

The Total State of the Torah: Isaac Breuer and the Foundations of Radical Orthodox Politics

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As to the legitimate: fine word, legitimate!

(King Lear, act 1, scene 2)

INTRODUCTION

THIS ESSAY AIMS TO ILLUMINATE a crucial moment in the development of Orthodox politics: its decision to opt for radical politics. By “radical politics” I mean an attitude consisting of three elements: first, a revolutionary political program led by an organized and disciplined vanguard aiming to reorder the system of politics and culture according to a specific ideology; second, an inner ideological conviction and zeal that drives actors, where politics is conducted not simply to achieve secular ends (e.g., freedom and security) but rather as part of a godly call to remake the public sphere; and third, a specifically antiliberal attitude that traces the malaise of modern society to the failures of liberalism and sees itself obliged to overcome them.¹

Orthodox radical politics is distinctively modern—although it aspires to realize what it itself perceives as traditional values (such as public observance of halakhah), it employs revolutionary and ideologically oriented methods to realize its political program. It should be opposed to other, more conservative forms of Orthodox Jewish politics, both traditional and mod-

1. The two first elements are analyzed by the young Michael Walzer, in a distinctively Weberian manner, as “the emergence of radical politics.” The third element is more relevant to the European constellation between the world wars. See Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965); Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

ern. These conservative forms could regard liberal ideals such as religious liberties and negative freedom or, alternatively, communitarian ideals such as multiculturalism, as essential for securing religious autonomy vis-à-vis the secular sovereign power. Radical Orthodox political projects, by contrast, reject both options. Instead, they identify liberalism and the set of values associated with it (toleration, rights, freedom of conscience, and autonomy) as their principal enemy.

Why did some forms of Orthodox politics reject the path of liberalism, and what are the contours of antiliberal Orthodox politics? This essay's approach is genealogical: it returns to Isaac Breuer, arguing that he was the first thinker to systematize a radical Orthodox political project and to posit liberalism as Orthodoxy's main foe. As a matter of fact—as I show below—following the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, Breuer welcomed the fall of “demonic” liberalism and called, despite his fear of the Nazis, for Jews to copy the latter's political program and establish a Jewish “total state” (*totale Staat*). Breuer not only initiated the Orthodox revolutionary political program but also systematized it philosophically around the idea of “totality.” Totality, for him, represented the aspiration to achieve an alternative horizon of culture, outside and against the fragmented world he identified with liberalism and modernity.

Breuer was one of the prominent ideologues of Frankfurt secessionist Orthodoxy and of leaders of the interwar Orthodox movement, Agudath Israel.² Although he was firmly anti-Zionist, he aspired, unlike most of his conservative fellows in Agudath Israel, to establish a sovereign Jewish theocracy.³ This essