rest upon, and develop, the Kabbalistic/Chasidic view that language (or representation in general) sunders a primordial divine unity and is thus the origin of finitude and difference. The first, *cartographic* model, draws upon the idea that seemingly contradictory but actually complementary cartographic representations are necessary in order to provide an accurate two-dimensional representation (or map) of a spherical world. The second, *linguistic* model, draws upon Kabbalistic and postmodern views on the relationship between language and the world, and in particular the necessity of regarding the linguistic sign as *both identical to and distinct from* the thing (signified) it is said to represent. In the course of my discussion, I hope to provide some insights into the relevance of *coincidentia oppositorum* to contemporary philosophical, psychological, and especially, theological concerns.

Rational Mysticism

Throughout this paper I engage in what the modern Neoplatonic philosopher, J. N. Findlay, has termed "rational mysticism." [6] Rational mysticism is a method of thought and inquiry that not only articulates mystical doctrines in rational terms, but utilizes reason to arrive at insights and conclusions that are typically only arrived at through meditative and other experiential/mystical techniques. The "rational mystic," as I am using this term, endeavors to achieve a unified conception of the world by *rationally* overcoming the distinctions, oppositions and antinomies that have torn it asunder and given rise to the polarities (e.g. between words and things, mind and reality, subject and object, humanity and God, good and evil, etc.) that characterize the world for ordinary, pre-mystical consciousness and discourse.

The key to rational mysticism in the Kabbalah is the notion of *ha-achdut hashvaah*, the "coincidence of opposites," an idea that not only "deconstructs" the poles of the various oppositions through which the world is ordinarily understood, but which also suggests that each term of an opposition (e.g. God/man, word/thing, freedom/necessity, good/evil, etc.) is completely (and logically) dependent upon its opposite, i.e. dependent upon the very ideas and things that the term was meant to oppose or exclude. It is the *rational* articulation of these reciprocal dependencies, as opposed to a purely experiential comprehension of them that distinguishes the rational from the ordinary mystic. [7]

Ascent to God, in <u>Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present</u>, ed. by Arthur Green (New York: Crossroads, 1987), pp. 157-205.

[6] I am indebted to the philosopher, J. N. Findlay, both for the term "rational mysticism,", and for the general philosophical approach that this term implies.

[7] There are certainly many who have argued that such a rational articulation of a unified cosmos is impossible. For example, the psychologist Carl Jung held that the realization of the coincidence of opposites "is not possible through logic" and that "one is dependent on symbols which make the irrational union of opposites possible" (C. G. Jung, Answer to Job, p. 152). Unlike Hegel who saw the mythological and symbolical as imperfect approximations to the union of opposites brought about by his "rational" dialectic, Jung understood symbols performing a unifying task that reason is incapable of even

Jewish Mysticism, especially as it is embodied in the Lurianic Kabbalah and its Chabad Hasidic interpretation, provides a unique framework for overcoming the antinomies of ordinary thought, and for climbing the ladder of mystical ascent. This ladder leads to a form of thought in which all oppositions and antinomies, indeed all things whatsoever (whether they be natural, cultural, axiological or conceptual) are understood to be critical moments in a developing, meaningful and divine whole (what the Kabbalists refer to as *Ein-sof*, the Infinite, literally: "Without End").

Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Early Kabbalah

The Kabbalists use the term, *achdut hashvaah*, to denote that *Ein-sof*, the Infinite God, is a "unity of opposites,"[8] one that reconciles within itself even those aspects of the cosmos that are opposed to or contradict one another.[9] *Sefer Yetzirah*, an early (3rd to 6th century) work which was of singular significance for the later development of Jewish mysticism, had said of the *Sefirot* (the ten archetypal values through which divinity is said to constitute the world) "their end is imbedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end."[10] According to *Yetzirah*, the *Sefirot* are comprised of five pairs of opposites: "A depth of beginning, a depth of end. A depth of good, a depth of evil. A depth of above, a depth of below, A depth of east, a depth of west. A depth of north, a depth of south.[11]

The 13th century Kabbalist Azriel of Gerona was perhaps the first Kabbalist to clearly articulate the doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum*. For Azriel *"Ein Sof* …is absolutely undifferentiated in a complete and changeless unity…He is the essence of all that is concealed and revealed."[12] According to Azriel, *Ein-sof* unifies within itself being and nothingness, "for the Being is in the Nought after the manner of the Nought, and the Nought is in the Being after the manner [according to the modality] of the Being… the Nought is the Being and Being is the

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undertaking. Traditional mystics have been even more clear in their rejection of the possibility of articulating, let alone defending, their unitive experiences via rational means.

[8] Scholem translates *achdut hasvaah* as a "complete indistinguishability of opposites," Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), p. 88.

[9] See G. Scholem. Origins of the Kabbalah. Trans. by R.J. Zwi Werblowski. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987; Originally published,1962 (p. 312). According to Elior *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, p. 69) the term *achdut hashvaah* connotes "two contradictions within a single entity." It is "the divine element that encompasses contradictions and reconciles their existence."

[10] *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:7. Kaplan, Aryeh. Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation, Rev ed. (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1997). p. 57.

[11] *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:5. Kaplan, A. Sefer Yetzirah, p. 44.
[12] Azriel, The Explanation of the Ten Sefirot, in Joseph Dan, The Early Kabbalah, texts trans. by Ronald C. Kieber (New York: Paulist Press, 1966).

Nought.[13] For Azriel, *Ein-sof* is also "the principle in which everything hidden and visible meet, and as such it is the common root of *both* faith and unbelief."[14]

Azriel further held that the very essence of the *Sefirot*, the value archetypes through with *Ein-sof* is manifest in a finite world, involves the union of opposites, and that this unity provides the energy for the cosmos.[15]

> The nature of *sefirah* is the synthesis of every thing and its opposite. For if they did not possess the power of synthesis, there would be no energy in anything. For that which is light is not dark and that which is darkness is not-light.

Further, the coincidence of opposites is also a property of the human psyche; "we should liken their (the *Sefirot*) nature to the will of the soul, for it is the synthesis of all the desires and thoughts stemming from it. Even though they may be multifarious, their source is one, either in thesis or antithesis."[16]

Azriel was not the only Kabbalist to put forth a principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*. The early Kabbalistic *Source of Wisdom* describes how God's name and being is comprised of thirteen pairs of opposites (derived from the 13 traits of God enumerated in Chronicles), and speaks of a Primordial Ether (*Avir Kadmon*), as the medium within which such oppositions are formed and ultimately united.[17]

Coincidenta Oppositorum in the Lurianic Kabbalah

The concept of *achdut hashvaah* figures prominently in the Lurianic Kabbalah, which became the dominant theosophical and theological force in later Jewish mysticism. Chayyim Vital (1543-60), the chief expositor of Isaac Luria (1534-72), records:

> Know that before the emanation of the emanated and the creation of all that was created, the simple Upper Light filled all of reality…but everything was one simple light, equal in one *hashvaah*, which is called the Light of the Infinite.[18]

While Vital's account suggests a unity of opposites in the godhead only *prior* to creation, a close examination of the Lurianic Kabbalah reveals a series of symbols that are applicable to God, the world and humanity, and which overcome the polar oppositions of ordinary (and traditional metaphysical) thought. Indeed, each of the major Lurianic symbols expresses a coincidence of

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[13] Scholem. Origins of the Kabbalah, p. 423.

[14] Scholem. Origins of the Kabbalah, pp. 441-2.

[15] Azriel, The Explanation of the Ten Sefirot. In Dan, The Early Kabbalah, p. 94.
[16] Azriel, The Explanation of the Ten Sefirot. In Dan, The Early Kabbalah, p. 94.

[17] Scholem, Origins of the Kabbalah, pp. 332-3.
[18] R. Chayyim Vital, Sefer Etz Chayyim (Warsaw, 1891), "Sha'are ha-Hakdamot"). Quoted in Elior, R. The Paradoxical Ascent to God p. 68.

opposites between ideas that in ordinary thought and discourse are thought to contradict one another. For example, Luria held that the divine principle of the cosmos is both *Ein-sof* (without end) and *Ayin* (absolute nothingness), that creation is both a *hitpashut* (emanation) and a *Tzimtzum* (contraction), that *Ein-sof* is both the creator of the world and is itself created and completed through *Tikkun ha-Olam*, the spiritual, ethical and "world restoring" acts of humanity, and, finally, that the *Sefirot* are both the original elements of the cosmos and only themselves realized when the cosmos is displaced and shattered (*Shevirat ha-Kelim*) and reconstructed by humanity (*Tikkun*).

A closer examination of two key elements in the Lurianic system, *Tzimtzum* (concealment/contraction) and *Shevirat ha-kelim* (the Breaking of the Vessels) can provides further insights into the Lurianic conception of the coincidence of opposites.

In the symbol of *Tzimtzum* (the withdrawal, concealment and contraction of the infinite that gives rise to the world) there is a coincidence of opposites between the positive acts of creation and revelation and the negative acts of concealment, contraction and withdrawal. For Luria, God does not create the world through a forging or emanation of a new, finite, substance, but rather through a contraction or concealment of the one infinite substance, which prior to such contraction is both "Nothing" and "All." Like a photographic slide, which reveals the details of its subject by selectively filtering and thus concealing aspects of the projector's pure white light (which is both "nothing" and "everything"), *Ein-sof* reveals the detailed structure of the finite world through a selective concealment of its own infinite luminescence. By concealing its absolute unity *Ein-sof* gives rise to a finite and highly differentiated world. Thus in the symbol of *Tzimtzum* there is a coincidence of opposites between addition and subtraction, creation and negation, concealment and revelation. In order to comprehend the notion of *Tzimtzum*, one must simultaneously think two thoughts, for example, one thought pertaining to divine concealment and a second pertaining to (this concealment as) creation and revelation.

For Luria, the further realization of *Ein-sof* is dependent upon a second coincidence of opposites; between creation and destruction, symbolized in the *Shevirat ha-Kelim*, the "Breaking of the Vessels." *Ein-sof* is only fully actualized as itself, when the ten value archetypes which constitute the *Sefirot* are *shattered* and are subsequently restored by humankind (*Tikkun ha-Olam*).   While *Ein-sof* is the source and "creator"[19] of all, *Ein-sof* paradoxically only becomes itself, through a rupture which results in a broken and alienated world in need of humanity's "restoration" and repair (*Tikkun*). For Luria, *Ein-sof* is propelled along its path from "nothing" (*Ayin*) to "something" (*Yesh*), through the creative and restorative acts of humankind; for it is only humanity acting in a broken and displaced world, that can undertake the *mitzvoth*, the creative, intellectual, spiritual and ethical acts that fully actualize the values and traits that exist in *potentia* within God. Indeed, the *Sefirot*, which are both the "traits" (*middot*) of God and the elements of creation, only become themselves after they are broken and then repaired by humankind. As the contemporary Kabbalist and sage, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz has put it, "We live in a world that is the worst of all possible worlds in which there is yet hope, and that, is the best of all possible worlds." The reason for this is that it is only in such a world on the brink, that the divine values (the *Sefirot*) can be fully actualized.

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[19] Zohar III, 113a. Sperling and Simon, <u>The Zohar</u>, Vol. 5, p. 153.

It is because humankind actualizes the traits and values that are mere abstract potentialities in *Ein-sof* that the *Zohar* proclaims "He who 'keeps' the precepts of the Law and 'walks' in God's ways…'makes' Him who is above."[20] Thus, just as humanity is dependent for its existence upon *Ein-sof*, *Ein-sof* is dependent for its actual being upon humanity. The symbols of *Ein-sof*, *Shevirah* (rupture) and *Tikkun* (Repair) thus express a coincidence of opposites between the presumably opposing views that God is the creator and foundation of humanity and humanity is the creator and foundation of God.

Several other Lurianic symbols overcome distinctions between what are generally thought to be opposing terms and ideas. For example, in the symbol of the ten *Sefirot*, the Kabbalists articulate a *coincidentia* between unity (of the Absolute) and the multiplicity of both God and the world. In the symbol of *Adam Kadmon* (the Primordial Man, which becomes the divine agent of creation) we have another example of a *coincidentia* between God and man., and in the symbol of the *Kellipot*, the evil husks that envelop the fallen sparks of divine light after the breaking of the Vessels, there is an explicit *coincidentia* between good and evil (for its only the capture of divine light by the forces of evil that creates the potential for *actual* good). Finally, in the symbol of *Tikkun Ha-Olam* (the Restoration of the World)*,* we again see a *coincidentia oppositorum* between theism (God created man) and atheism (man created God), for by restoring the world through acts of wisdom, kindness, compassion, etc. humanity not only becomes a partner with God in creation, but, as we have seen, is said to actually create God himself!

Each of the Kabbalistic symbols can be understood as a higher order synthesis of an opposition, antinomy or contradiction that inevitably arises when one thinks deeply about God, humanity and the world, and each, as I have argued in *Symbols of the Kabbalah*,[21] resolves a tension between apparently contradictory philosophical ideas. Further, the whole Lurianic conception of *Ein-sof* is that of a dialectically evolving deity who is understood as logically passing through and embodying a variety of phases and aspects, each of which opposes, but also embodies, an earlier phase in the overall scheme. As such, the Kabbalistic deity is both nothing (*Ayin*) and everything (*Ein-sof*), perfectly simple and infinitely complex, hidden (*Tzimtzum*) and revealed (*Sefirot*) , reality and illusion, broken (*Shevirat ha-Kelim*) and restored (*Tikkun ha-Olam*) creator of humanity and created by humanity, etc. As *Ein-Sof* evolves it is revealed to be both the totality of its own evolving dialectic, as well as each of the points along the way. For the Kabbalists, this means that *Ein-Sof* must be constantly redefined, as by its very nature, it is in a continual process of self-creation which involves a unification of opposing principles, values, and ideas.

Chabad Hasidism: The Unification of Opposites as the Purpose of the World

As Stace has pointed out, mysticisms of many, if not all, cultures develop a paradox in which the "absolute," "universal self," or "truth" of the world is understood as both vacuum and

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[20] Zohar III, 113a. Sperling and Simon, <u>The Zohar</u>, Vol. 5, p. 153. Idel translates this passage as follows: "Whoever performs the commandments of the Torah and walks in its ways is regarded as if he made the one above." Idel, <u>Kabbalah: New Perspectives</u>, p. 187.

[21] S. Drob, Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and Psychological Perspecuves (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000).

plenum, as both absolutely nothing, and the totality of all things.[22] In addition, several other paradoxes are characteristic of mystical thought; for example, the validity of both a 'truth' and its negation, the reality and unreality of space and time, and the substantiality and illusory character of the self. Such paradoxes are present in the mysticisms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam as well as in the Kabbalah, where, for example, the infinite godhead is regarded simultaneously as both nothingness (*Ayin*) and the infinite (*Ein-sof*).[23] However, the mystical paradoxes, which are a pervasive if not dominant theme in the Kabbalah, achieves their supreme expression in the philosophy of the Chabad Hasidim, where they become the governing principle for both God and the world.

For Chabad, all things, both infinite and finite, involve a unity or coincidence of opposites. These Chasidim held that the very purpose of creation was the revelation of these opposites, precisely in order that they should be articulated and then overcome. One of the early Chabad thinkers, R. Aaron Ha-Levi Horowitz of Staroselye (1766-1828), a pupil of the first Chabad- Lubavitcher rabbi, Schneur Zalman (1745-1813) held that "the revelation of anything is actually through its opposite,"[24] and that "all created things in the world are hidden within His essence, be He blessed, in one potential, in *coincidentia oppositorum*..."[25] Schneur Zalman 's son, Rabbi Dov Baer, wrote "within everything is its opposite and also it is truly revealed as its opposite."[26]   According to Dov Baer, the unity of worldly opposites brings about the completeness (*shelemut*) of God on high: "For the principal point of divine completeness is that…in every thing is its opposite, and…that all its power truly comes from the opposing power."[27] Within the godhead, earthly opposites are united in a single subject. According to R. Aaron Ha-Levi: "He is the perfection of all, for the essence of perfection is that even those opposites which are opposed to one another be made one."[28]

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[22] W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, pp. 161 ff.

[23] The notion that the entire world is contained within the divine plenum is present in the writings of such Kabbalists as Moses Cordovero. M. Cordovero, Elima Rabati, fol. 25a): Cordovero says "He is found in all things, and all things are found in Him, and He is in everything and beyond everything, and there is nothing beside Him"(as quoted in R. Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, p. 50.). However, Jewish mystics have generally downplayed this aspect of the mystical experience in deference to the longstanding Jewish belief in the utter transcendence of God with respect to both humanity and the world. Judaism has generally been resistant to the pantheistic or panentheistic implications of mystical philosophy, and it is thus somewhat surprising to find such views explicitly entertained by the Hasidim.

[24] Quoted in Elior, R. The Paradoxical Ascent to God p. 64.

[25] Quoted in Elior, "Chabad: The Contemplative Ascent to God", p. 163.

[26] Rabbi Dov Baer, Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, II, fol. 6a. Quoted in Elior,The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 64.

[27] Rabbi Dov Baer, Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, II, fol. 6a. Quoted in Elior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 64.

[28] Quoted in Elior. "Chabad: The Contemplative Ascent to God," p. 166.

Chabad philosophy which developed contemporaneously with German idealism, bears a striking resemblance to the philosophies of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. It is interesting to compare Dov Baer's or Rabbi Aaron's pronouncements to Hegel's claim that:

> every actual thing involves a coexistence of opposed elements. Consequently to know, or, in other words, to comprehend an object is equivalent to being conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations.[29]

The coincidence of opposites that characterizes God, humanity and the world can be approximately understood by the simultaneous adoption of two points of view. As put by the founder of the Chabad movement, Schneur Zalman of Lyadi (1745-1813):

> (Looking) upwards from below, as it appears to eyes of flesh, the tangible world seems to be *Yesh* and a thing, while spirituality, which is above, is an aspect of *Ayin* (nothingness). (But looking) downwards from above the world is an aspect of *Ayin*, and everything which is linked downwards and descends lower and lower is more and more *Ayin* and is considered as naught, truly as nothing and null.[30]

Indeed, Chabad understands the world in each of these two ways simultaneously: *as both an illusory manifestation of a concealed divine essence and as the one true actualized existence.* For Chabad, it is simultaneously true that God is the one reality that creates an illusory world, and that the world, in particular humankind, is the one reality that gives actuality to an otherwise empty, if not illusory, God.[31] This dual understanding reflects the activities of the *Tzimtzum*, through which God creates a world by concealing an aspect of Himself, and the *Shevirah* and *Tikkun*, in which humankind actualizes the values that were only potentialities within the Godhead.

While the Chabad Hasidim generally speak as if the divine perspective upon the world is its "inner truth," it becomes clear that on their view this truth is itself completely dependent upon its opposite, the perspective from which humanity and the material world are fundamentally existent and real. In this they were in accord with the early Chasidic leader, the Maggid of Mezrich (1704-1772), who held that while God is the foundation of all ideas, the very significance of divine thought is contingent upon its making its appearance in the mind of man.

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[29] Hegel's Logic. William Wallace trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), par. 48, Zusatz 1, p. 78.
[30] Schneur Zalman Likutei Torah, Devarim, fol. 83a.; Elior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 137-8.

[31] The Chabad view is implicitly present in Azriel's coincidentia between faith and unbelief, and the Zohar's precept that "He who "keeps" the precepts of the Law and "walks" in God's ways... "makes" Him who is above," and finally, in the Lurianic notion that *Ein-sof* both creates, and is itself completed by, humankind.

For the Maggid, God is the source of thought but *actual thinking* can only occur within the framework of the human mind.[32]

Chabad takes seriously, and attempts to spell out the full implications of the Zohar's dictim: "Just as the Supernal Wisdom is a starting point of the whole, so is the lower world also a manifestation of Wisdom, and a starting point of the whole."[33] For Chabad, the highest wisdom, and the fullest conception of the divine is one in which both perspectives (one beginning with God and the other with humanity) are included. For Chabad, *Ein-sof* is truly a coincidence and unity of opposites, and the fullest understanding and realization of the divine is one that includes each pole of the Zohar's "dialectical inversion." It is only by *thinking in both directions simultaneously* that one can grasp the original mystical insight that the divine is present in all things. One implication of the Chabad view is that a God who simply creates man (direction one) is far less complete than a God who is *both* creator of, and created by, humankind (directions one and two), and it is only the latter bi-directional thinking that captures what the Kabbalists designate as "infinite" (*Ein-sof)*. According to Elior:

> Hasidic thought is strained to the ultimate stage in a dialectical way; just as there is no separate reality and no discriminative essence in the world without God, so also God has no revealed and discriminate existence without the world, that is, just as one cannot speak of the existence of the world without God, so too one cannot speak of the existence of God without the world.[34]

> For Chabad, all things, both infinite and finite, involve a unity or coincidence of opposites. According to these Chasidim, the very purpose of creation is the revelation of these opposites, precisely in order that they should be articulated and then overcome. However within the godhead, earthly opposites are united in a single subject. As we have seen, according to R. Aaron: "He is the perfection of all, for the essence of perfection is that even those opposites which are opposed to one another be made one."[35]

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[32] Schatz Uffenheimer, Rifka. <u>Hasidism As Mysticism</u>: Quietistic Elements In Eighteenth Century <u>Hasidic Thought</u>. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1993), p. 207. Compare this to Derrida's assertion: "Meaning is obliged to wait to be spoken or written, so it may become that which it itself is in its differentiation from itself: meaning." Dissemination, p. 22?, as quoted in Gideon Ofrat, The Jewish Derrida, p. 115.

[33] Zohar 1:153a. H. Sperling, M. Simon, Maurice and P. Levertoff, trans. <u>The Zohar</u> (London: Soncino Press, 1931-34), Vol. 2, p. 89-90.

[34] R. Elior. <u>The Paradoxical Ascent to God</u>, p. 62.

[35] Quoted in Elior. "Chabad", p. 166.

Dialectical Process in *Chabad* Thought

For Chabad, "divinity is conceived as a dialectical process comprising an entity and its opposite simultaneously,"[36] as *Ein-sof* embodies the opposites of being" (*yesh*) and "nothingness" (*ayin*), emanation (*shefa ve-atsilut*) and contraction (*Tzimtzum*), ascent (*ratso*) and descent (*vashov*), revelation and concealment, annihilation and embodiment, unity and plurality, structure and chaos, spirit and matter. [37] In addition, these Hasidim held that *Ein-sof* unifies divine and human perspectives on the world, and that the coincidence of opposites applies not only to God but to the world and humankind.   Finally, each pole of these various oppositions is thought to be both necessary and determinative for its opposite. As Elior puts it: "The principle emerging from these concepts states that divinity possesses two opposing aspects that condition one another."[38]

For Schneur Zalman, the truth of the opposite perspectives is necessary in order for both God and the world to actualize their unified essence. Schneur Zalman holds that the very meaning of the cosmos involves a dialectical movement from non-being to being and back to nothingness. He writes: "the purpose of the creation of the worlds from nothingness to being was so that there should be a *Yesh* (Creation), and that the *Yesh* should be *Ayin* (*Nothing*)[39] For Chabad, in order for *Ein-sof* to fulfill its essence as the infinite God, it must differentiate itself and actualize all possibilities in existence (*Yesh*) only to have them each return to itself in nothingness (*Ayin*). According to Rabbi Aaron Ha Levi it is the basic divine purpose that the world should be differentiated and revealed in each of its finite particulars and yet united in a single infinite source.[40] Rabbi Aaron states:

> ...the essence of His intention is that his *coincidentia* be manifested in concrete reality, that is, that all realities and their levels be revealed in actuality, each detail in itself, and that they nevertheless be unified and joined in their value, that is, that they be revealed as separated essences, and that they nevertheless be unified and joined in their value.[41]

We can interpret the process that Schneur Zalman and Rabbi Aaron describe in the following way. *Ein-sof*, which is initially *actually nothing* but *potentially all things*, differentiates and actualizes itself into each of the innumerable manifestations of a finite world. It does so precisely in order that these finite entities can actualize the *sefirotic* values (e.g. wisdom, understanding, kindness, beauty, compassion, etc.) which are only divine abstractions prior to the world's

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[36]R. Elior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 25.

[37]R. Elior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 25. According to Elior, these *coincidentia* appear in the Lurianic Kabbalah, but presumably apply only to the heavenly realms. In Chabad they apply to the earthly and human realms as well (ibid., p. 25-6)

[38] R. Elior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 25.
[39] Schneur Zalman, Likkutei Torah, Leviticus, p. 83, quoted in Elior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 137.

[40] R. Elior, "Chabad: The Contemplative Asdcent to God," p. 165.
[41] R. Elior. "Chabad: The Contemplative Asdcent to God," p. 167.

creation. By instantiating these intellectual, spiritual, ethical and aesthetic values, the entities of the finite world (i.e. human beings) negate their individual desire and will, and "return" to *Ein-sof* (*Ayin* or "nothing"). From another perspective, humanity actually *constitutes* the source of all value, *Ein-sof*, and in this way achieves unity with the divine. For this reason, a world that is alienated from and then reunited with God is superior to one that had never been alienated or divided at all.

There is thus a practical, spiritual and ethical dimension to the "coincidence of opposites" that finds its expression in the Chabad system of belief. Schneur Zalman implores his followers both to nullify (*bittul*) the self and matter in favor of the Godhead *and* to bring about the infusion of the divine will into the material world through religious worship and the performance of divine *mitzvoth* (commandments). According to Schneur Zalman:

> there are two aspects in the service of the Lord. One seeks to leave its sheath of bodily material. The second is the… aspect of the drawing down of the divinity from above precisely in the various vessels in Torah and the *commandments*.[42]

Further, "Just as one annihilates oneself from *Yesh* (Existence) to *Ayin* (Nothingness), so too it is drawn down from above from *Ayin* to *Yesh*, so that the light of the infinite may emanate truly below as it does above."[43] Again, there is a coincidence of opposites on the level of spiritual and moral action. One must annihilate one's finite separate existence in favor of the infinite God, and in the process one is paradoxically able to draw down the divine essence into the vessels of the finite world. For Chabad, there is thus an "upper unification" (*Yichud ha-elyon*) in which the world and self are annihilated in favor of their re-inclusion within the godhead, and a "lower unification" (*Yichud ha-tachton*) in which there is an influx of divinity into the world. What's more, each of these "unifications" is fully dependent upon the other. It is thus through a doctrine of the coincidence of opposites that Chabad is able to combine the opposing principles of mystical quietism and an active concern with the material world.[44]

Incidentally, I believe that through their doctrine of *achdut hashvaah*, the coincidence of the dual aspects of infinite and finite existence, the Chabad Hasidim are able to avoid the pantheistic implications that might otherwise attach to the view that there is nothing outside of God. Although Schneur Zalman and others in the Chabad tradition make such acosmic declarations as: "Everything is as absolutely nothing and nought in relation to His (God's) being and essence,"[45]"For in truth there is no place devoid of Him…and there is nothing truly beside Him,[46] and "although the worlds seem like an entity to us, that is an utter lie,"[47] such

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[42] Schneur Zalman, Torah Or, p. 49, quoted in R. Elior, <u>The Paradoxical Ascent to God</u>, p. 134
[43] Schneur Zalman, Torah Or, p. 58, quoted in R. Elior, <u>The Paradoxical Ascent to God</u>, p. 150.

[44] R. Elior, <u>The Paradoxical Ascent to God</u>, p. 31.

[45] Schneur Zalman. Igeret Ha Kodesh, Ch. 6, <u>Likutei-Amarim-Tanya</u> Bi-lingual edition. (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1981)., p. 421.

[46] S. Zalman, <u>Likutei-Amarim-Tanya</u> Chapter 35, p. 159.

pronouncements are only from one of two equally valid points of view, the supernal one. In Chabad the traditional Jewish distinction between God and creation, is not discarded but is dynamically transformed into two "starting points" or "points of view," which though dialectically interdependent, must at the same time remain distinct in order to fulfill the purpose of both God and the universe. Chabad is actually typically Jewish in its view that God's presence and glory fills the whole earth, but that humanity must be distinguished from God and granted a measure of freedom, in order that it may return to Him through worship and *mitzvoth*. Metaphysically speaking, Chabad again bids us to think two opposite thoughts simultaneously; the thoughts (1) that God is all and there is nothing beside Him, and (2) that God and humanity are separate and distinct and humanity is implored to *return* to, and in effect constitute God, through divine worship and the performance of the *mitzvoth*.

It is, I believe, the double movement of Chabad thought, its insistence on a coincidence between two opposing perspectives on the reality of God and humanity that differentiates it from most other forms of mysticism, and underscores its significance for philosophy and theology. While according to Elior, "The great intellectual effort invested in Chabad writings is meant to bring one as close as possible to the divine point of view, according to which every creature is considered as nothing and nought with respect to the active power within it, "[48] a close reading of Chabad formulations as they are found even Elior's own writings suggests a much more subtle theology. The goal of Chabad thought, it seems to me, is to bring us as close as possible to *simultaneously realizing both* the worldly and divine points of view, thinking them simultaneously, and recognizing their complete interdependence; thereby providing us with an intimation of the fullness of divinity as it is manifest in the world and humankind.

As we proceed we will come to understand that the paradoxes of Jewish mysticism, e.g. that God creates humanity and humanity creates the divine, that the world is both an illusion and reality, that *Ein-sof is and is not* identical with the world, that creation is at the same time a negation, that values must be destroyed in order to be actualized, etc. are the best means of expressing within language, truths about a whole that is sundered by the very operation of language itself. While each of these paradoxes will not necessarily require the same type of analysis, in general we will see that within the necessary but false (or partial) consciousness of language and concepts, mystical truths can only be expressed as a series of contradictions, which, because of the complete interdependence of their opposing terms, dissipate once things are viewed from a "rational mystical" point of view.[49]

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[47] R. Elior, "Chabad: The Contemplative Ascent to God," p. 80.

[48] R. Elior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 56.

[49] I am not alone in holding that the Kabbalistic doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum* is crucial both for understanding mystical consciousness and significant questions in philosophy. A similar point of view is adopted by Elliot Wolfson in his recent *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death*, where he holds that "in death…the truth of the world of unity is disclosed--a truth predicated on discerning the coincidence of opposites, that is the mystical insight that in ultimate reality opposites are no longer distinguishable, for they are identical in virtue of being opposite." Elliot Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death*. Berkely: University of California Press, 2006, p. xiv.

It will be my task in the following pages to come as close to articulating the mystical point of view as is possible, given the fact that language itself is predicated upon distinctions (e.g. between subject and object, and, more fundamentally, between *words* and their *objects*) that prevent the mystical point of view from being completely expressed. But I am here getting ahead of myself; much groundwork in modern and, especially, postmodern, philosophy, must be laid before we can fully enter this field.

The Coincidence of Opposites in Other Traditions

The "coincidence of opposites" is neither original to, nor the exclusive province of Jewish Mysticism, and it will be useful to consider this doctrine as it appears in the non-Jewish mystical and philosophical sources.

In Eastern Thought

Paradox and contradiction are more readily accepted in Eastern philosophical traditions than in west. As Graham Priest has pointed out the logicians of ancient India standardly held that propositions could be (1) true only, (2) false only, (3) both true and false, or (4) both true and false (to which the Buddhist added "none of these").[50] The Jains went so far as to hold that a proposition could be both true only and both true and false.[51] Contradictory propositions abound in Taoism, and it is clear that in the Japanese school of Buddhism, Chan or Zen, which fused the teachings of the Buddha and the Tao, contradictions (in the forms of Koans) play a significant role in propelling the adherent towards enlightenment.[52]

Amongst Buddhist thinkers, Nagarjuna (c. 150-220 CE), who founded the Madhyamaka (Middle Path) school of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, is well-known for advocating such apparently contradictory ideas as "space is not an entity [and] it is not a non-entity" and "the assertion that effect and cause are similar is not acceptable (and) the assertion that they are not similar is also not acceptable." Nagarjuna held that nirvana is equivalent to samsara (i.e. the "depths" of things are equivalent to their "surface") and (in Mark Siderits' paraphrase) "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth".[53] While it is arguable that at least some of these contradictions are only apparent (i.e. they can be "corrected" by placing them in their polemical contexts or showing that a single term is used in more than one sense), there is little doubt that Nagarjuna (and Buddhism) in general holds that certain "deep truths" can only be expressed

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[50] Jay Lazerowitz. Garfield and Graham Priest, Nagarjuna and the Limits of Thought. *Philosophy East and West*; Jan 2003; 43, 1-21, p. 13.
[51] Graham Priest, "Dialetheism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2004 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2004/entries/dialetheism/>.

[52] Ibid.
[53] Jay Lazerowitz. Garfield and Graham Priest, Nagarjuna and the Limits of Thought. *Philosophy East and West*; Jan 2003; 43, 1-21, pp. 8, 13. Compare the dictum attributed to Derrida that "the secret is that there is no secret" (Circum 156, Caputo 289 John D. Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 311.)

using paradoxical language and that Nagarjuna held their to be a coincidence (or identity) between at least some opposing terms and ideas.

Gnosticism

The coincidence of opposites is an important doctrine in the Gnostic religion, which flourished in both Christian and Jewish circles during late Hellenistic times. The Gnostics, for example, held that to know one's *arche* (beginning) is to know one's *telos* or end,[54] that one can become the knowledge that is known (via a reunion with one's divine self), that both God and reality are androgynous (both "Mother" and "Father"). The Gnostics further held there to be a radical coincidentia oppositorum between God and man, affirming, for example:

> God created men, and men created God. So is it also in the world, since men created gods and worship them as their creations it would be fitting that gods should worship men.[55]

The Gnostics typically held that the coincidence of opposites occurs between a perfect divine and a corrupt worldly reality, and, in contrast to the Kabbalists who saw it as an expression of divine perfection, the Gnostics held that *coincidentia oppositorum* provides insight into the corruption of the perfect One. Nevertheless, in the Gnostic (Nag Hammadi) text, *Thunder, The Perfect Mind*, we find an expression of the nature of Sophia (Wisdom) and the human soul in purely dialectical terms:[56] "I am the first and the last…the honored and the scorned…the whore and the holy one...the bride and the bridegroom… the mother of my father…the sister of my husband and he is my offspring...knowledge and ignorance…the one whom they call Life, and you have called Death…a mute who does not speak, and great is my multitude of words.[57]

Plotinus

The Neoplatonists elaborated a philosophical perspective that provided the basis for much subsequent mystical speculation, both Christian and Jewish. The idea that God and the world exist in *coincidentia oppositorum* finds a prominent place in Plotinus' *Enneads*, where we learn that the "All" is necessarily "made up of contraries,"[58] that "to deny Evil…is necessarily to do away with the Good as well."[59] Plotinus further held that "in the Intellectual-Principle Itself there is a complete identity of knower and known."[60] For Plotinus, "the Supreme must be an entity in which the two (knower and known) are one."[61] Indeed, according to Scholem, the notion of God as a *coincidentia oppositorum* may have entered the Kabbalah via the Christian

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[54] Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, p. 42.

[55] Rudolph. *Gnosis*. p. 93.

[56] Ibid., p. 81.

[57] "Thunder: The Perfect Mind." Robinson (ed.). *The Nag Hammadi Library* pp. 295-303. (Compare *Bhagavad Gita* iix, 16-19.Zaehner (trans.) *Hindu Scriptures*, p. 320 where the "blessed lord" describes himself as father and mother, origin and dissolution, death and deathlessness.

[58] Plotinus, Enneads, 1:8:7. Great Books of the Western World, Plotinus, p. 311.

[59] Ibid. 1:8:12, p. 336.

[60] Ibid. 3:8:8, p. 449.

[61] Ibid. 3:8:8, p. 449.

Neoplatonist, Scotus Erigena, who possibly served as a model for such Kabbalists as Azriel of Gerona.[62]

Nicholas of Cusa

The idea of God as a coincidence of opposites is expressed in the philosophy of the Christian theologian, Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464), and Cusanus, as he is called, will serve to provide us with a carefully developed example of the a non-Jewish, pre-Kantian understanding of opposition and paradox in western thought.

Cusanus argued that rational investigation can only approximate knowledge of the infinite God, which can never be understood in terms of the "relations and comparisons" of the philosopher. However, according to Cusanus, there is a similar, if less radical, limitation of knowledge with regard to all other things; for while "truth" is an absolute, knowledge is always an approximation by degree. Cusanus uses the image of a polygon with an increasing number of sides that is inscribed in a circle to illustrate how knowledge only approximates its object. Cusanus held that each perspective we take upon truth is only partial and relative. However, not even the sum of all perspectives yields truth in an absolute sense.

More to the point of our current concerns, Nicholas of Cusa argued that the *principle of non-contradiction* invoked by philosophers was simply evidence of the weakness in the human intellect. He criticized the idea that contradictory assertions cannot both simultaneously be true with regard to a given object; for Cusanus contradictory assertions can both be true regarding both the world and, in particular, God. Cusanus held that there is a faculty superior to reason, what he termed the faculty of "knowing" or "intellect," which can transcend the principle of non-contradiction to comprehend the unity or interdependence of opposites operating in the world and in God.

According to Cusanus, it is in God that all oppositions are reconciled. For example, it is possible to say of the deity that He is both the absolute maximum *and* the absolute minimum. Cusanus uses mathematical examples to demonstrate how opposites can coincide; for example, he asks his readers to imagine a circle of infinite circumference whose curvature becomes equal to that of an infinitely straight line, yielding a coincidence of opposites between line and circle, straight and curved.

For Nicholas of Cusa, God *both* transcends the world and is imminent within it; like a face reflected in a mirror. Echoing a Neoplatonic theme,[63] Cusanus held that each creature, indeed all things, are mirrored and hence, paradoxically present, in every other, creating a *coincidentia* between unity and difference.

Interestingly, Cusanus seems to have anticipated the Kabbalistic doctrine of *Tzimtzum*, in his view that all specific forms and all individual things are contractions of the most universal form, the Soul of the World. According to Cusanus, the universe itself is a contraction of the infinite God. In light of his affinities to the Kabbalah, it is also worth noting that in his work, *On the Peace of Faith*, Cusanus made use of the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* in an effort to reconcile differences amongst the world's religions; such reconciliation, he believed, would lead to a universal faith and peace.

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[62]See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 440.
[63] See, e.g. Plotinus, Enneads 5:8:3.

Like nearly all mystics and philosophers who have considered the question (as we will see, Hegel is the notable exception) Nicholas of Cusa held that the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* ultimately transcends rational comprehension. In God, both essence and existence, maximum and minimum, and all other opposites fully coincide, but we cannot attain a rational understanding of the synthesis of these oppositions

The Coincidence of Opposites in Modern Philosophy, Psychology and Science

We will now turn our attention to the tradition in European philosophy, beginning with Kant, which concerned itself with the variety of oppositions, antinomies or apparent contradictions that the mind runs up against whenever it deeply ponders the ultimate nature of the world. While it will not here be possible to survey this tradition in great detail, it would be hardly be possible to offer a rational interpretation of the coincidence of opposites without at least considering it. In the following pages I provide a brief survey of this broad tradition, focusing on several of its representatives, Kant, Schelling, Hegel and Jacques Derrida, each of whom, in their own way were concerned with overcoming the polar oppositions of traditional metaphysical thought. In addition, I will provide a description of the views two recent philosophers, Morris Lazerowitz and Graham Priest, who reflected upon the role of contradiction in philosophy and logic respectively. Finally, I will briefly discuss the views of the Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung, and the Danish physicist, Neils Bohr, who in the twentieth century imported the notion of the coincidence of opposites into scientific discourse.

Kant's Dual-World Solution

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) regarded certain contradictions or antinomies generated by common reason to be both the major problems of philosophy and the major impetus to his "transcendental philosophy." Kant argued, for example, that since human reason inevitably regards itself to be *both* determined by nature *and* infinitely free, any philosophy that failed to do justice to each of these, apparently contradictory claims would at best be hopelessly incomplete. Kant held that the postulate of universal causality (determinism) was absolutely necessary for science, while the postulate of human freedom was equally necessary in the realms of morality and the law. Kant's solution to this paradox was to, in effect, assert that both poles of the antinomy are true, but he endeavored to avoid running afoul of the logical *principle of non-contradiction*, by postulating that each is true of *separate realm*. Kant thus felt compelled to postulate his now famous distinction between the *phenomenal* and *noumenal* realms, the former considered by him to be the arena of knowledge and empirical investigation, while the latter was considered an inherently unknowable but necessary postulate for practical action, moral and legal judgments.

Kant's solution to the antinomies inherent in philosophy and common sense was to posit two-worlds, each of which was, in effect, completely independent of the other, and only one of which could be the proper object of scientific and philosophical knowledge. In his later work, Kant suggested that the unknowable noumenal realm, was indeed the realm of religious faith and God, and he thus came close to adopting the mystical point of view that there is a realm, unknowable to science and reason, which is nonetheless accessible to a certain ethical or religious intuition.

Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* had held that the impenetrable barrier to knowledge of the noumenal realm was a function of the structures and categories of the human mind. These categories, or what Kant referred to as "modes of apprehension" (amongst which are space, time, and causality) make knowledge of phenomenal "appearances" possible, but render impossible all knowledge regarding things as they are "in-themselves." Knowledge of the *thing-in-itself* or the noumenal realm is impossible precisely because all knowledge is necessarily conditioned by the *a priori* categories and modes of apprehension of the human mind. For Kant, it is because "ultimate reality" is completely unknowable apart from its *appearance* through human modes of apprehension, that traditional metaphysics and theology is impossible.

Despite Kant's disclaimers, by the time of his later works, the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant appeared to have much to say regarding the so-called noumenal world. Kant noted that while the phenomenal world necessarily follows the laws of causal, mechanical necessity, the moral law requires man to transcend the causal nexus, act on the basis of will, and conform his behavior to the rule of reason. He therefore concluded that the demands of ethics and the individual's capacity to act in accordance with the moral law were windows into a non phenomenal, noumenal reality.[64]   For Kant, God, freedom, and reason were each necessary hypotheses for morality, though each were, on his view, outside the phenomenal order, and therefore part of the noumenal realm. While Kant continued to hold that there was no metaphysical *knowledge* regarding these noumenal hypotheses, by placing them in a world or "realm" he reopened the door to metaphysics, one which such German Idealists as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel were to enter shortly after Kant's death.

Kant's hypothesis of a noumenal realm, is in many ways characteristic of the religious and particularly mystical consciousness in general. Finding no place in the natural order for the objects of his experiences and/or speculations, and, further, recognizing that these objects often contradict the data of the human senses, the mystically inclined philosopher or theologian is apt to speak of a higher consciousness or "world" as the realm of his experience and understanding. From the point of view of the present study it is important to note that the very notions that Kant attributed to the "unknowable" noumenal realm, i.e. God, will, reason, and ethical values are the same notions, which the Kabbalist's closely identified with the unknowable *Ein-sof*.

Schelling

A post-Kantian reformulation of the position earlier adopted by Nicholas of Cusa can be found in Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), who held that the "Absolute" is the "vanishing point" of all distinctions and difference.[65] For Schelling, the Absolute is indeed the act in which the distinctions between subject and object are overcome. The viewpoints of subject and object are necessary standpoints of all empirical (i.e. human) consciousness. Only God can stand outside of this distinction. If we attempt to grasp the Absolute as it is in itself we can only conceptualize it as the "point of indifference" or the vanishing point of all distinctions. Rational inquiry, however, cannot apprehend the coincidence of opposites and the vanishing of difference; however, Schelling assures us that all distinctions of thought, including all philosophical

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[64] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Lewis W. Beck trans. (Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956).

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controversies, i.e. that between realism and idealism, have no meaning from the standpoint of the Absolute. We will have occasion to return to the question of standing outside the subject/object distinction and other polarities of thought, after we have had an opportunity to survey the desconstruction of these polarities in postmodern philosophy.

Hegel's Dialectical Idealism

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), recognized the prevalence of antinomies in conceptual thought, but rejected Kant's distinction between phenomena and *noumena*, arguing that Kant's positing of a "thing-in-itself" as the source of freedom, morality and faith involved an illegitimate extension of the phenomenal category of causality into a realm where on Kant's own theory it could have no legitimate application.[66] Further, Hegel held that any assertion that the noumenal realm exists and provides the foundation for ethics, makes it knowable, and thereby undermines Kant's claim that "knowledge" is restricted to phenomena.[67] Hegel concluded that anything whatsoever that can be referred to must, at least in principle, be knowable, and that since all that can be known is either a presentation to or category of the mind, all knowledge, and, hence, all existence, is essentially "idea". As a result of this equation of knowledge, existence and idea, the distinction between the mind and its objects collapses and Kant's reason for speaking about the phenomenal and noumenal realms (and hence about an *essential unknown*) completely dissolves.

Hegel took a much different, more dynamic approach to the antinomies or contradictions that appear in conceptual and philosophical thought, and he proceeded to enlist the Kantian, and other antinomies as the fuel for his famous "dialectic," arguing that the mind's taking up a position on one pole of an opposition inevitably leads to a breakdown in that pole, the necessity of entertaining its opposite, and the appearance of a more embracing idea that both deepens the original notion and then serves as the ground for the next stage in the dialectical process. Hegel thus attempted to make rational, philosophical sense of the notion that a concept's opposite or contradictory is implicit in itself, and his philosophy is, in effect, the first systematic attempt to provide a rational basis for the mystical notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*.

I think it is fair to say that regardless of whether one holds Hegel in high or low esteem, any contemporary discussion of the interplay of opposites in our conception of God, humanity, and the world, must begin with Hegel. Whatever else he is (and there are probably more interpretations of Hegel than of any other philosopher) Hegel has to be regarded as the major philosophical representative of the view that contrary if not contradictory notions are implicit within one another and are indeed interdependent ideas. While it is unclear whether Hegel actually discovered a new form of thinking or logic, it is clear that he articulated a point of view in which (at least apparent[68]) contradiction was essential, as opposed to being fatal, to our thinking. Priest quotes Hegel's reformulation of one of Zeno's paradoxes of motion: "Something

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[66] Hegel discusses his differences with Kant's "Critical Philosophy" in his Greater Logic. See Hegel, Logic, esp. pars. 40-51.
[67] Stace, The Philosophy of Hegel, p 43.
[68] It is unclear whether Hegel held that the contradictions in his dialectic were fully real, i.e, that the world itself contains contradictory elements. This is a question that we will return to after our consideration of postmodern thought.

moves, not because at one moment it is here and another there, but because at one and the same moment it is here and not here, because in this "here", it at once is and is not."[69]

Hegel makes us aware that thought itself is dependent upon conceptual dichotomies that permit us to express distinctions between the world's things and amongst our own ideas. Yet he goes beyond this simple assertion to the view that there is a class of philosophical oppositions, e.g. thought and nature, universal and particular, master and slave that not only require one another, but which, when pressed to their extremes and pondered thoroughly, actually pass into their opposites.

Hegel himself had some acquaintance with Kabbalistic symbols and ideas.[70] In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel says that "Kabbalah is called the secret wisdom of the Jews," and he makes reference to *Sefer Yetzirah* and the *Zohar*, as well as Rabbi Abraham Cohen Herrera's *Puerto del Cielo* (The Gate of Heaven). He indicates that while there is much enigma and fantasy in these works, "there are certainly some genuinely interesting determinations of a fundamental nature [Grundbestimmungen] in these books." Hegel makes passing reference to *Ein Sof*, the *Tzimtzum*, *Adam Kadmon*, *Keter*, the ten *Sefirot*, and briefly describes the Kabbalistic doctrine of the "four worlds."[71] However, apart from these brief references there is no sustained discussion of the Kabbalah in any of Hegel's writings or lectures. Still, Hegel may have been influenced by Kabbalistic ideas indirectly, through his reading of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), the German mystic and theosophist. Boehme, who had a profound impact on both Schelling and Hegel[72] was himself likely influenced by *Zoharic* and other Kabbalistic ideas (Hegel attributes the Kabbalistic symbol of *Adam Kadmon* to Boehme![73]). Hegel may have also encountered Kabbalistic notions through his association with Schelling and their mutual reading of the Swabian Pietists (e.g. Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, 1702-1782).

Hegel adopts and provides a philosophical basis for the mystical (and Kabbalistic) view that all concepts and things have their contraries, as it were, hidden away within themselves,[74] and he holds that there is an important sense in which apparent opposites are actually identical. For example, Hegel argues that the notion of *being*, which is generally thought to opposed to and distinct from *knowledge*, actually contains knowledge as part of its essence. This is because what we mean by saying that something has "being" is that it must at least be potentially known. For Hegel "being" is precisely what consciousness makes of it, and "knowing" is conversely

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[69] Priest, Graham, "Dialetheism", op. cit. Quoting A.V. Miller (trans.) Hegel's Science of Logic, Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1969, p. 440.

[70] I have explored the connection between Hegel and the Kabbalah in some detail elsewhere: *Kabbalistic Metaphors*, Ch. 6, pp.185-240.

[71] G.W. F. Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, translated from G.W.F. Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie ii* , (Theorie Werkausgabe, Bd. 19), Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977, 426-430] .

[72] See Cyril O'Regan, The Heterodox Hegel (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

[73] G.W.F. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Peter C. Hodgson, ed. (Berekely: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 84.

[74] Stace, The Philosophy of Hegel, p. 90.

nothing but the contents (being) of such consciousness. As such, these two apparently contrary ideas exist in a state of *coincidentia oppositorum*, and are in an important sense identical. Another way of summarizing this position is to say that Hegel seeks to overcome the knowledge/being or subject/object distinction.

Hegel makes use of the term "dialectical" to refer to (what he believes to be) the logical and historical processes through which concepts or things pass into their opposites and the distinctions between opposing terms are broken down.[75] For Hegel, dialectics is the essence of creativity. However, while concepts that are subject to the dialectic are transformed, they are never lost completely; they are "lifted up" in such a manner as to provide insight into their original essence. As the above example of being and knowledge illustrates, this insight reveals apparently opposing or contradictory terms to be mutually dependent ideas. Hegelian thought thus provides one valuable point of view from which to develop a contemporary reading of the Kabbalistic doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum*.[76]

Paradox and Contradiction as the Hallmark of Philosophy

Nearly 40 years ago Morris Lazerowitz developed the view that "a paradox or contradiction lies hidden in every metaphysical theory" and that antinomy is in fact the hallmark of philosophy.[77] Lazerowitz argued that all, or nearly all, metaphysical arguments result in contradictions, but acknowledged that "unlike mathematical contradictions, metaphysical contradictions are the kind of contradictions about which it is possible permanently to disagree as to whether they are contradictions."[78] An example, Lazerowitz adduces, is that of an uncaused occurrence (or uncaused cause), which philosophers from Empodocles to Bradley regarded as a self-contradiction, but which other philosophers, notably A.J. Ayer, found perfectly conceivable. Lazerowitz writes that "this intellectual deadlock, and a great number of others encountered in philosophy, make inescapable the thought that perhaps every philosophical statement is one side of an antinomy.[79] Lazerowitz points out that philosophers have differed regarding the significance of antinomies in philosophy. For instance, Kant, who developed several such antinomies held that there existence "points to a transcendent world into which the human mind is not privileged to enter" while Bradley held that the antinomies of experience implied the unreality of sensible phenomena.[80]

Lazerowitz further argues that ". …in the case of a vast number of…views in philosophy, the paradoxical fact emerges that the arguments adduced for a proposition imply the invalidity of a distinction which the proposition requires." He concludes that "this paradox is a sphinx whose riddle must have an answer, and undoubtedly an answer will someday be forthcoming."[81] Lazerowitz himself developed the Wittgensteinian view that "philosophy has the substance of a verbally contrived intellectual mirage and that it is a subject which only in outward appearance

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[75] Ibid., p. 104.
[76] See my Kabbalistic Metaphors, Ch. 6 for a fuller discussion of Hegel and the Kabbalah.
[77] Morris Lazerowitz, *Philosophy and Illusion*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968, p. 1.

[78] Ibid. P. 47.
[79] Ibid. p. 47.
[80] Ibid. p. 48.
[81] Ibid. p. 46.

seeks to discover the truths about things."[82] He went on to suggest the Freudian view that psychological wishes propel the philosopher to contrive metaphysical positions that are cast in the language of "logical argument" and "truth" but which in fact serve very subjective needs.

Of course, if Lazerowitz is right, then his view that "every philosophical argument is one side of an antinomy" is itself one pole of an antinomy, and thus essentially contestable. Further, we need by no means grant that Lazerowitz (or Wittgenstein) has finally solved the "riddle" of philosophy's tendency to undermine its own propositions. Indeed, we will have occasion to proffer an answer to Lazerowitz's riddle, though in its more "positive" formulation, when we explore the tendency for arguments adduced for a given philosophical proposition to imply the validity of the very position or distinction which the argued-for proposition is meant to exclude.

Dialetheism

Recently, the notion that contradictory statements may both be true has been revived by the logician Graham Priest and others who have argued that it is only western philosophical prejudice that has held the "law of non-contradiction" (if A then *not* not A) to be both inviolate and a condition for rationality. According to Graham, philosophy has long rested on the defense of this "law" in Chapter Four of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, a defense which is at worst trivial and confused and at best non-persuasive.[83] According to Graham, a major argument in favor of *dialetheism* (the possibility for true contradictions) stems from such logical anomalies as the *liar's paradox* ("This sentence is not true") which yield logically sound arguments that result in a contradiction. Graham tells us that in spite of numerous attacks against such paradoxes, the result of these attacks is to simply relocate the paradoxes elsewhere in a chain of reasoning. Graham believes that there are a number of other phenomena that can only be adequately handled by a violation of the law of non-contradiction and the adoption of a dialetheistic logic. These include transition states, as when a person is exiting a room (is he in or out of the room?), paradoxes of motion (as described in reference to Zeno and Hegel above), terms (such a "death") that have multiple criteria of application, and the paradoxes of quantum mechanics (in which, for example, a single sub-atomic particle is said to move through two slits at once).[84] To this we might add the paradoxes of time, for example, that the present is both completely distinct from yet imbued with the past and the future. In addition, and perhaps most significantly, claims about the ultimate nature of things, such as Kant's claim that is impossible to assert anything whatsoever about ultimate "noumenal" reality, or the Kabbalist's claim that it is impossible to say anything at all about *Ein-sof,* violate the law of non-contradiction, because in the very act of making such claims one does precisely what one says cannot be done.[85]

The notion of dialetheistic logic is not without its critics. For example, it has been pointed out that dialetheism has difficulty handling negation and disagreement; for if I show an opponent in a debate that his views are false or wrong he can dialetheistically agree but still assert that his views are also true and correct! Priest has argued that the dialetheist must distinguish between those (presumably few) contradictions that are rationally acceptable and those that are not, but

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[82] Ibid. p. 99.
[83] Priest, Graham, "Dialetheism", op. cit.
[84] Ibid.
[85] See Jay Lazerowitz. Garfield and Graham Priest, Nagarjuna and the Limits of Thought. *Philosophy East and West*; Jan 2003; 43, 1-21.

there are difficulties in characterizing the latter within a formal logical system. Efforts to delimit the class of sentences that are dialetheistic have not been wholly successful, and appear to be *an ad* hoc in nature.[86] Other critics have held that acceptance of the law of non-contradiction is a pre-requisite for both meaning and rationality. It is thought, for example, that a sentence is meaningful only if it rules something out. Graham counters that the sentence "Everything is true" is meaningful without excluding anything. With respect to rationality, Priest points out that *consistency* is only one criteria that has a bearing on truth; *evidence* being another, and there is evidence (even if it is arguably inconclusive) for the truth of certain contradictions such as the liar's paradox.

Priest raises the interesting and time-honored question of whether (both western and eastern) philosophers' contradictory assertions might be restated in non-contradictory form. While it is his view, for example, that some of Nagarjuna's (and other philosophers') apparent paradoxes can be re-stated this way, he holds that certain fundamental utterances in philosophy (e.g. that it is impossible to speak about ultimate things, or that the nature of ultimates is that they have no ultimate nature) can only be expressed using dialetheistic language.

We will have occasion to explore the question of the ultimate nature and status of the "coincidence of opposites" later in this paper. Here I would like to briefly note that while the doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum* may best be formalized via dialetheistic logic (as the *truth* of *both* A and *not* A) not all *true contradictions* involve a coincidence of opposites in the sense suggested by the Jewish mystics. Indeed, there are true contradictions of the form *neither* A *nor not* A (such as Nagarjuna's view that space is neither an entity nor a non-entity, or the Buddha's purported view that the Saint neither survives nor does not survive his physical death) that do not comport well with the Kabbalistic formula "the union of all contradictions". (As an aside, the quantum physics view that photons are *both* particles and *not* particles comports better with the *coincidentia* idea, because of its *positive* formulation.) We might say that with regard to those who accept the possibility of true contradictions, there are those who adopt the point of view of "neither" (e.g. "it is *neither* true that the world exists nor that it exist") and those who adopt the point of view of "both" ("it is *both* true that the world exists and does not exist"). Buddhism, we might say, is a tradition of "the neither", whereas Judaism, especially Jewish mysticism has largely been a tradition of "the both". It is, I believe, only within the traditions of "the both" that the doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum* is easily formulated. One can readily state, for example, that the world's existence is dependent on its non-existence and vice versa (understanding this paradox is another matter), but it is much more difficult to state that the falsity of the world's existence is dependent upon the falsity of its non-existence, etc. With the Buddhist (or Wittgensteinian) view of "the neither" it would seem that one's entire framework must be overturned and one's concepts discarded rather synthesized. Of course, a dialethician may well be open to the possibility of accepting both "both" and "neither," holding that the collapse of one's conceptual framework implied by "the neither" is necessary to arrive at "the both" and *vice versa*.[87]

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[86] See JC Beal, Dialetheism and the Probability of Contradictions, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*; Mar 2001; 79, 114-118.

[87] Interestingly, interchangability between the "neither" and the "both" is suggested by Derrida in *Positions*, where in describing his "logic" of "undecidables" he says "the *pharmakon* is "neither remedy

Carl Jung and *Coincidentia Oppositorum*

Early in the twentieth century, the interest in opposition and antinomy spread from philosophy to psychology. Noting the tendency of the human mind to think in either/or terms, psychologists developed theories and therapies that implored individuals to embrace those aspects of their psyches, which they had hitherto tended to ignore, reject or otherwise exclude. Psychoanalysis, for example, sought to expand the psychic field to include both conscious and unconscious, and socially acceptable as well as unacceptable ideas, emotions and impulses. Carl Jung went so far as to hold that the fully developed or *individuated* self is a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a coincidence or blending of oppositions. Drawing upon spiritual and practical traditions that had themselves been marginalized in the history of western thought (Gnosticism, alchemy and the Kabbalah), and embracing eastern (Taoist and Hindu) modes of thought as well as western (Christian) mysticism. Jung's vision of humanity was one that united the polarized aspects of both the individual and the "collective" psyche.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that for Jung the "coincidence of opposites" is the key principle of his entire psychology. Elaborating on the basic Freudian insights that there are no contradictions in the unconscious and that personality develops as a result of psychological conflict, Jung articulated a conception of the whole "Self" which unifies the conscious and the unconscious, the personal and the impersonal and a whole host of other archetypal oppositions (e.g. between anima [female] and animus [male], shadow and persona, etc.). As Jung himself put it "The self is made manifest in the opposites and the conflicts between them; it is a *coincidentia oppositorum*".[88]   For Jung, the measure of both an individual and an entire culture is the capacity to recognize polarity and paradox and to balance and unify oppositions.[89] However, in contrast to Hegel, Jung held that the "union of opposites on a higher level of consciousness is not a rational thing, nor is it a matter of will; it is a process of psychic development that expresses itself in symbols."[90] Indeed, Jung himself held that Hegel had erred by intellectualizing what were essentially insights into human psychology.[91] One might, perhaps more dispassionately, say that Jung attempts in the realm of the symbolic, mythological and the psychic what Hegel endeavored to accomplish in the sphere of reason: a dialectic of oppositions and antinomies leading to the full development of psyche or "mind".

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nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplement* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence, etc.; the *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc.….Neither/nor, that is *simultaneously* either/or… (J. Derrida, Positions, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 42-43.

[88] Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, ibid., p. 186.

[89] Jung, Commentary on the Secret of the Golden Flower, p. 21.

[90] ibid. We should here note that the structural anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss was to later hold that the very purpose of myth and symbols is to reconcile conflicts and contradictions that cannot be reconciled via other forms of thought or behavior. Because all cultures organize thought and knowledge into binary oppositions, all cultures require myth and symbols to reconcile the contradictions that are engendered.

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From a Jungian perspective, the Kabbalah performs on the level of myth and symbol, an integration of oppositions that would lead to contradiction and absurdity when considered on the level of reason and ideas. The Kabbalistic views that God creates man but man completes and, in effect creates God, that God himself is both the absolute being and total nothingness, that in order to realize the good, man must first pass through the realm of evil, that creation is negation (and vice versa), that destruction of values is the condition of their realization, that man himself is incomplete unless he is both male and female, and that the dialectical tensions of the cosmos are mirrored in the psychology of man, are not, on the Jungian view, philosophical theses that can be rationally proved or disproved, but rather symbols, myths and metaphors that assist the psyche in integrating the conflicts and contradictions that it experiences daily. The coincidence of opposites is not, as Hegel supposed, a rational truth, but a symbolic and psychological one, to be lived rather than merely thought. According to Jung, the mind becomes preoccupied with antinomies precisely because one pole of a psychic or emotional contrary has seized control of the individual and must be balanced by the other pole. According to Jung, the repressed unconscious poles "stand in compensatory relation to the conscious mind"[92] and, in effect, form a "shadow" which expresses itself in dreams, symptoms etc., all in an effort to balance the individual's "persona."

One can hardly argue against Jung's assertion that the coincidence of opposites must be lived as well as thought, and, indeed, the Kabbalists and particularly the Hasidim, recognized that the ideas and symbols that they originally attributed to the higher worlds must be, and indeed are, mirrored in the psyche and emotions of the individual. For example, the 13th century Kabbalist, Azriel of Gerona held that the energy of the human soul derives from the heavenly *Sefirot,* and that each *Sefirah* was a psychological power or physical organ in man.[93] Abraham Abulafia (1240-after 1291) understood the names of the ten *Sefirot* (thought, wisdom, understanding, mercy, fear, beauty, victory, splendor, etc.) as referring to processes taking place in the mind and body of man, and thought it possible for man to cleave to these attributes through proper meditation.[94] Amongst the Hasidim, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichov (1740-1809) held that "Man is a counterpart of the Attributes on high", and provided a one to one correspondence between these attributes and parts of the human body.[95] Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezrich (1704-1772), who succeeded the Baal Shem Tov as the leader of the early Hasidic movement, taught "that everything written in (Vital's) *Sefer Etz Chayyim* (the major exposition of the Lurianic Kabbalah) also exists in the world and in man".[96] As we have seen, the "Maggid" (who Jung later said anticipated his whole psychology[97]) went so far as to hold that the significance of divine thought is dependent upon this thought making its appearance in the

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[92] Carl Gustav Jung, The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious" in Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, Collected Works, Vol. 7 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.

[93] Scholem, Origins of the Kabbalah, p. 95.

[94] ibid., p. 147.

[95] Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichov, *Kedushat Levi, Bo*, p. 108. In Aryeh Kapaln, Chasidic Masters (New York: Maznaim, 1984), p. 78.

[96] Maggid, Dov Baer of Mezrich, *Or ha-Emet* (Light of Truth), fol. 36 c-d. Quoted and translated in Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives, p. 15.

[97] C.G. Jung: "An Eightieth Birthday Interview." C.G. Jung Speaking, pp. 268-72, pp. 271-2.

mind of man, a view suggesting a coincidence of opposites between the minds of God and man, and which enables us to see why Jung considered the Maggid to be his own predecessor.

Jung himself recognized the importance of the Kabbalah for a psychological understanding of *coincidentia oppositorum*. He was particularly interested in the Kabbalists' divine wedding symbolism,[98] which he understood as symbolic of the union between opposites in general, the union between God and man, and the unity within the Godhead. Jung refers to the division between the masculine *Sefirah*, *Tiferet* and feminine *Sefirah*, *Malchut* when he states "Our current state of disequilibrium results from a rupture between the King and the Queen, who must be reunited to restore God his original unity."[99] In 1955, after a massive heart attack that nearly killed him, Jung had Kabbalistic visions which he later came to regard as "the most tremendous things [he had] ever experienced".[100] In these visions Jung experienced himself as Rabbi "Simon ben Jochai" (who according to Kabbalistic tradition, was the author of the Zohar) and he felt himself to be in "the garden of pomegranates" (an allusion to a Kabbalistic work by Moses Cordovero). Jung relates that *he himself* became the beatitude of the "wedding of *Tifereth* and Malchut," and that the vision caused him to feel "as though [he] were safe in the womb of the universe."[101] Jung later took an interest in Hasidism, and in his final years went so far as to say that "the Hasidic Rabbi Baer from Mesiritz, whom they called the Great Maggid… anticipated [his] entire psychology in the eighteenth century."[102]

I have explored Jung's Kabbalistic visions and his interest in Jewish mysticism in detail elsewhere.[103] I have argued that while Jung's psychological perspective is a valuable vehicle for our understanding of both Jewish mysticism and the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*, it is not the only vehicle, and by no means excludes potential philosophical, theological and even scientic understandings of Kabbalistic ideas.

Neils Bohr: The Complementarity of Opposites in Modern Physics

While mystics of various traditions had for millennia contemplated the oppositions of thought, and had sought, for example, to dispel them as illusions cloaking a unified God or Absolute, in the last two hundred years a rational approach to overcoming these oppositions has emerged, paving the way for a form of philosophical, even scientific, reason, which avoids the

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[98] MC p. 23 and note 123, pp. 432-35

[99] ibid.*,* p. 23.

[100] Jung, <u>Memories, Dreams, Reflections</u>, p. 289.

[101] ibid. p. 293.

[102] C. G. Jung. "An Eightieth Birthday Interview." C.G. Jung Speaking, pp. pp. 271-2.

[103] See S. Drob, Jung's Kabbalistic Visions, *Journal of Jungian Thought and Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2005, pp. 33-64;*Kabbalistic Metaphors: Mystical Themes In Ancient and Modern Thought.* Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1999, Ch. 8, pp. 289-343; S. Drob, Jung and the Kabbalah. *History of Psychology.* May, 1999 Vol. 2(2), pp. 102-118 (reprinted as Jung, Kabbalah and Judaism, in A. Maidenbaum, ed., *Jung and the Shadow of Antisemitism,* Berwick, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 2002, pp. 175-192; and S. Drob, Towards a Kabbalistic Psychology: C. G. Jung and the Jewish Foundations of Alchemy. *Journal of Jungian Thought and Practice*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2003, pp. 77-100.

either/or distinctions of traditional rational inquiry. This trend has found expression among modern physicists, in particular in the theory of wave/particle complementarity as it was articulated and interpreted by the twentieth century quantum physicist Neils Bohr. I will explore Bohr's thinking on complementarity in some depth, as I believe it has an important bearing on our own problems in Jewish mystical philosophy.

Citing the fact that the findings of quantum physics support both a particulate and wave theory of light and matter, Bohr concluded "we are not dealing with contradictory but with complementary pictures of the phenomena, which only together offer a natural generalization of the classical mode of description."[104] In other words, Bohr tells us that it is only by thinking two seemingly opposing theories together that we are afforded an adequate scientific understanding of light and matter. Bohr reminds us that both "radiation in free space as well as isolated material particles are abstractions" but that both are "indispensable for a description of experience in connection with our ordinary space time view."[105]

Bohr notes that modern physics leads to a blurring of certain other distinctions that had earlier been thought to be sharp and clear. Drawing on Heisenberg and others he speaks of the "impossibility of any sharp distinction between the behavior of atomic objects and the interaction with the measuring instruments which serve to define the conditions under which the phenomena appear."[106] The collapse of a clear distinction between the instruments of knowing the world and the world itself, between the knower and the known, subject and object, epistemology and metaphysics, brings physics close to the insights of mystical consciousness.

Bohr regarded his "complementarity" as a philosophical position that stretched well beyond quantum physics, to matters of psychology and biology (e.g. the controversy between mechanism and vitalism).[107] With regard to psychology he wrote:

> As is well known, many of the difficulties in psychology originate in the different placing of the separation lines between object and subject in the analysis of various aspects of psychical experience. Actually, words like "thoughts" and "sentiments," equally indispensable to illustrate the variety and scope of conscious life, are used in a similar complementary way as are space-time and dynamical conservation laws in atomic physics.[108]

Bohr's point is that there is a subjective and an objective sense and use for most "psychological" terms (e.g. my inner subjective "thoughts" and the objective "thoughts" or ideas that they are about), and that only by considering both aspects at once can we develop understanding in psychology. Bohr tells us that progress in atomic physics leads us to recall "the ancient wisdom, that when searching for harmony in life one must never forget that in the dram of existence we are both actors and spectators."[109] In effect we are both conditioners of the world as we are conditioned by it.

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[104] N. Bohr, Atomic Theory, p. 315.

[105] Ibid. p. 316.

[106] Ibid. p. 341.

[107] N. Bohr, "Discussion with Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Physics.," p. 347 ?

[108] ibid. p. 347.

[109] Ibid. p. 353.

Bohr was aware that his thought could lead one to an impression of mysticism. While he denied that his thought led to an acceptance of logical contradictions in either the world or our descriptions of it (holding that apparent contradictions only disclose an essential inadequacy in our philosophical viewpoint)[110] he did make use of the metaphor of the simultaneous truth of opposites in describing his and others' work in quantum mechanics:

> In the Institute in Copenhagen, where through these years a number of young physicists from various countries came together for discussions, we used, when in trouble, often to comfort ourselves with jokes, among them the old saying of the two kinds of truth. To the one kind belonged statements so simple and clear that the opposite assertion obviously could not be defended. The other kind, the so-called "deep truths," are statements in which the opposite also contains deep truth.[111]

Bohr's position on complementarity seems to have been that seemingly opposite assertions about reality are, at least on occasion, both true, and that the affirmation of both "truths" are necessary for a complete description of the subject (e.g. light, matter, human psychology) to which they are applied. (It is unclear if he ever held that seemingly opposing truths were not only complementary but mutually determinative).

For Bohr, the differences between philosophers and even those between physicists of different schools often have their root "in the preferences for a certain use of language suggesting itself from the different lines of approach."[112] Bohr held that at times the most complete account of the world is given when we use language in ambiguous ways that gives latitude to more than one aspect of the significance of our words." There is, he held, a mutually exclusive relationship…between the practical use of any word and attempts at its strict definition."[113]

With Bohr's comment on the value and necessity of linguistic ambiguity we are ready to enter the post-modern, deconstructive philosophy of Jacques Derrida.

Deconstruction: the Overcoming of Polar Oppositions

The most recent, and perhaps most radical, philosophical voices concerned with conceptual oppositions, have developed an anti-metaphysical relativism that at first blush, appears to be unrelated (and even opposed) to any form of mysticism, metaphysics and theology.[114] Philosophers, led by Jacques Derrida (1932-2004), have argued that the entire history of western philosophy and religion is actually predicated upon radical distinctions between a wide variety of conceptual oppositions (God-world, subject-object, inside-outside, good and evil, etc.) and the *privileging* of one pole of each of these oppositions. These philosophers have called for a post-metaphysical consciousness in which traditional ideas and values become open to that which they were meant to exclude and in which we learn to embrace

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[110] Ibid. p. 347?
[111] Ibid. p. 354.
[112] Ibid. p. ?
[113] ibid., p. 347.
[114] As one might expect it is my view that deconstruction's very opposition to mysticism and metaphysics may well leave it open to its being determined by them.

both poles of oppositions and all that does not fall neatly into the dichotomies that have dominated western thought for the past 2500 years.

As Howells puts it, Derrida seeks to "to deconstruct the binary oppositions of Western thinking"[115] and "evolve new concepts or models that would escape the traditional system of metaphysical oppositions."[116] Though Derrida sometimes writes as if he considers these oppositions useful tools, to be maintained until better concepts become available,[117] it is clear that the overcoming of the various binary distinctions that form the core of Western metaphysics is a defining, if not the defining, characteristic of both deconstruction and postmodern philosophy and theology.[118] God-world, subject-object, inside-outside, word-thing, good and evil, etc. are all distinctions which break down in postmodern thought. As we have seen many of these distinctions also break down in the Kabbalah and we might regard the Kabbalistic symbols as pointing to new concepts that are vehicles for overcoming the basic binary oppositions in western metaphysics.[119]

However, whereas the Kabbalah generally seeks to overcome metaphysical distinctions in the service of a higher unity in *Ein-sof* (which is regarded as a "unity of opposites'), Derrida, holds that the effort to dissolve oppositions in the service of a "higher unity" is a subterfuge, which, while pretending to respect differences in perspectives, theories, cultures, and ideas, ultimately obliterates these differences in favor of a preferred "absolute" point of view. This is the gist of Derrida's long-standing polemic against Hegel, who Derrida holds to be the first philosopher to genuinely recognize "difference," and the last to make a heroic effort to obliterate it.

The "Supplement" and the "Undecidable"

Derrida invokes the notion of the "supplement" in his critique of a totalizing absolute or essence. The "supplement," a notion that suggests there is always *something else*, is designed to disrupt all binary oppositions: nature/culture, animal/human, child/adult, mad/sane, divine/human, without creating new integrative models of understanding the subject matters which these oppositions consider and classify. "Supplementarity," by suggesting that there is always something beyond what one encompasses with one's vision or refers to with one's words, undermines the idea that anything can be fully present to consciousness (what Derrida calls "presence"), or that one can fully grasp anything's identity. What something (anything) is, is in

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[115] Howells, p. 82.
[116] Howells, p. 33.
[117] Howells, p. 37?
[118] See Mark Taylor, Erring.
[119] The Kabbalistic symbol *Ein-sof* overcomes the distinctions between being and nothingness, God and the world, and theism and atheism; *Tzimtzum* overcomes the distinctions between concealment and revelation, and reality and illusion, the *Sefirot* overcome the distinctions between unity and diversity, permanence and change and subject and object, the *Otiyot Yesod* (foundational letters) overcome the distinction between language and the world, words and things, and *Shevirat ha-Kelim* overcomes the distinctions between creation and destruction, life and death, etc.

part constituted by that which at first appears "outside" of it, i.e, by that which it is presumably meant to exclude.[120]

Derrida borrows a concept from Godelian mathematics to further unsettle the notion of an absolute identity and self-presence. He uses the term "undecidable" to articulate the idea that there are certain aspects of, or terms in, a text whose are undecidable and which serve to unsettle the text they appear in. These undecidable terms mean *both* one thing and its opposite, and neither one thing nor its opposite. They do not, however, according to Derrida, resolve contradiction in Hegelian fashion by constituting a third, integrative term.[121] Indeed, the 'supplement' is itself an "undecidable" in Derrida's use of the term, as it is neither essential nor accidental, yet also both.

The key symbols of the Kabbalah are "undecidable" in a sense close to that of Derrida's. It is *undecidable*, for example, whether *Tzimtzum* is creation or negation, knowledge or ignorance, good or evil, and whether it is each of these things for either God or humanity. For God, *Tzimtzum* is the *creation* of the world, but it is also a *negation* because the world is an illusion based upon a contraction of the one real being. For humanity, *Tzimtzum* is creation because humankind owes its existence to the *Tzimtzum*, but it is also negation, for it is at the same time humanity's alienation from the source of being, which is God. Other Kabbalistic terms partake in similar undecidability. It is *undecidable* for example, if the *Sefirot*/*Partzufim* *were* or are *yet to be*, whether they are multiple or one, whether *Ein-sof* is nothing or everything, outside or at the center (*Yosher* vs. *Iggulim*), transcendent or immanent within the human mind. It is also *undecidable* whether the Breaking of the Vessels is a destruction of values or their origin, or whether the destruction of values is at once their origin.[122]

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[120] An interesting effect of the supplement is that because one cannot circumscribe the world with one's speech or perception, the supplement makes possible (and necessary) desire; for desire is precisely a reaching towards that which one does not—yet—have. A similar set of ideas is expressed in the Lurianic symbol of the "Breaking of the Vessels." According to Luria, an excess of divine light that the *Sefirot* were unable to contain resulted in their shattering, and ultimately in the alienation of sparks (*netzotzim*) of divine light in the *Kellipot* or "husks." The imprisonment of these sparks in the *Kellipot* and the shadow world of the "Other Side" assures that that the concepts and values that were represented by the *Sefirot* as they were originally emanated in the "World of Points" are not (and at least until the completion of *Tikkun ha-Olam*) "self-present," integrated and whole. At the same time, these sparks provide humankind with its spiritual desire; as its mission on earth is to discover these sparks, liberate them from the husks, and "raise" them in the service of human, and ultimately divine, values, in order to complete humanity, the world and God.

[121] Derrida links these undecidables to the Freudian unconscious.

[122] I have attempted to explicate these paradoxes in *Symbols of the Kabbalah*, but such explication cannot determine how, for e.g., *Tzimtzum* is to be read in any given context, e.g. As will be seen later in this essay, *Tzimtzum* is neither and both with respect to various binary oppositions (creation/negation, knowledge/ignorance, good/evil).

Essence and Accident, 'Outside' and 'Inside'

  Derrida's interest in oppositions coincides with his critique of ideals and "essences," and his criticisms of the correlative idea that it is possible to arrive at the one "essential" perspective or truth about a given text, phenomenon or the world as whole. In this way he is not only opposed to the view that any particular perspective is absolute, but is also opposed to any Hegelian or other effort to use oppositions to dialectically generate comprehensive or "absolute" point of view.[123]

  For Derrida, essence is always exposed to accidental variations that cannot be rationalized or explained through a definition that covers all cases. For Derrida the accidental features of a given concept or thing are a necessary, indeed, an "essential" possibility for that thing.[124] For Derrida, the "outside" of a particular text, concept or phenomenon, i.e. that which the concept is meant to exclude, is *essential* to the inside. One cannot, for example, understand the *man* unless one locates man within a differential matrix involving the inanimate, the animate, the concrete, the abstract and the immortal, as well as the specific bodily, emotional, intellectual and spiritual features that are present (accidentally) in one man but which are illustrative of the necessary accidental features that are present in all men. Thus man is defined in his essence both by features (the inanimate, the immortal) that he does not possess and by those that he possesses only "accidentally". For Derrida, the notion that what is outside, contrary, and accidental, is both illustrated and conditioned by the idea that an 'absence' (i.e. the past and the future) is constitutive of 'presence' (the present). What is *not now*, i.e. the past and future, is absolutely necessary in order to make sense of what is *now*, and, as such, an *absence* is absolutely necessary to make sense of *presence*. There are numerous special applications of this principle.[125] For example, the possibility of forgetfulness is part of the essence of memory; as a memory not subject to forgetfulness would, according to Derrida, be an "infinite self-presence," and not a *memory*, which must be of something that *is no longer present*.

  Derrida points out that traditional metaphysics typically sets up a binary opposition and then privileges one term of the opposition over the other.[126] 'Essence' and 'accident,' or 'identity' and 'difference'[127] are the most general of these binary oppositions, which are then specified in such further oppositions as being/privation, good/evil, purity/contamination, logical/empirical inside/outside, meaning/sign, soul/body, and world/language. While "metaphysical grammar" privileges *essence* and subordinates *accident*, "deconstructive grammar" allows accident to penetrate and ultimately determine essence. In violating essence accident becomes a positive condition for the assertion of essence as essence.[128]

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[123] My own understanding of Kabbalah and Hasidism *does and does not* accord with Derrida's critique of essence. However, this topic leads us too far astray from our purpose in the present context.

[124] H. Staten, Wittgenstein and Derrida, p. 16 ff.

[125] C. Howells, Derrida, p. 17.

[126] See Marc Taylor's enumeration of these oppositions in Erring.

[127] I discuss the deconstruction of the distinction between Identity and Difference in my essay "Beyond the Bounds of Language" (Chapter 8).

[128] Staten, p. 18.

The Permeability of Concepts

Derrida does not hold the nihilistic view that pure concepts (being, the world, man, goodness) are drowned or eliminated by otherness (their opposites, accidental features), only that they are necessarily permeable to them.[129] A concept must retain a measure of its identity, otherwise the force of its contamination by or connection to its opposite is nil. We cannot reduce pure concepts, the poles of our binary oppositions, to their opposites. Although in the process of deconstructing certain words and ideas, certain equivalences appear to be asserted, we cannot simply conflate essence and accident, being and nothingness, God and man. Derrida does not hold that there is no value or necessity to pure concepts. He only writes to instruct us that in using such concepts their purity is not what we originally thought it to be.

The Kabbalist's symbolized the permeability of all concepts in their doctrines of the *Behinnot* and the interpenetration of the *Sefirot*. In short, these doctrines, as expressed by the Safedian Kabbalist, Moses Cordovero (1522-1770) assert that none of the *Sefirot* are "pure," and that each *Sefirah* contains within itself an element of each of the others.[130] *Chesed* (Kindness) for example, is actually composed of each of the *Sefirot* in combination with *Chesed*, so that it is composed of the *Chesed of Chesed*, the *Gevurah* or *Din* (Strength, Judgment) of *Chesed*, the *Tiferet* or *Rachamim* (Beauty, Compassion) of *Chesed*, etc. The doctrine of the interpenetration of the *Sefirot* anticipates the "monadology" of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz[131] (1646-1716) as well as Nietzsche's famous dictum that everything in the world is integrally related to everything else, and that each of the world's concepts and values must be understood and developed in connection with each of the others.

Cordovero, who was the leading Kabbalist in Safed prior to Isaac Luria, held there to be an infinite number of aspects (*behinnot*) within each *Sefirah*.[132] Further, Cordovero held the (then) radical view that each of these "aspects" are dependent upon the point of view of the one who perceives or comprehends them. As such his theory anticipates postmodernist thinkers who regard reality to itself be a function of the constructions placed upon experience.[133] In Cordovero we find a doctrine of the permeability of essence that clearly anticipates and in some ways rivals that of Derrida.

Opposition in Derrida and the Kabbalah

As we have seen, the Kabbalists, and in particular the *Chabad* Hasidim who we have discussed in some detail, held that everything in the world exists in *coincidentia oppositorum*, that the infinite God (*Ein-sof*) as well as each of the archetypes of creation (the *Sefirot*) are as

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[129] Staten, p. 18.

[130] Moses Cordovero, *Or Ne'erav* VI:2, 35a; Robinson, <u>Moses Cordovero's Introduction to Kabbalah</u>, p. 119. Cordovero tells us "each of the [sefirot] is made up of [all] ten." (ibid., p. 120).

[131] On Leibniz and the Kabbalah

[132] Scholem, <u>Kabbalah</u>, p. 114, referring to M. Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim* 5:5.

[133] There are, according to Cordovero, six main *behinnot*, and these involve aspects which are both hidden and manifest within any given *Sefirah*, as well as properties that are both "essential" and "relational". Of particular significance are those *behinnot* that enable a given *Sefirah* to receive "light" from the *Sefirah* above it, and those which enable it to pass light onto the *Sefirah* below. Scholem is correct in pointing out that in this aspect of the *behinnot* doctrine Cordovero is close to a dialectical mode of thinking within a Kabbalistic framework.

Azriel put it, a "union of opposites," the poles of which are constitutive of each other. While Derrida is clearly skeptical of any ultimate union, his position is actually *dialectical* in a similar way. By holding that the outside is essentially constitututive of the inside, and that all essences (i.e. all concepts) are essentially permeated by the opposites that they are designed to exclude, Derrida becomes part of a tradition, one that was maintained by the mystics, which provides a counterpoint to the Platonic view that concepts must have clean boundaries that are uncontaminated by their opposites or by so-called accidental properties. This tradition, by invoking the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*, or "mystical paradox," holds that a proposition and its opposite can at the same time both be true. One implication of this view is that ideas have permeable boundaries, and that such permeability is essential to their very articulation as ideas. A number of authors have argued that Derrida is linked to mysticism through his approximations to *apophantics* or negative theology.[134] I believe that he is also linked to mysticism through his dialectics as well, via his views that the essential is necessarily permeable to the accidental, that identity is permeable to difference, and that each pole of the traditional metaphysical oppositions are penetrated, if not determined by, their 'other'. This overcoming of oppositions and polarities actually links deconstruction with a tradition that begins in ancient China and India, finds its earliest occidental expression in Gnosticism and reaches profound expression in the theosophical Kabbalah and Hasidism. It also links Derrida to Hegel, and despite differences on many critical points, to Carl Jung. Derrida's dialectics differs from both that of Hegel and Jung in its refusal to strive after a totality (a metaphysical absolute in Hegel's case and an individuated self in Jung's) but it shares with these thinkers a relentless pursuit of opposites that are to be discovered at the core of presumably pure concepts and ideas.

We will have occasion to return to Derrida later when we examine the demise of the signifier-signified distinction (the distinction between words and things). There we will see that the demise of this distinction (and the demise of its demise!) is critical to a contemporary philosophical understanding of *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Understanding the Mystical Paradox
We are now, after our brief survey of the history of *coincidentia* idea, in a better position to ask whether it is possible to *rationally* comprehend the paradoxes of Jewish mysticism, e.g. that God creates humanity and humanity creates the divine, that the world is both an illusion and reality, that *Ein-sof is and is not* identical with the world, that creation is at the same time a negation, that values must be destroyed in order to be actualized? Mystics of various persuasions have generally held that such paradoxes are the best means of expressing within language, truths about a whole that is sundered by the very operation of language itself. Any effort, it is said, to analyze these paradoxes and provide them with logical sense is doomed from the start because logic itself rests upon assumptions, such as the laws of "non-contradiction" and "the excluded middle," that are violated by the mystical ideas. Indeed, Stace has argued that mustical truths are essentially "alogical", inasmuch as they apply to unity, whereas logic applies to, and indeed defines the nature of, multiplicity.[135]

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[134] See H. Coward & T. Foshay, Derrida and Negative Theology. (Albany: Staue University of New York Press, 1992).

[135] W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, xxx.

Hegel was perhaps the last great speculative philosopher to hold that the identity of opposites could be demonstrated rationally. His view that *coincidentia oppositorum* yields a *logical principle* was treated with such scorn by later generations of philosophers that the idea of finding a rational/philosophical parallel to the mystic quest became an anathema to serious philosophers. Even W. T. Stace, who was highly sympathetic to mysticism (and originally sympathetic to Hegelian philosophy) eventually came to the view that in trying to make a logic out of the coincidence of opposites Hegel fell "into a species of chicanery." According to Stace, "every one of [Hegel's] supposed logical deductions was performed by the systematic misuse of language, by palpable fallacies, and sometimes…by simply punning on words."[136] Stace, who early on wrote a sympathetic (but now much maligned) book on Hegel's system, gave up the idea that *coincidentia oppositorum* could be shown to be a rational principle, holding that "the identity of opposites is not a logical, but definitely an alogical idea."[137]

It is thus with a certain trepidation that in the following sections, I offer two strategies or models that I believe will enable us to comprehend in rational terms how the overcoming, or simultaneous assertion of opposite, apparently contradictory, ideas can provide a more complete account of both particular phenomena and the "world as a whole" than the privileging of one pole of an opposition and the exclusion of the other. The first of these models is "cartographic" and the second "linguistic," but each are founded broadly on the view that *representation* sunders a unified theological or metaphysical whole. It is my hope that the model I offer can provide a degree of insight into the Kabbalistic/Hasidic view that both God and every actual thing in the world is a coincidence of opposites.

Model 1: Lessons from a Two-Dimensional World
The first model can best be introduced via an analogy, one that is derived from Edwin Abbott's 1884 book, *Flatland*.[138] Our analogy we will prompt us to temporarily adopt a perspective on the world that is *less complete* than our own. (In Kabbalistic terms, we will be compounding the effects of the *Tzimtzum* --the contraction and concealment which the Kabbalists held gives rise to both partial ignorance and the finite world.) The process of working out certain conundrums about the physical world from a more limited perspective than our own will, I hope, shed considerable light on certain metaphysical and theological questions that are difficult to resolve from within our actual epistemic situation.

Imagine for a moment a world that is virtually identical to the world we live in, but for the fact that the inhabitants are unable to represent, or even conceptualize, anything in more than two dimensions. It is not necessary that we fully imagine ourselves into this world, only that we accept the fact that even though the inhabitants of this world live in a world of three dimensions, they can only conceptualize themselves within two (in much the same manner that we, for example, cannot conceptualize the curvature of space-time, or the existence of extra dimensions that modern physics insists complement the three [or four] of human experience).

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[136]W.T. Stace, <u>Mysticism and Philosophy</u>, p. 213.

[137]W.T. Stace, <u>Mysticism and Philosophy</u>, p. 213.
[138] Edwin Abbott, <u>Flatland</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

One of the consequences of the inability to conceptualize experience in more than two dimensions (and the most important consequence for our current purposes) is that all representations of the spherical earth would be constructed in two-dimensions rather than three. In short, our "2D people" would have maps but no globes, and, however advanced their knowledge about their world, they would be continually faced with the epistemic problem of having to represent a round, spherical earth, on a flat, two-dimensional plane. This is, in fact, precisely the problem we have in creating our own maps, with the exception that, unlike the '2D people', we have the capacity to represent the earth synoptically with a globe, and thereby immediately intuit the limitations of our two-dimensional cartographic projections.

It has long been a principle of cartography that it is impossible to perfectly represent a spherical earth on a two-dimensional plane. Every cartographic "projection" of the whole earth suffers from one or more serious defects. In the so-called "Mercator" projections, for example, the lines of latitude and longitude, which are parallel on the globe, are kept parallel, but only at the expense of creating gross distortions in the size and shape of land masses near the earth's poles. "Polar projections" solve this problem but distort the size and shape of land masses near the equator, and create the further problem of requiring two circular projections, two maps in order to represent a single world. Certain, so-called "equal-areas" projections create the impression that there are huge 'gaps' in the earth, which are arbitrarily but conveniently placed in the oceans, creating the so-called "flattened orange peel" effect. Like the Mercator projection, these maps suffer from the problem of non-continuity at the equator, and as with all cartographic projections, one is unavoidably left with the impression that the world is flat and bounded by an edge; children often wonder what lies past that edge, and the ancients speculated that one could perhaps fall off into an abyss. (Actually, the space beyond the edge of a full-world cartographic projection is an artifact of the means of representation, and from within the scheme of the map, strictly speaking, does not exist. One would imagine, however, that the 2D people might have various theories concerning this region of "non-being").

For us, each of the various two-dimensional projections of the world is a 'perspective' upon the three-dimensional earth: each is suited to a particular purpose, and each has the practical advantage of being amenable to major increases in size and detail without concomitant geometric increases in their bulk. Their limitations are, however, readily apparent to us precisely because we can compare them to the "perfect" representation of the three-dimensional globe. Our "two-dimensional counterparts" however, have no such recourse to such a perfect model, and we might imagine that their various maps would, for them, engender a number of scientific and philosophical puzzles, which they would seek to resolve through a variety of conjectures and theories, just as our inability to see the world *sub-species aeternae* generates scientific and metaphysical theories designed to reconcile our various perspectives on a reality much broader than the earthly globe.

One particular feature of the two-dimensional people's descriptions of the world is that they would naturally be prompted by their projections into offering a number of interesting propositions about the world as a whole. For example, cartographers from the "2-D" world, might argue (and they would be correct in doing so) that each of their projections were *complete* maps of the world. Likely they would also realize that two (or more) projections were mutually corrective in that the distortions of the first were not present in the second, and vice versa. For example, the Mercator projection gives the misleading impression that the equator is non-

continuous and that land masses at or near the poles are immense. The dual polar projection corrects for these defects, though it has deficiencies of its own (not the least of which is that it gives the impression of two earths as opposed to one), and these defects are in turn 'corrected" by the Mercator projection.

In considering their various projections, some of the 2-D people might be inclined to hold that one or the other of their maps were "true" and that the others were either false or imperfect approximations of their favored forms of representation. Others, less inclined to such dichotomous thinking, might hold, for example, that both their Mercator and polar maps were valid, that the world was both one and many, linear yet curved, rectangular yet circular, broken yet continuous at the equator, with parallel lines of longitude that are nevertheless widest at the equator and converge near the poles, etc. In short, their forms of representation might prompt them to utter a number of paradoxical, seemingly contradictory ideas about their world that their limited epistemic position would make very difficult or even impossible for them to express or resolve in any other manner. (Further, as I have suggested above, their limited form of representation might prompt them into uttering such other propositions of variable merit as the world lays situated against the background of non-being, that it changes with the perspective of the observer, that at points it is both infinitely extended and minutely small, that there are as many "worlds" as there are perspectives, and that the idea of "one world" is not a given, but a construction or achievement.)

Certain philosophers in the 2D world might argue (as certain 3D thinkers argue in our world) that the various propositions derived from maps are simply an artifact of language and representation, that the dichotomous thinking, arising in cartography, though necessary for practical purposes (i.e. map-making) leads to metaphysical conclusions that are neither justified nor necessary, or that the dichotomous expressions and points of view are permeable to, and actually dependent upon, one another. In short certain philosophers might hold (as do mystics and Wittgensteinians) that the world is inherently distorted through our efforts to represent it, and others might argue (as Neils Bohr did with respect to wave-particle physics) that in order to think about the world as a whole one would need to actually think that seemingly contradictory maps were both true (and complimentary).

The analogies with our own epistemic predicament should by now be amply clear. Like the 2D people, who have no synoptic means of representing the earthly globe, we have no synoptic means of speaking about or representing such totalities as God, man, and the universe. We have perspectives on all of these matters but no super-perspective from which we can gain a perfect, integrated point of view. Our conceptions of the world are of necessity expressed via a series of dichotomies, but on closer analysis, these dichotomies, though necessary, are seen, at least by certain mystics and philosophers, to be either misleading or "permeable" to one another and interdependent. On this view, creation is interdependent with negation; values are interdependent with their own abrogation; truth is interdependent with error, God is reciprocally dependent with humanity, good is interdependent with evil, language is completely interdependent with, and not fully distinguishable from the world, etc. Indeed, these are the very reciprocities that constitute the Kabbalistic/Chabad, and to certain extent, postmodern world-view. However, whereas the postmodern tendency is to avoid any hint of synopsis or totalization, the Kabbalistic/Chabad view is that such reciprocities between dichotomous conceptions, like the reciprocities involved in the 2D maps we have been discussing, point to a

single, unified cosmos, which for the Kabbalists is a union of our necessarily partial perspectives upon it. Our failure to see or intuit this unified world is akin to the failure of our hypothetical 2D people to intuit the globe they live on; like them, we can only approximate a synoptic perspective through an extensive analysis of the reciprocity of our many partial and seemingly contradictory, points of view.

The Coincidence of Opposites: From Analogy to Analysis
        The cartographic model described above, like Neils Bohr's philosophy of "complementarity," suggests that our subject matter (in our case the universe as a whole) and the nature of our representations are such that in order to speak about things as a whole, we must describe them using two, seemingly contrary descriptions. However, this model merely provides an *analogy*, one that I hope renders plausible the idea that in order to understand God, humanity and the world as a whole, we must surrender our dichotomous thinking and think two or more seemingly contradictory thoughts at once. Now, I would like to offer the beginning of an *analysis* of why such bilinear thinking is necessary in philosophy and theology.
        Elsewhere I have attempted such an analysis with regard to perspectives on the human mind in *psychology*.[139] There I suggested that a synoptic view of the human mind can only be attained once we recognize the mutual interdependence of such dichotomies as determinism and free will, objectivism and constructivism, facts and interpretations, individualism and collectivism, and public vs. private psychological criteria. Here I will suggest how a similar analysis is necessary with respect to certain *metaphysical* and *theological* ideas, and further that such an analysis is necessitated by the very nature of linguistic representation.
        As we have seen, a close examination of major symbols of the Lurianic Kabbalah, symbols that were adopted by the Chabad Chasidim, reveals that they each cut across, and are in effect "undecidable" with respect to one ore more of the classic dichotomies of western metaphysics, and that each expresses an understanding of one or more of these dichotomies as a *coincidentia oppositorum*. The most important of these symbols is *Ein-sof,* literally "without end", which the Kabbalists use to indicate the metaphysical ground of both God and the cosmos, and which cuts across the dichotomies of being and nothingness, universal and particular, origin and end, divine and human, personal and impersonal, and faith and disbelief. It is almost as if the Kabbalists invoke the term *Ein-sof* to point to a "metaphysical whole" that is unavailable to us in the same way that a three dimensional globe is unavailable to the hypothetical "3-D blind" denizens of "Flatland." Just as the globe is a *physical whole* "prior" to its being sundered into an indefinite array of imperfect cartographic projections (maps), *Ein-sof* is a *metaphysical whole* prior to its being sundered into a variety of imperfect conceptual dichotomies that seek to represent God and the world. In each case, a primal, inexpressible whole,[140] has been ruptured

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[139] S. Drob, Fragmentation in Contemporary Psychology: A Dialectical Solution. Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Fall, 2003), pp. 102-123.
[140] In spite of the Jewish mystics' recognition that concepts are "permeable" and conditioned by their opposites, that ideas indefinitely open to interpretation, and that there is even a "subjective" element in all things, they continued (in opposition to the Postmodernists who have maintained similar ideas) to take seriously the notion that there is indeed a single world, which is a manifestation of a single, absolute God. In providing a philosophical basis for the Kabbalistic/Hasidic view that God or *Ein-sof* is a *coincidentia*

by the very system of representation that seeks to express it; the globe is ruptured by the system of representation that seeks to represent a 3-dimensional sphere in a 2-dimensional plane, and *Ein-sof* is sundered by the very system of representation (i.e. language) that seeks to speak of a unity, but which has dichotomy and distinction as the very condition of its expressing anything at all.

As we have seen, in the case we have been examining, cartography, it is the *system of representation*, the attempt to represent three dimensions on a two dimensional plane, that sunders the globe into a series of only partially adequate and seemingly contradictory maps. Is it possible that the metaphysical case follows the cartographic and that our inability to comprehend the world and cosmos as a unified whole is a function of our attempts at linguistic representation?

The Dialectic of Facts and Interpretations

In order to address this question we must reflect at some length on the nature of linguistic representation itself. When we do we realize that *coincidentia oppositorum* come into play with the advent of language, and are thus at work the moment we attempt to assert anything whatsoever. While we will have occasion to explore several such *coincidentia*, I will first focus my attention on two aspects of language: its tendency to fix a reference on specific objects in the world (and thus delineate *facts*), and the opposite tendency for it to be subject to an indefinite number of (re)*interpretations*. Indeed these two tendencies lie at the foundation of two very different pictures or theories of how language functions in relation to the world. The first, which I will call the "traditional" theory (or theory of "fixed meanings"), holds that words in language are grounded, at least in their primary, denotative meanings, in specific objects and concepts, such that there is a direct relationship between words and things, or between statements (or sentences) and worldly states of affairs. Two prominent exponents of this view were St. Augustine and the twentieth century philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who in the early phase of his career expounded what came to be known as the "picture theory" of language.[141] The "picture theory" is implicit in much traditional philosophy, theology and metaphysics. The second theory (which I will call the theory of "unfixed meanings"), which has been advocated by early 20th century linguists such as Saussure, the postmodernists (and by Wittgenstein in the latter phases of his career) holds that language is completely autonomous, that the distinctions it makes are not essentially tied to pre-existing entities and concepts, and that its assertions do not delineate inviolate "facts". On this view, the distinctions made by language are simply a function of the *differences between words* and the uses to which we put them , and the meanings of words and sentences do not have a fixed relationship to things or states of affairs in the world. While the theory of "fixed" meanings lies at the core of traditional metaphysics and theology, the postmodern theory of unfixed meanings has been used to deconstruct the very possibility of an absolute metaphysics or theology. I will here argue that each of these theories of language, like

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opposirorum , I hope to render plausible the notion that the overcoming of opposites enables us to *think* of the world (as opposed to *experiencing* it) as a unified whole.

[141] A theory that Wittgenstein himself later criticized and abandoned.

the Mercator and Polar projections of a three dimensional globe, are equally necessary and mutually correcting points of view upon the subject matter they are designed to explain.

Interestingly, *both* points of view on language are found amongst the Jewish mystics. On the one hand the Kabbalists held that the name of a thing completely fixes and captures its essence; on the other hand, they held that all words and propositions are subject to an indefinite series of re-interpretations. As an example of the first view, Schneur Zalman of Lyadi (the first Lubavitcher Rebbe) held that everything in the world, including inanimate objects such as stones, water and earth, has a soul or spiritual life-force which is to be found in the letters of divine speech from which they and their names are composed.[142]   Basing himself on a Kabbalistic tradition dating back to *Sefer ha-Bahir* that "the name of a thing is that thing itself,"[143] Schneur Zalman holds that "The name by which (a thing) is called in the Holy Tongue is a vessel for the life force." This view that all created things have a linguistic essence, can be traced at least as far back as the Talmud, where it is reported that Rabbi Meir could grasp the nature and character of an individual simply by knowing his name.[144] Thus a traditional, essentialist view of language is a very significant strand in Jewish thought in general and Jewish mysticism in particular.

On the other hand, there are also equally strong tendencies in the Kabbalah that go in the opposite direction. Gershom Scholem has described what he refers to as the Kabbalistic view of the "unlimited mystical plasticity of the divine word," and quotes from the Kabbalist Azulai to the effect that each time a man reads a given verse of Torah the combination of its linguistic elements change in response to the call of the moment, resulting in the creation of new Torah meanings.[145] More recently, Moshe Idel, building upon his earlier exposition of the exegetical methods of the Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (1240->1291), has detailed the Kabbalist's preoccupation with the infinite interpretability of language in general and the Torah in particular.[146] Idel describes how Abulafia advocated a form of free association to the rearranged letters of the Torah text, thus yielding an interpretive latitude that was unheard of amongst traditional Torah scholars and exegetes,[147] and even amongst contemporary deconstructionists.

Many Kabbalists, while not quite as extreme in their methods as Abulafia, held views suggestive of a radical deconstruction of the biblical text and its traditional meaning.   For example, the Safedian Kabbalists held that there are 600,000 aspects of meaning to the Torah, corresponding to the number of Israelites present at the revelation at Sinai, and hence to the number of "primordial souls" present in each succeeding generation.[148] Some Kabbalists held that the Torah was originally revealed as an incoherent scramble of letters which later rearranged themselves in response to historical events. The Lurianist, Israel Sarug, held that the Torah

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[142] Zalman *Shaar Ha Yichud Vehaemunah*. Chapter 1; Zalman, Likutei Amarim-Tanya, p. 287, referring to Vital.

[143] *Sefer ha-Bahir* sec 54. Book Bahir, Neugroschel trans., p. 65.

[144] Talmud. *Tractate Yoma*, 83b.

[145]Scholem, "On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism,"p. 76.

[146] See Moshe Idel, Absorbing Perfections (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), Chapter 3" "Text and Interpretation, Infinities in Kabbalah."

[147] Moshe Idel, Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia.

[148] Scholem, "On the Kabbalah", p. 65. Referring to *Sefer ha-kavvanoth* (Venice, 1620), 536.

manifests itself in different ways in different levels of spiritual and material existence. At the highest level (the world of "Atziluth") it exists as all possible combinations of Hebrew letters, thus adumbrating the set of all possible conceptual/linguistic worlds.[149] Similar views of the Torah's plasticity are attributed to the founder of the Hasidic movement, Israel Baal Shem Tov.[150]

By understanding the reciprocal relationship between strict representationalist and more plastic points of view on language, we can not only gain insight into the controversy between postmodernism and traditional philosophy, but also begin to gain a deeper understanding of the Kabbalistic/Hasidic theory of *achdut hashvaah*.

Whereas traditional theories of semantics held that (at least some) linguistic terms must have fixed meanings, postmodernists such as Wiitgenstein, Derrida and Foucault have held that no meanings are fixed and that all linguistic terms are always subject to reinterpretation. These later theorists have held that the meaning of any given term is not, as traditionally assumed, determined by its reference to or representation of, some thing (or 'signified') in the (extra-linguistic) world, but rather by the manner in which the term is used or the behavioral and linguistic context within which that term appears. Derrida and other postmodernists took up Saussure's structuralist claim that a term's significance is a function of its difference from all other terms in a linguistic system, as well as by its position within a diachronic chain of linguistic signs. As the totality of the system is not determinate, and the contextualizing linguistic series is potentially infinite (e.g. what Shakespeare wrote is continually being recontextualized by generations of interpreters) no sign or term can be said to have a determinate meaning. Similarly, Wittgenstein held that a term's meaning is determined by its use in a "form of life," i.e. a linguistic-social activity within which that term has a function or role. Since the variations in human forms of life are infinite or nearly so it is impossible to specify the total context that will once and for all fix the meaning of any given utterance or text. The implication of this view is that there is no hope of arriving at a solid foundation for truth and meaning and, hence, no hope of establishing an ultimate perspective upon, or "truthful" account of, the world.

Traditionalists counter that unless some terms are fixed in their meaning, communication itself would be impossible; that the simplest of utterances, would be infinitely re-interpretable and there would thus be no way of meaning or referring to anything whatsoever. Since we obviously do *mean* and *refer*, and our words do have profound and predictable effects, there is no doubt that meanings are indeed fixed, at least in a relative sense.

Consider the possibility of a *coincidentia oppositorum* between these two points of view regarding the anchoring of linguistic significance. Might it not be the case that the very idea of fixed meaning requires its opposite, indefinite interpretability, and vice versa?

I think it is easy to see how the notion of unfixed, indeterminate, indefinitely interpretable significance is dependent upon at least some aspects of meaning being fixed. This is apparent simply on the grounds of the traditional arguments in favor of anchored significance. If no terms were fixed, at least for the purposes of a specific communication, language would be unable to perform the functions it obviously performs so well. I think, however, that the traditional view runs aground by holding that the meaning of a given term must be fixed for all occasions in

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[149] Ibid., p. 75.
[150] Ibid., p. 76.

which that term is used. Wittgenstein, for example, in his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*,[151] had already realized that no actual terms could fulfill the demand for absolutely fixed meanings, so he hypothesized that underlying natural language there were certain invisible, inaudible, unwritable "elementary propositions" and "names." which referred to equally ineffable "atomic facts," and which performed, on a metaphysical level, the function of anchoring language to a determinate reality. One might be tempted to regard the Kabbalists' *Otiyot Yesod* (the Primordial Letters, which in the Kabbalah are said to be primal units of meaning as well as sound) or the *Sefirot*, which are said to be mirrored in God, the world, language and the human mind, as such underlying anchors of meaning and significance (and in a certain limited sense this view is illuminating). However, before adopting this view, we should briefly examine why the very existence of such anchored meanings was later challenged by Wittgenstein himself, and replaced by the "meaning as use" perspective of his *Philosophical Investigations*.[152] (It was also, as we will see, challenged by the Kabbalists themselves!) Wittgenstein came to the simple realization that *any candidate that we propose as an anchor* of significance will itself be subject to recontextualization and thus further re-interpretation *ad infinitum*. Because any given word or sentence is continually heard or read by different subjects in different linguistic, social and psychological contexts, there is absolutely no way of fixing its meaning for all time.

Wittgenstein's apparent error in the *Tractatus* was to hold that language must be fixed *in an absolute sense*. In actual practice linguistic meaning is only fixed in a relative sense, in the context of specific utterances or types of locutions. As speakers we are, as it were, continually dropping temporary anchors with our use of terms. While the word "moon" can mean many different things, in certain contexts (e.g. those of astronomical observation) it takes on the character of a *relative* anchor around which other terms may vary.

If there were no such relatively fixed meanings there could be no unfixed meanings as well.[153] If all words were continually open to reinterpretation, no one could offer a coherent interpretation or understand any utterance whatsoever. There would be an infinite regress of doubt and misunderstanding even with respect to such commonplace locutions as "I am hungry" or "Please pass the salt." Further, without some fixed meanings it would no longer make sense to speak of different points of view, interpretations, or perspectives; for what would these interpretations and perspectives be *about*? Thus the very notion of interpretation (i.e. unfixed meaning) is itself dependent upon, at least some, terms and meanings being fixed.

Conversely, the idea of a fixed interpretation is itself actually dependent upon non-fixed or interpretive significance. This proposition is somewhat harder to understand than its converse, but the basic point is that *without interpretive meaning we would never arrive at general concepts and hence would never arrive at any significance or meaning whatsoever*.

To see why this is the case, let's assume, for the moment, the truth of the traditional theory of absolutely fixed representations. What would such a system of representation be like? Again we must ask what "elements" in the world would our words presumably correspond to? The objects of common-sense perception? The objects of natural science? The problem we run

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[151] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* xxxx

[152] Ludwig Wiitgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

[153] As we will see a similar idea motivates Derrida to hold that although the signifier/signified distinction is spurious it remains necessary for significant speech and writing.

into is that any objects we can name as the supposed fixed referents of our terms are themselves culturally and linguistically constructed and defined. It is hard to see how any of them could serve as the essential elements or "natural kinds" to which our terms unequivocally refer. We might consider sensations (e.g. red, heavy, cold) as the candidates for our fixed referents, but it becomes difficult to see how pairings between words and sensations can lead to the objects of ordinary and scientific language, without considerable construction and interpretation. Besides, it is hard to comprehend how such sensation vocabulary can even be communicated outside of reference to things (e.g. a *red* flower, or a *heavy* rock). All of these problems are familiar enough; they are among the standard difficulties involved in any effort to create a representational theory of meaning, whether grounded in common-sense, science or human sensations.

However, let's further assume that each of these problems have somehow been surmounted and we have our fixed linguistic representations. X word means *this* sensation, Y word means *this* object, Z word means *this* event. How is it that we can then move from a *particular* named thing to a *kind* of sensation, object, or event? How does a child, for example, learn that when an object pointed to is said to be a "pencil" or a "person" that these are not proper names (or terms referring to particular aspects of the object) but are instead names of a whole class objects (pencils, persons) of which the particular object pointed to is just one example? If the word "person" is to even develop its fixed meaning (as referring to the class of human individuals) how can this occur unless its original fixed particular meaning, is unfixed and *interpreted* to cover a class? (If one asserts that our original fixed meaning [of say the word "human'] already covers a class, how does it come to refer to a series of actual and possible individuals—Socrates, Sherlock Holmes—unless its meaning is also unfixed, so as to be applicable to an indefinite range of cases and not just a "general" object?) The very idea of a fixed, representational theory of meaning, requires its opposite, the non-fixed, interpretive theory of meaning, to assure that a fixed term applies to a wider class and not just a particular case. The application of terms to such a wider class is itself neither fixed nor automatic, and indeed the growth of language, and the growth of human knowledge involves a continual reinterpretation of classes, which, in effect, corresponds to the reformulation of ideas. What counts, for example, as " a dinosaur," "a disease," "an atomic element," "a pain," "a human right," and even "a human being," is constantly being reinterpreted by the various scientific and cultural institutions that make use of these terms. The class of objects to which a particular term refers is not a rigid, inflexible class, but an ever-shifting one, wholly dependent upon contexts of interpretation. As has been repeatedly pointed out by Kuhn and others: even the "facts" of science are already laden with theory and interpretation.

We have thus arrived at a *coincidentia oppositorum at the core of our investigation of what it even means to assert or speak about anything whatsoever*. We can conclude that the very notion of unfixed meaning, of the infinite recontextualization and reinterpretability of language that postmodernism has brought to our attention, is (as the traditionalists assert) dependent upon the possibility of fixed, representational significance, but also that the very possibility of such representational significance is itself dependent upon meanings becoming unfixed and interpretively applied to a larger class. *Data* is necessary in order for there to be interpretations, but *interpretations* are equally necessary for, and lie at the very core of, data. These two ideas exist in *coincidentia oppositorum*.

As with all philosophical dichotomies we go astray when we attempt to latch onto one pole of an opposition and assume its truth excludes the truth of what we presume to be its opposite. We must develop a form of thinking in which we intuitively recognize that when we have grasped onto one pole of such a dichotomy we have already and necessarily grasped its opposite as well. Our desire to eliminate one pole of a philosophical dichotomy is akin to "keeping the circle but dispensing with its circumference." Our tendency to dichotomize, while it often provides us with insight into the nature of our subject matter, seduces us into thinking that one pole of our dichotomy must be true and the other false. From a philosophical (and theological) perspective it is better to conceptualize truth as one, and to think of our dichotomies as artifices designed to precipitate out temporary distinctions from what in actuality is a unified whole.

Kabbalistically, the dichotomizing tendencies of thought are a function of language, and are indeed an aspect of the *Tzimtzum*, the concealment of *Ein-sof*. Theologically, we must take an approach that is akin to the Buddhist "middle way," seizing hold of both poles of our dichotomies whenever our thinking tempts or impels us to choose only one.

The *coincidentia oppositorum* between fixed ("fact") and unfixed ("interpretation") theories of meaning is paralleled in postmodern thought by another coincidence between (1) the traditional and common sense view that there is a real distinction between words and things and (2) the deconstructive (and Jewish mystical) view that the signified (thing) is just another signifier (word). The *theoretical* collapse of the *signifier-signified distinction*, and the *practical* restoration of this distinction, is an important aspect of Derrida's philosophy that is of significance for our Kabbalistic/Hasidic understanding of God and the world as a coincidence of opposites.

Model 2: Overcoming the Distinction between Words and Things

The Chabad Chasidim held that the *Tzimtzum*, the act of contraction and concealment which wrought all distinctions and brought the world into being, was a *linguistic* act. According to Schneur Zalman, the *Tzimtzum* is a revealing/concealing act in which the infinite, *Ein-sof*, contracts itself into language, specifically into the combinations of letters which comprise the so-called "ten utterances of creation."[154] Such contraction into language is both a concealment and revelation of the divine essence.[155] The *Tzimtzum* inaugurates a distinction between language and the world which conceals the singular unity of *Ein-sof* but reveals an infinite multitude of finite objects and ideas. These notions suggest the intriguing possibility that by undoing the *Tzimtzum*, i.e. by overcoming the distinctions between words and things and thus language and the world, we can return to the primal unity of *Ein-sof*, the infinite God.

In this connection we should note that Schneur Zalman's understanding of the *Tzimtzum* arising through language accords well with the view, suggested by Derrida, that the most fundamental dichotomy, one that inaugurates the history of western philosophy is the distinction between the signifier and the signified, i.e. between words and things. This distinction

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[154] Zalman, Likutei Amarim-Tanya, p. 319 (*Shaar ha Yichud VehaEmunah* 7).
[155] See S. Drob, Symbols of the Kabbalah (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aaronson, 2000), Ch. 3 "Contraction into Language"

inaugurates all other distinctions and, as such, is the very foundation of language and thought. If words could not be distinguished from the things they refer to or represent, no distinctions, no ideas, no descriptions whatsoever could be expressed. For these reasons, the signifier/signified or word/thing distinction is a critical, even foundational "test case" for our consideration of the coincidence of opposites in philosophical theology. If this distinction can be overcome, if it can be shown that there is a coincidence of opposites between word and thing than we will have arrived at an intellectual (as opposed to intuitive) vehicle for realizing the primal unity (between language and world, subject and object) that was sundered by creation.

Such a vehicle is indeed provided by recent philosophers, including Wittgenstein and Derrida, who have suggested that in spite of the fundamental role that the distinction between words and things plays in language and thought, this distinction is philosophically untenable. I will explore the reasoning that leads to this conclusion below, but for now it is sufficient to comment that it rests on the observation that the very process of pointing to or referring to a thing involves an infinite regress of words that disambiguate what one is referring to, but *only relatively and always within a further linguistic context*.

Interestingly, the Kabbalists themselves questioned the distinctions between language and both the world and God. Indeed, as we have seen, Moshe Idel has argued that Jacque Derrida's now famous aphorism "There is nothing outside the text," which in 1967 announced the collapse of the signifier-signified distinction, may actually derive from the Kabbalist, R. Menahem Recanti's dictum that there is nothing outside *the Torah*. Recanti, writing in the early fourteenth century, held "All the sciences altogether are hinted at in the Torah, because there is nothing that is outside of Her…Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, is nothing that is outside the Torah, and the Torah is nothing that is outside Him, and this is the reason why the sages of the Kabbalah said that the Holy One, blessed be He, is the Torah." [156] Elliot Wolfson has argued that the "obfuscation between story and event" in both *Sefer ha-Bahir* and *Sefer ha-Zohar* led to a collapse between *mashal* and *nimshal*, signifier and signified:

> In the Kabbalistic mind-set, there is no gap between signifier and signified, for every *nimshal* becames a *mashal* vis-à-vis another *nimshal*, which quickly turns into another *mashal*, and so on ad infinitum in an endless string of signifiers that winds it way finally (as a hypothetical construct rather than achronological occurrence) to the in/significant,

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[156] Moshe Idel, <u>Absorbing Perfections</u>, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, p. 122) Idel points out this passage was never translated and was unknown outside of Kabbalistic circles prior to its discussion by Gershom Scholem at the 1954 Eranos Conference in Ascona. At that time Scholem's comments and the passage itself were printed in English and French translations in the journal, Diogenes (Diogene). The French translation (1955-6) was made by the distinguished Judaic scholar Georges Vajda, and in French the translation reads "there is nothing outside her (i.e. the Torah)." Idel holds that "the fact that this statement about the identity between the Torah and God was available in French in 1957 may account for the emergence of one of the most postmodern statements in literary criticism: There is nothing outside the text." Idel suggests that in the *Grammatologie*, which was first published in 1967, Derrida, who maintained a certain interest in the Kabbalah, "substituted the term and concept of Torah with that of text" (M. Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, p. 123).

which may be viewed either as the signified to which no signifier can be affixed or the signifier to which no signified can be assigned.[157]

While the Kabbalists may have intuitively understood that both the world and God are, to use Idel's metaphor, "absorbed" by language, contemporary philosophers have offered reasons why this must be the case. It will be worthwhile to review the chain of reasoning that leads to the dissolution of the signifier/signified distinction in some detail. In doing so we will see that there is a *coincidentia oppositorum* not only between words and things (signifier and signified) but also between the *view* that the signifier/signified distinction is spurious and the *view* that this distinction is absolutely essential.

What does Derrida mean when he says that the signified is just another signifier, that the "thing in itself" is itself a sign? We can again perhaps explicate this best by borrowing a line of reasoning inspired by the later Wittgenstein. There is a certain class of words, those naming so-called mental states and processes that can serve as clear examples of the theory that words do not achieve their meanings by attaching themselves to things, but rather by the position they hold within a form of life and language. Consider, if you will, the question of how many "mental acts and processes" are required in order for you to read and comprehend this paragraph? Attention, concentration? Surely one must attend to and concentrate upon the meaning of the words. Memory? Certainly one must remember the sounds of the letters and the meanings of the words, as well as recall the beginning of the paragraph to understand its end. Intention? Clearly one must intend to read and understand. Recognition? In reading we are constantly recognizing words, meanings and ideas with which we are familiar. Thought? One can read without thinking, but in that event one wouldn't understand what one has read. What of other mental terms? Interpretation, expectation, perception?..it would seem that nearly any cognitive term we can think of names a process that is necessary in order for one to read. However, should we then conclude that there is a process in the mind or brain corresponding to each of these terms when you read this paragraph. Wittgenstein might say that the necessity of attention, concentration, memory, recognition, thought, expectation, intention , interpretation, understanding, etc. is a "requirement of the language" rather than a reference to or description of actual, concrete mental acts and processes. We have a whole host of mental terms that have meaning by virtue of their distinctiveness from, and entailments *vis a vis*, one another, but whose application to the "world" is quite tenuous and indirect. The idea that the signified is in reality another signifier or series of signifiers, might be said to generalize from cases like this one about "reading" to most, if not all, of language.

But what about language that literally points to objects in the material world? When I hold up a pencil and say "this is a pencil," the word "pencil" is presumably the *signifier* and the pencil itself the *signified*. However, even in this case we might still ask what it is that I am referring to with the word "pencil"? This is because *depending on the context* I could hold up a pencil to illustrate an application or reference of the words "wood", "yellow", "writing implement", etc. When I point to something and utter a word, this is not an unambiguous act of

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[157] Elliot Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death.* Berkely: University of California Press, 2006, p. xii.

reference; my word "pencil" refers, but it does so only through a series of other words that disambiguate what I am referring to, which require other words to disambiguate them, and so on, potentially *ad infinitum*. While we typically do not need long explanations in order to discern what someone is referring to when he or she points and speaks, this is in large measure because as members of a common culture we already share a language and a whole host of standard interpretations. (This, by the way, is not the case when it comes to communications between a small child and an adult; and when a child points to something it is often completely unclear what the child means). A so-called signified, like "pencil" only has significance within the context of a social practice and language that expresses the routes of interest of a certain culture; a pencil is what it is only in the context of a *form of life* in which writing is a significant act, there is a difference between erasable and non-erasable writing etc. To an individual of a completely different culture, a pencil may not have the meaning we assign to it, and any efforts we make to get such an individual to simply attach the word "pencil" to what we refer to with this term will be fruitless because 'pencil' does not have a *place* in his form of life. Hence, when I use the word pencil (even within my own culture) I am not pointing immediately to an object or "transcendental signified" but I am rather (implicitly) invoking a series of other signifiers that disambiguate and explain my use of this term and which situate "pencil" within a cultural practice/language. The same is true for *any* other word, including words that designate so-called "natural" as well as culturally determined objects. It is only within a certain (culturally conditioned) "language-game" or "form of life" that we regard "copper" or "tuberculosis", to take two arbitrary examples, as meaningful "terms", "ideas", "objects" or "natural kinds." My meaningfully asserting that "x is copper" invokes a linguistic setting and series of disambiguating signifiers in the same ways as my saying that "x is a pencil." Whether the object of our attention is "cultural" or "natural", the so-called *signified* is really another signifier or series of signifiers *ad infinitum*.

It is for this reason that it is arbitrary what we regard as the *signifier* as opposed to the *signified*. Pencil can signify long, wooden graphite instrument for writing, or the latter can signify pencil. Since our words never directly seize hold of *the thing itself*, all language simply involves a reversible chain of signification. Once we regard the so-called transcendental object as a sign, it becomes arbitrary what we regard as the sign and what we regard as the signified. In theological terms, if we were to follow Menahem Recanti and equate God and the Torah or God and language, we might equally regard Torah/language as the sign and God the signified or God as the sign and Torah/language as the signified. The whole of language, we might say, is a comprehensive signifier for the absolute God, or "God" is the comprehensive signifier for the whole of whatever can be written or said.

It is important to see how on this view there is an arbitrariness or reversibility of signifier and signified. Since "words" and "things" are both, in effect signifiers, what plays the role of the *signified* is dependent upon how the language is set up. I can write a treatise about man, the world, or God, and set the latter three up as my ultimate signifieds, but it can also be that my treatise is the signified and these 'ultimates' are mere signs. My Kabbalistic treatise is about the transcendental object *Ein-sof*, but we can just as easily say that *Ein-sof* is the role played by the word "Ein-sof" in my treatise. Or, in more mundane terms, my text on American history is presumably about the nation "America", but America here can just as easily be understood as the part played by the word "America" within my treatise or text (e.g. "Drob's America"). This, of course, relates to the problem of the philosopher's so-called imprisonment within language.[158] I want to write about God Himself, or freedom, or the world, but in the end I am simply setting up these terms within a certain discourse; something akin to setting up a game with rules (like chess) and calling God, the world, or freedom, one of the pieces. The playwright Samuel Beckett once said: "writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*."

If we follow this line of reasoning thoroughly we soon realize that the very distinction between words and things is not what we originally held it to be, and this distinction is itself dependent upon a use of language that actually overcomes or obliterates this distinction. My ability to use the word pencil to refer to pencils does not proceed via a direct attachment of the word "pencil" to the "pencil thing," but actually *must operate through a chain of other signifiers* involving marking, drawing, writing, erasure, and which disambiguate my pointing to the pencil as "pencil" as opposed to pointing to it is an instance of wood, graphite, cylinder, stick, pointy thing, weapon, lettering (on the pencil) etc. If signs and signifiers were truly distinct, and words attached themselves directly to objects, unmediated by other words we would not be able to say anything at all, because such objects or "transcendental signifieds" would lie completely outside the matrix of signification. In such a case one could make a noise or a mark and point to a presumed object, but one would not be able to say what aspect of the thing one was pointing to, what kind of thing it was, and how it differed from other things. In actual fact, when we point to an object and make meaningful reference to it we do so only because our pointing and reference carries with it an entire language.

In collapsing the distinction between word and thing, we have already begun to think of the world as a unified whole, as we begin to recognize that an integrated web of nature, culture, and language is implicit in each and every utterance we make. However, our analysis is not yet complete, and must proceed, as it were, in the opposite direction as well. The point of view in which the signifier-signified distinction is overcome is itself dependent upon another point of view, the "traditional" one, which holds this very distinction to be inviolable and absolute. Just as the postmodernist view of the infinite interpretability of language is itself dependent upon the possibility of fixed meanings, the related postmodernist obliteration of the distinction between signifier and signified is itself dependent upon an inviolable distinction between words and things.

As Derrida has suggested, one could hardly use language at all without adopting the very word-thing distinction that he himself has argued against. One could not speak *about* anything unless one assumed a distinction between one's words and their subject matter. Indeed, the very

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[158] which will be the subject of Chapter XX.

deconstruction of the word-thing distinction is itself dependent upon the very distinction it undermines. While it is true that when we refer to purported objects, referents or signifieds, we are only using language to refer to something that is constructed by consciousness and language itself, consciousness, as Marc Taylor has observed, *understands itself as using language to refer to an object outside of itself*, and in the process *obscures from itself its own role in constructing such objects* (this is a perfect human parallel to the Lurianic notion of divine self-concealment or *Tzimtzum*). As Derrida points out, *even though the distinction between the signifier and the signified is specious*, *we could neither speak nor function without it*. In order to say anything at all we must (at least temporarily) set up a distinction between what we are saying and what we are speaking about. (For example, we must speak *about* language or speak *about* consciousness *constructing* objects, etc.). Thus the identity of word and thing is a doctrine that can be written or uttered, but which can never be fully assimilated or understood. This is because the signifier/ signified distinction is a necessary assumption of language; without it we literally would not be talking *about* anything. Sense and nonsense, truth and error, reality and illusion, and what's more all "subject matters," e.g. science, history, psychology, etc. ultimately depend upon the signifier-signified distinction. Now while one implication of the deconstruction of this distinction is that our belief in "meaning," "truth" and "reality" is in a sense undermined, if we abandoned these notions altogether, we could neither speak nor think at all.

We are left with the paradoxical conclusion that if language is to function at all, the two propositions "the signified is another signifier" and "the signified and signifier are distinct" must both be true. While on the one hand the very distinction between words and things is itself dependent upon a use of language that actually overcomes or obliterates this distinction, on the other hand, in order to use language, in order to even think, we must assume the very distinction between words and things that our deconstructive analysis has overcome.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that from a broad point of view there is not only a *coincidentia oppositorum* or interdependence between words and things, but also a *coincidentia oppositorum* between the *view* that words and things are absolutely distinct and the *view* that there is in effect no distinction between them. As we have seen, the word-thing distinction is necessary even for expressing its own transcendence, dissolution or collapse, and, conversely, the dissolution of the word-thing distinction is necessary for expressing the distinction itself! In grasping the interdependence of these seemingly contradictory points of view we have moved one step closer to rationally regarding the world as a unified whole and have moved up one rung on the ladder of our "rational-mystical ascent". The conceptual distinctions through which we view the world are a function of an illusory, but absolutely necessary, consciousness. Our efforts to articulate a point of view or philosophy that transcends this illusory consciousness inevitably leads us to formulate a series of paradoxical, even contradictory propositions (e.g. words are both distinct from and identical to the things they signify) that turn out to be mutually interdependent. Recognizing their mutual interdependence, i.e. the coincidence of opposites that lies at the heart of all conceptual thought is perhaps as close as we can get to an intellectual apprehension of the mystical experience of the opposites becoming unified as one.

The signifier/signified distinction is thus like the dual and multiple two-dimensional maps that our 2D people must continue to use even after they have realized that the world exists

in three dimensions and that their maps are reciprocally corrective and determinative, and point to an undifferentiated globe or whole. However, we can also say that that the realization that the signifier/signified distinction is ultimately untenable is as close as our intellect can come to conceiving the metaphysical "globe" or unity that underlies the multiplicities of the finite world.

In recognizing the *coincidentia oppositorum* between signifier and signified we have an intellectual apprehension of a unified whole; a whole that unites the distinctions between language and world, and subject and object, and which is very much akin to the mystical union of opposites that is spoken of as *Ein-sof* in Jewish mysticism. Indeed, the Kabbalists held that *Ein-sof* (in at least one of its moments) is the primal, undifferentiated unity that is *prior* to the advent of the finitude and difference produced by *Tzimtzum* and language. In a logically later moment, *Ein-sof* is the *union* of opposite, even "contradictory" ideas. In comprehending the *coincidentia oppositorum* between words and things as well as the coincidence between the views that words can be distinguished from things and that they cannot, we begin to grasp how an integrated web of subject and object, and language and world, is implicit in each and every linguistic utterance or proposition. The deconstruction of the signifier-signified distinction provides us with a hint of a unitary whole that "antedates" language, or, put another way, restores the unity that had been sundered by language. However, as the very process of thought is predicated on the distinction between signifier and signified, our conception here is fleeting, as our deconstruction involves thoughts which necessarily again sunder the world into a multitude of entities and ideas, distinct from, and presumably represented by, words.

Interestingly, the Kabbalists sometimes speak of *Ein-sof* as equivalent to or a product of language, and sometimes as the origin of all linguistic representation. On the one hand, as we have seen, Menahem Recanti held that God "is nothing that is outside the Torah" and further that "the Holy One, blessed be He, is the Torah." [159] The Kabbalistic work *Sefer Yichud* avers that one who writes a Torah scroll is credited with having "made God Himself."[160] On the other hand, the proto-Kabbalistic work, *Sefer Yetzirah* expresses the apparently opposite view: "Twenty-two foundation letters: He engraved them, He carved them, He permuted them, He weighed them, He transformed them, And with them, He depicted all that was formed and all

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[159] Moshe Idel, <u>Absorbing Perfections</u>, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, p. 122) As discussed in Ch. 4, Idel points out this passage was never translated and was unknown outside of Kabbalistic circles prior to its discussion by Gershom Scholem at the 1954 Eranos Conference in Ascona. At that time Scholem's comments and the passage itself were printed in English and French translations in the journal, Diogenes (Diogene). The French translation (1955-6) was made by the distinguished Judaic scholar Georges Vajda, and in French the translation reads "there is nothing outside her (i.e. the Torah)." Idel holds that "the fact that this statement about the identity between the Torah and God was available in French in 1957 may account for the emergence of one of the most postmodern statements in literary criticism: There is nothing outside the text." Idel suggests that in the *Grammatologie*, which was first published in 1967, Derrida, who maintained a certain interest in the Kabbalah, "substituted the term and concept of Torah with that of text" (M. Idel, <u>Absorbing Perfetions</u>, p. 123).

[160] Moshe Idel. <u>Kabbalah: New Perspectives</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 188.

that would be formed.[161] Whereas in Recanti and *Sefer Yichud Ein-sof* is equivalent to language, in *Sefer Yetzirah Ein-sof* fashions language as a tool for creating the worlds.

Strictly speaking, "Ein-sof" should be used neither as a signifier or a signified, for to do so necessarily involves it in the very bifurcating, sundering process that it is meant to escape or transcend. To use "Ein-sof" as a word or to classify it as an object, however sublime or exalted, is to place it as one amongst others in a system of differences, and to have *Ein-sof* simply become the role that the term "Ein-sof" plays in, say, the language of Jewish mysticism. *Ein-sof* can only be used as a pointer, or, to use Heidegger's expression, a "formal indicator" of that which is unsundered, and which for that very reason cannot be pointed to or said. Even using *Ein-sof* as a pointer in this way runs the risk of having it become just another word or thing. We might therefore say that *Ein-sof* is no-thing (*Ayin*), and its (non) character is such that it can best be conveyed through non-representation or silence. As *Sefer Yetzirah* had importuned, "restrain your mouth from speaking and your heart from thinking, and if your heart runs let it return to its place".[162] We might also say with the Kabbalists and Schneur Zalman that *Ein-sof* is the *Ayin* (nothingness) that is logically prior to all distinctions resulting from the *Tzimtzum*, thought and language.

While the Kabbalists and Chasidim often state that *Ein-sof* is itself a *coincidentia oppositorum*, I believe that it would, at least initially, be more illuminating to say that the coincidence of opposites is a *logical echo* of the a-logical primal unity, after that unity has been wrenched apart and dichotomized by logic, thought and language. The recognition that each pole of a dichotomy is fully dependent upon its presumed opposite, and (perhaps more fundamentally) that words are fully interdependent with things, provides a sign or echo within thought and language of the primal unity that was sundered by thought and language itself. A philosophical comprehension of the coincidence of opposites is a means of undoing the bifurcating tendencies of the intellect and moving back in the direction of an original unity.

For the Kabbalists, however, this return to the primal unity is all the more exalted for having passed through the dichotomies and multiplicities of a finite world; for such a restored unity is not simply a restoration of the original divine oneness, but is actually the completion and perfection of *Ein-sof* itself. According to the Kabbalists, it is incumbent upon humankind to recognize and even facilitate the distinctions within the finite world, while at the same time, through an appreciation of the coincidence of opposites, to comprehend the unity of all things. I believe that one implication of this view is that in disciplines as diverse as philosophy, psychology and theology, we must guard against a form of dichotomous "either/or" thinking that permanently excludes, and thus fails to recognize the necessity of, ideas and points of view that are seemingly opposite to our own. More positively, we must seek integration in our thinking by exploring the possibility that opposing ideas and points of view are actually complimentary. Amongst the candidates for such complementarity are theism/atheism, rational/irrational, being/nothingness, and freedom/necessity. From a Kabbalistic point of view, these and many

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[161] *Sefer Yetzirah* 2:2, A, Kaplan, Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation, p. 100.
[162] *Sefer Yetzirah*. I. 8.   As translated in Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar. Vol. 1 p 234. See also, Aryeh Kaplan, Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation, Rev ed. (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1997), p. 66. Wittgenstein, in the Tractatus, holds that we must remain silent regarding the nature of the link between language and the world, precisely because this link cannot be said.

other seemingly contradictory ideas are not only complementary but are fully interdependent. Indeed, it is the task of a theology which seeks to comprehend the "whole", to articulate the manner in which presumably polar opposites are permeable to, and interdependent with, one another. In doing so, we participate in forging the "unity of opposites" that is said by the Kabbalists to constitute *Ein-sof*, the Infinite God.

Tzimtzum as the Origin of the Signifier/Signified Distinction

The necessary but (from one perspective) specious distinction between the signifier and the signified is paralleled in the Kabbalah by the necessary but (according to Kabbalists) specious distinction between God and the world. According to the Kabbalists the world itself is simply a divine aspect that God chooses to regard as independent of Himself. This illusion of independence is an effect of the *Tzimtzum*, the contraction and concealment of the divine essence that gives rise to an illusorily independent world. *God conceals from Himself his identity with the world, in much the same way that consciousness conceals from itself the identity between words and things*. God conceals His identity with the objects of the world in order to effect the appearance of an independent world. Similarly, language must conceal its identity with the objects it names in order to give the appearance of an independent realm of things. Without such an "illusory" realm it could not function as language. Thus a contraction or concealment, in Kabbalistic terms, a *Tzimtzum*, underlies the distinction between consciousness and world, words and things, and the very possibility of language itself. Schneur Zalman says that language is the vehicle of *Tzimtzum*,[163] but the converse is true as well, *Tzimtzum* is the very condition of language. The *Tzimtzum* that operates at the heart of language may ultimately be indistinguishable from the *Tzimtzum* described by the Kabbalists as giving rise to a finite world. In "both" cases (and it is unclear that there are really two cases here) an infinite, undifferentiated unitary consciousness contracts itself in order to create a necessary, but illusory, distinction between itself and its objects.

The Dialectic of *Tzimtzum*

Once we realize that there is a coincidence of opposites between our most fundamental theories about the nature of language, it becomes easier to understand how there is a coinc*identia oppositorum* behind *every* opposition of thought, not only those oppositions that we observe between terms of traditional thought and philosophy, but also those we observe between different senses of Kabbalistic or other terms that are said to deconstruct or transcend the polarities of ordinary discourse.

There is thus a *coincidentia oppositorum* between such oppositions as "reality" and "illusion," "humanity" and "God," and "good" and "evil," but also between different *interpretations* of each of these concepts. There is even a coincidence of opposites implicit in the concept of *Tzimtzum* itself, which is invoked to express the *coincidentia oppositorum* between "creation" and "negation," revelation and "concealment," etc. We must not forget that a

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[163] Zalman, <u>Likutei Amarim-Tanya</u>, p. 299, ff. (*Shaar ha Yichud VehaEmunah* 5-7).

coincidence of oppposites runs through all of our categories, and that if we wish to, as it were, "think of the world as a whole," we can never let our minds come to permanent rest in concepts or interpretations that we believe are not themselves subject to this dialectic.

A deep reflection on the notion of *Tzimtzum* reveals that like everything else in the Kabbalah, *Tzimtzum* leads in two opposing yet complimentary directions at once. On the one hand, as I have argued in *Symbols of the Kabbalah*,[164] the doctrine of *Tzimtzum* suggests that individual, *particular things* are imperfectly known, partially occulted, or concealed *ideas*; for example, the individual man is a mere shadow, a constricted version of the ideal man (*Adam Kadmon*) and of the *midot* or traits that are archetypally expressed in the *Sefirot*. The ideal man contains within himself *in potentia* all the characteristics of every possible individual man, and the individual man, by instantiating certain of these possibilities, is a selected, occulted, limited or contracted version of the ideal. However, we can also see that the doctrine of *Tzimtzum* suggests the precise opposite, i.e. that an *idea* is a constricted, imperfectly known *particular*, one in which the infinitely rich detail and individuality of the particular object is bracketed and concealed in order to permit an abstract, universal idea to emerge. A certain forgetfulness, inattention or unconsciousness is necessary in order to transform the unassimilable, particularity of the "thing" into to universal typicality of the idea.[165] When we look at anything too closely we get lost in its particularity, and run the risk of a complete disintegration of conceptual consciousness and an end to the possibility of knowledge. In this sense, the idea is an imperfectly known particular. As Harry Staten has put it: "Vagueness or unconsciousness attends consciousness as a function of its mortality, yet it makes possible an ideality which ensures the possibility of its transmortal repetition."[166] This is a very interesting observation, which suggests that human finitude and ignorance is itself the *foundation* of the ideal order of which *Ein-sof* is the apex. On this view, not the particular, but the *ideal* is the result of a species of ignorance.[167]

There are thus two *Tzimtzums*[168], or two axes or directions along which the *Tzimtzum* travels, one starting from a knowledge of the ideal and which contracts itself into an ignorance that becomes the particular, and a second starting from a knowledge of the particular, which contracts itself into an 'ignorance' that becomes the ideal.[169] The two kinds of, or perspectives upon, *Tzimtzum* are summarized graphically in Figure 1.

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[164] S. Drob, Symbols of the Kabbalah, Chapter Three.

[165] Staten, p. 144.

[166]Staten, p. p. 144,

[167] We might loosely paraphrase this by saying that the angels are what they are because they are ignorant of the details of mortal existence.

[168] The Hebrew plural would be *Tzimtzumim*.

[169] Concretely this can be seen in the distinction between "book" (ideal) and experiential (particular) knowledge.

Figure 1: Two Kinds of *Tzimtzum*

Tzimtzum I I	Knowledgege	Ignorance (*Tzimtzum*)
Ideal	Ideal as Perfect Knowledge	Ideal as Ignorance Ignorance
Particular	Particular as Perfect Knowlege	Particular as Ignorance

Tzimtzum II

We can see from the table that each form of knowledge is predicated upon a corresponding ignorance: knowledge of a particular object involves a selectivity and concealment of all the various possibilities that are inherent in its type. To know a given person is to know him as having a particular sex, age, size, color of hair, intellect, personality, etc. and to not know him or her as each of the other characteristics that are potential in individuals and humanity as a whole. Yet to know an ideal "man" is to ignore, and abstract from, all of the particular or 'accidental' features of any given man and focus upon those aspects that are definitory or universal. Each process involves an act of selectivity, and the resultant knowledge is predicated upon a form of ignorance.

One might certainly retort here that "knowledge" and "ignorance" are being used in two different senses with regard to the two kinds of *Tzimtzum*; i.e. knowledge and ignorance of universals on the one hand and particulars on the other. However, there are good reasons to believe that there is really only one kind of knowledge, a knowledge that strives for completeness in all ramifications and details and that this single concept of knowledge *pulls us in two opposite directions*. Do I know the nature of an object only by comprehending its over-arching essence (as argued by Plato), by clearly and thoroughly grasping a particular case (Aristotle), or by knowing both at the same time? Further, is it not the case that each *kind* of knowledge (assuming for the moment that there are two kinds) depends on its (complementary) opposite. How, for example, can I describe a person in all of his/her accidental features other than by appealing to *ideal descriptions* (e.g. colors, shapes, anatomical features, emotional characteristics, etc.) that enable me to say what these features are? And how can I illustrate, intend, or fulfill an ideal description other than through a real case, with all of its details, both essential and accidental?

Our two interpretations of *Tzimtzum* bring to mind a passage from the Zohar that we have already had occasion to quote:

> Just as the Supernal Wisdom is a starting point of the whole, so is the lower world
> also a manifestation of Wisdom, and a starting point of the whole.[170]

We *might* say that the *Tzimtzum* that starts from the ideal and contracts or conceals itself into the particular is the wisdom that starts from the supernal realm and results in the material world, while the *Tzimtzum* that begins with the particular and through selective concealment arrives at the ideal, is the wisdom that begins in the lower world. (The former would then correspond to traditional theism and idealism, and the latter to traditional materialism). One might think that the *Tzimtzim* which begins with the particular and through selective ignorance arrives at the ideal expresses the idea that humanity (through its ignorance) creates the ideal, and *ipso facto*, God. However, this is not the only way of viewing this form of *Tzimtzum*. We might also say that the concealment/contraction that begins with man need not be understood as *creating* God, but as getting out of God's way and *allowing Him to become manifest*, and this is clearly the interpretation provided by the Hasidim in their conception of *bittul ha-Yesh*, the nullification of the egocentric self. The Hasidim tell us that God contracts or constricts His infinitude in order to manifest finite things in a world, but that man must equally contract/constrict his particularity, his individual ego, in order to realize or manifest God. The encounter between God and man, the very process of creation is one of mutual or reciprocal contractions. On this view, the failure to acknowledge the existence of God is not a failure to have a certain belief or knowledge, but rather a failure to contract one's individual self and knowledge. Following this line of reasoning further, it might even be said that one must become *ignorant* to know God, as God is in the realm of what is *not known*.

Again, it is important to remember that we have not here arrived (nor will we ever arrive) at an ultimate viewpoint. Indeed, each time one arrives at a seemingly conclusive dichotomy, new dichotomies appear, and each are incomplete halves necessary to complete a whole, which is in turn incomplete, etc.

Stepping Outside the *Tzimtzum*: God as Signifier, World as Signified; Word as Signifier, God as Signified

In this section, I will consider the idea that although the *Tzimtzum* (concealment, distinction, differentiation) is necessary for both language and thought, we can imagine and even *quasi-conceptualize* what it would mean to think outside of, or at least reverse the *Tzimtzum*, i.e. think outside of language and thought!

Thinking within the *Tzimtzum*, i.e. within language and the word-thing distinction, we might readily arrive at the conclusion that God or *Ein-sof* is the *great signifier* and the world is that which has been signified or rendered meaningful. *Ein-sof* as the plenum of all value and significance contracts itself into the ten *Sefirot* and 22 letters, which serve as the archetypes for value and meaning in a material world. As we have argued, the *Tzimtzum* is thus seen to be a development that is analogous to (and perhaps even identical with) the process through which consciousness distinguishes itself (or its own linguistic acts) from a signified object, and thus posits an independent, meaningful world. This, according to the Lurianists, *is* the very process of creation.

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[170] Zohar 1:153a. Sperling and Simon, The Zohar, Vol. 2, p. 89-90.

However, once we step outside the *Tzimtzum*, and obliterate the signifier/signified distinction, certain rather paradoxical conclusions emerge. The first of these, as we have already seen, is that words do not describe their objects, but rather constitute them and are, in a very important sense, the objects (of discourse) themselves. A particular instance of this paradox, one that is especially important for our discussion, is that once we stand outside the *Tzimtzum* (or rather reverse it), theological writing no longer reflects or describes God, but is rather the *writing or making of God*. (Recall Samuel Beckett's aphorism: writing is not *about* something; *it is that something* itself). The *Zohar* says that he who writes a Torah is credited as if he created the Holy One Himself.[171]   Hegel, whose philosophy moves between traditional metaphysics and non-referential "writing," suggested that idealist philosophy not only described or mirrored the Absolute, but that the Absolute first emerged in its texts. I made a similar point in *Symbols of the Kabbalah*, where I suggested that *Ein-sof* in effect emerges out of the very words of the Lurianic theological system.

There is a comparatively trivial sense in which this *must be* true; "Ein-sof" is a word, the meaning of which only emerges within the context of the language game of the Kabbalah, in much the same way as the meaning of the "knight" only emerges within the context of the rules of the game of chess. In this way *Ein-sof* emerges from the texts of the Lurianic Kabbalah, in the same way that "Sherlock Holmes" emerges from the writings, the texts, of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But is there a non-trivial sense to the notion that God emerges from the text? Is there something profound being said here, or am I simply saying "the Kabbalists use of the word "God" emerges from the manner in which they use it"?

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[171] The full quote is "each and every one [of the people of Israel] ought to write a scroll of Torah for himself, and the occult secret [of this matter] is that he made God Himself." (quoted in Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives, p. 188)

With respect to "*Ein-sof*" I believe that there is indeed a special point, one that is more profound than the trivial notion that my use of a term generates the meaning of that term (as used by me). This special point emerges from the observation that the very notion of a signified object, any object whatsoever, emerges through its being established in its use by a certain discourse. *Ein-sof* is presumably the foundation of all: the first beat, a semantic "big bang" establishing the possibility of all significance, all meaning, all being, all worlds. Since anything or everything attains the status of 'signified' or object via the use of a word or words in the context of discourse, the emergence of *Ein-sof*, which is intended as a term covering this signification process, does so as well. But since *Ein-sof* is used to refer to the signification process itself, when it appears in discourse, it establishes a peculiar fusion of process and content, in which the very process of emergent meaning is highlighted by the fact that the origin and nature of "emergent meaning" is here the very meaning which is emerging.

We could say that Sherlock Holmes emerges only in the context of Sir Arthur Canon Doyle's text, and this could be used as an illustration of primal signification and hence the creation of *a world*. But when we say that "Ein-sof" or "God" has emerged from our text, there is a particular coincidence of content (i.e. God or *Ein-sof*) and process (the creation of meaning) that highlights the process we have been speaking of as truly foundational, as it were, for *all worlds*. Ein-sof emerges in its meaning*, but the very process (or origin) of "emerging in its meaning" is Ein-sof itself*! This is my "special point." It is not particularly remarkable if a fictional character emerges, or is created from textual discourse; that's what fiction is supposed to be about. But if the world, God, Being, and the Infinite are created out of the play of the text, this tells us how deep and general this signification process actually is; for then it must be that this is the process by which *all significance whatsoever* is brought about. We can call *this signification process Ein-sof* (the Infinite God). *Ein-sof* is thus the process that renders meaning and significance. When looked at this way we can see that God, the world, humanity emerge in the same way that characters emerge out of fiction. They are woven out of the very fabric of language and text. They are, in effect, fictive characters, things, and events, and it is only in this way (by being fictive) that they become *real*. Once we step outside the signifier-signified distinction, once we view things from a standpoint outside the *Tzimtzum*, this "fiction" *is no longer an illusion*, because we are no longer under the spell of the difference between words and things. As the Zohar claims, one who writes a Torah (i.e. one who signifies) has indeed participated in the very act which creates (and is) God!

From one perspective, God is the signifier and the world is the signified, yet from another perspective, one that attempts to momentarily stand outside the *Tzimtzum*, outside the signifier-signified distinction, the "word" is the signifier and God and the world are the signifieds that *emerge out of the word*. We live in what we might be spoken of as an all-encompassing narrative. This narrative has created, and is created by both the Absolute and each of the particulars that are comprised within it. Indeed, this narrative is one definition of the "absolute:" man, world, and God. Grasping this narrative is *one way* to think the world whole, and yet another rung on the ladder of rational-mystical ascent.
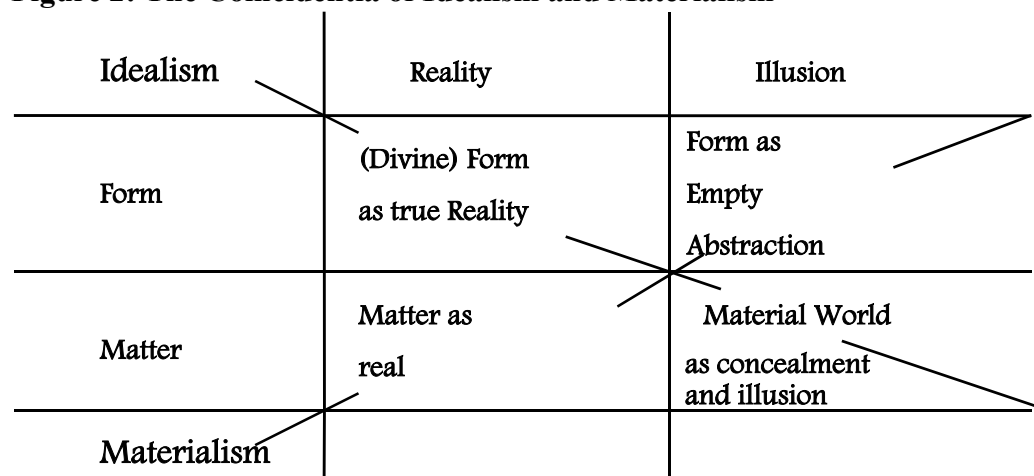
Truth and Reality

What happens to such ultimate concepts as "truth" and "reality" when we understand them from a Kabbalistic and rational mystical perspective? Philosophers have long understood

that the terms "truth" and "reality" are "essentially contestable" concepts, notions of such singular value and significance that their very meaning varies according to one's religion, philosophy, or world-view. For example, materialist thought identifies reality with the so-called "bedrock" of the material world, and sees ideas, concepts, and values at best as approximations to that reality, and at worst, error and illusion. On the other hand, idealist thought identifies "reality" with values and concepts, and sees the material world at best as a mere instantiation of basic ideas, and at worst as formless and empty substance awaiting the stamp of mind.

The Kabbalistic notion of *Tzimtzum* initially impels us toward an idealist perspective on reality. Idealism certainly follows from the perspective on *Tzimtzum* (*Tzimtzum* I in Table I above), which understands the world of matter and particular, finite things to be the result of a contraction, concealment and ignorance of the infinite God. This is the *Tzimtzum* that, in the language of the Zohar, sees "the Supernal Wisdom [as] a starting point of the whole." However, idealism does not necessarily follow from the second *Tzimtzum*, the *Tzimtzum* that begins with the particular, and contracts and conceals its accidental features in arriving at an abstraction that covers many similar cases, and ultimately to the most general (but empty) of concepts, the "Absolute" itself. This is the *Tzimtzum* (Tzimtzum II above), that (again, using the language of the Zohar) sees the "lower world also (as) a manifestation of Wisdom, and a starting point of the whole." This *Tzimtzum* (which might be called "Aristotelean"--in contrast to the first *Tzimtzum* which can be called "Platonic") is far more compatible with a materialist point of view. However, as I have argued in *Symbols of the Kabbalah*, these two perspectives exist in *coincidentia oppositorum*. The very things (atoms, molecules, trees, animals, rocks, etc.) which the materialist regards to be examples of the objective, material world, cannot be comprehended unless they are *subsumed under a category or idea*. As Hegel points out, even the pointing to a material object or a mere reference to a vague, undetermined "this" involves us in categorical thinking, and such thinking inevitably leads to an element of "mind" in all things. On the other hand, the very categories or ideas through which we divide up and cognize the world are themselves dependent upon the existence of concrete material examples, which subsist independently from the mind. The very concept of the objective or physical implies the constructed or mental and vice versa. Thus, idealism and materialism are mutually dependent and reciprocally determined ideas. Kabbalistically, the supernal and the lower worlds are two halves of a completely interdependent whole. Figure 2 expresses this interdependence graphically as the intersection between the Idealist and materialist points of view.

Figure 2: The Coincidentia of Idealism and Materialism

Idealism	Reality	Illusion
Form	(Divine) Form as true Reality	Form as Empty Abstraction
Matter	Matter as real	Material World as concealment and illusion
Materialism		

We can gain no absolute "objective" hold on "reality" or "truth," because each of our conceptions of the real and the true are themselves dependent upon other conceptions that our initial conceptions were formulated to exclude. It is only through a dialectic of multiple points of view that we can, as it were, "traverse the territory" that the terms "reality" and "truth" occupy in our discourse. According to Derrida, the demand for a single 'truth' is the demand for an objectivity that would transcend actual discourse, obliterate otherness and deny death.[172] As Derrida puts it, this demand for objectivity stems from a covert desire to "dispense with passage through the world," a world that creates fragmentation and otherness.[173]   By continually contemplating an ideal object, the discourse on truth seeks to negate time, space, materiality, otherness, and death, in favor of an unchanging, immutable significance.

The Breaking of the Vessels: The "Real" as Rupture

There is yet another dialectic involving the "real" that should command our attention; a dialectic that is again suggested by the thought of Jacques Derrida, and which is also implied in the Lurianic Kabbalah, in the symbol of the Breaking of the Vessels. In this dialectic, a "real" which accords with what is articulated, conceptualized and known is contrasted with a "real" that breaks open all discourse and theory, and intrudes upon our awareness in a manner that is completely unanticipated. According to the latter pole of this opposition, the "real" that is a function of conventional thought and discourse, which accords with both "common sense" and our best scientific theories, *provides us with an illusory belief that we have grasped reality, when in fact all we have done is replaced reality with our conventional discourse about it*. On this view, all of our theoretical constructions, idealism, materialism, Judaism, even Kabbalah, are on the near side of a chasm between the *constructed* and the *real*. From this perspective, the real is a pre-linguistic, pre-conceptualized, undigested "monstrous" and "traumatic" *reality* that renders all of our theory and discourse inoperative This "real," for example, is the reality of trauma,

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[172] Staten, p. ?
[173] Grammatology, p.153.

suffering and death, in the face of which all our theories and discourse (whether philosophical, theological or scientific) are wholly inadequate. This is the "real" of the unknown divine energy that, according to Isaac Luria, engenders the Breaking of the Vessels, shattering the *Sefirot*, and with them, all our concepts and values. On this view, the real, rather than being the "known," is precisely what is "unknown," breaking apart what we believe to be our knowledge at any given point of time.

Figure 4: Coincidentia of Knowledge and the Real

Natural, Scientific Attitude	Real	Illusion
Known (Rational)	The 'Real' is that which accords with our best understanding and theory	Our concepts are constructions that provide us with the illusion that we have grasped reality
Unknown (Irrational)	The 'Real' is that which intrudes, traumatizes, and breaks through the ruling discourse	'Illusion' is that which does not accord with consensual discourse
Derrida's Deconstruction		

On Derrida's view concepts are in a sense "illusory," but not because they are empty and non-instantial, but rather because they are circular, self-supporting and relative, creating a *version* of 'reality' that attempts to seal off the (pre-conceptual) real. While the "form/instance" *coincidentia oppositorum* of Figures 2 and 3 is operative in the Kabbalistic dialectic of *Tzimtzum*/emanation, i.e. in God's contraction, concealment and instantiation in a finite world, a second *coincidentia*, one of knowledge vs. the unknown (represented in Figure 4) is operative in the Kabbalistic dialectic of *Shevirah/Tikkun*, a dialectic in which human concepts and structures are continually shattered and restored by divine light. This light, which the Kabbalists termed the *Or Ein-sof* radiates and intrudes from beyond the boundaries of our linguistic system.

Shevirah/ Tikkun is an oscillation between the points of view represented in the dialectic of knowledge and the unknown, just as *Tzimtzum*/Emanation is an oscillation between the points of view represented in the *coincidentia* of form (idea) and instance (matter). The dialectic of the known and the unknown supplements the idealism-materialism dichotomy described above, and thus provides a second axis, through which we can understand "truth" and "reality."[174]

Just as form and instance are related to one another as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, there is a coincidence of opposites between "reals" that respectively attach to knowledge and the unknown. That knowledge and the unknown are reciprocally determinative is evident from a variety of considerations, several of which should be fairly obvious. One of these is the observation that all knowledge, all science, proceeds, as it were, out of mystery. As Hegel argued, the history of human endeavor is one in which the forest of mystery is continuously pushed back in favor of the clearing of knowledge. With each advance, however, there is an acknowledgment of a further "unknown," which itself then becomes the subject of new investigation, and an awareness that what was once known to be fact, was at least in part, error. Natural scientists are all too familiar with the notion that truth itself is a species of "error" which only approximates an ideal. All so-called scientific "truths" of the past and present have been, or will be, revealed to be *errors* of one form or another.

Further, since the very structure of human awareness limits it to some specific "presence" or content, there is always something, some potential knowledge or mental content that exists beyond its reach; such content being notable for its "absence", for the fact that it is unknown. On a more psychological level, while the content of consciousness changes from one moment to the next, the general dialectic between "presence" and "absence", between known and unknown always remains. It is thus part of the concept of consciousness or mind that there is something, not yet specified, that is absent, beyond awareness or unconscious. Hence it is part of the very concept of the known that there is yet something unknown or undiscovered.

However, the reverse is true as well. What is unknown can only be articulated against a background of what (is believed) to be known. The "real" in the postmodern sense only exists as an intrusion from beyond the "symbolic order." It is, by definition, that which has not (yet) been assimilated by our categories and schemas. The ruling discourse, in effect defines the boundaries, which through relief, give rise to *an unassimilated reality,* what Derrida terms "the monstrous"

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[174] There are, indeed, many more such axes, for example, the "objective" vs. the "subjective", the "factual" vs. the "hermeneutic", the "molar" vs. the "molecular" etc. Although it is impossible to go into each of them here, each of these axes can be understood as a *coincidentia oppositorum* between seemingly opposing conceptions of "truth" and "reality."

and what the psychoanalyst Lacan terms the "real" (in contrast to the "symbolic"). Kabbalistically, it is only because we have vessels that can be broken by the divine light, that this light has its *real* impact upon the world.

A Dialectical Ontology

In all of what has been said thus far I am attempting to provide a window into the logic of *coincidentia oppositorum*. The figures illustrate the logic, and provide a means for working out, the *coincindentia* idea. Two opposing metaphysical, axiological or epistemological notions are placed on one axis and two opposing metaphysical, axiological or epistemological notions are placed on the other. The resulting cells contain descriptions of how each of the opposing notions on one axis is instantiated in terms of each of the opposing notions on the other axis, yielding four cells, which exemplify two philosophical or metaphysical points of view (e.g. traditional metaphysics vs. postmodernism) that are each represented by diagonally adjacent cells. The intersection of the diagonal axes graphically expresses the notion that these general points of view exist in *coincidentia oppositorum*, precisely because the polar concepts that generate them are not mutually exclusive, as they initially seem, but are rather fully interdependent ideas. In *Symbols of the Kabbalah* I argued that *Ein-sof*, the infinite absolute, could be understood as the point of dialectical intersection or transformation, where concepts swing over into their apparent contraries or opposites.

In presenting various *coincidentia oppositorum* in diagrammatic form I am attempting to illustrate the Kabbalistic dictum that *Ein-sof* is the "union of all contradictions." In the process I am arguing that the "world," instead of being comprised of "realities," "truths," and "entities" describable via a particular ontology or metaphysics, is actually better understood as being composed of the dialectical inter-dependencies represented in these figures. What I am proposing is a "metaphysics" of *coincidentia oppositorum*, and that this metaphysics leads us to the supreme unity that the Kabbalists, and in particular, the Chabad Chasidim, speak about with the term *Ein-sof*. These diagrams, however, are static representations of an unending dynamic, as each term within them enters into another dialectic and so on, *ad infinitum*. The process can be multiplied indefinitely, revealing the dialectical potential in all of our concepts, and I would propose, the dialectical nature of the broadest possible concept, which the Kabbalists term *Ein-sof*.

Kabbalistic thinking is bilinear. As *Sefer Yetzirah* says regarding the *Sefirot*, a Kabbalistic idea is one whose end is wedged in its beginning and its beginning in its end. This is well illustrated in the Kabbalist's own understanding of *Ein-sof*, which is both the origin of everything and only realized once it is manifest in a world, a world, which from *Ein-sof's* initial perspective is totally illusory and unreal. For the Kabbalists the idea of the supreme reality is defined and completed by its end, an end that from the point of view of the beginning, is an illusion. For the Kabbalah, just as there is a starting point from the supernal heights, there is also a starting point from the worldly, and even infernal, depths. Kabbalistic thinking is perhaps best understood in musical harmonic, or "counterpoint" terms. There is a melody line, for example, that is theistic, that exists in counterpoint with one that is atheistic; one in which God creates man, in counterpoint with one in which man creates God; one in which the past is the cause of all that is present and future, and one in which the future constructs both the present and the past. For the Kabbalah, *a true view of the world must involve listening to both of these melody lines or*

thinking two or more, seemingly incompatible thoughts at the same time. Indeed, it is the simultaneity of these thoughts that brings about the harmony (*Tiferet*) of the Kabbalistic view.

The ideas that we are discussing thus imply that there is no single, objective truth, (outside of the fallible notion of a "single objective truth" that enters into the dialectics we are discussing). These ideas suggest that we are always simultaneously in truth and in error, reality and illusion, etc. and further that error and illusion are not only necessary for truth but that they are each to be valued as well as disvalued. Our concepts are always in flux, and it is only imminently, and for certain limited purposes, that we can, as it were *freeze* things and provide our conceptual matrix with a (relatively) fixed sense. The mistake of traditional metaphysics is to mistake a single "frozen" take on the cosmos for the cosmos itself. In this essay I have attempted to *unfreeze* things, and to introduce a form of thinking that does not rest in any particular, frozen or static point of view. While the initial results of such an enterprise may be confusing and even dizzying, this is the price that one must pay to be freed from more conventional (and limiting) modes of thought. Acertain ungroundedness is a necessary byproduct of any attempt to think the world whole.

I am arguing that in order to understand the world as a whole we must proceed according to the logic of the ideas and figures I have presented in this essay, and comprehend the significance of all things as being dually constituted by presumably opposing, but ultimately completing/complementary points of view. The opposing views appear to (and actually do) compete, but are each ultimately necessary for a full account of "reality;" I place "reality" in quotes, because any term we use here will itself move along similar dual axes, as in the *coincidentia oppositorum* involving reality that I have described above. In providing philosophical grounds for the Kabbalistic doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum*, I have attempted to provide a rational basis for the Kabbalistic/Hasidic view that "everything is revealed in its opposite"[175] and, ultimately, for the Jewish mystical tradition that the *Sefirot*, and *Ein-sof* itself, is the union of all contradictions.[176] In the process, however, I hope I have supplied a rationale for the notion that, in the Kabbalah, there is the possibility of an *intellectually based mystical ascent*, and further, provided the reader with guidance to step upon the first rungs of the *rational mystical* ladder.

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[175] See, for e.g. Rabbi Dov Baer, Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah. (Elior, The Paradoxical Ascent to God, p. 64).
[176] See Azriel, The Emanation of the Ten Seforot, in Joseph Dan, The Early Kabbalah, p. 94.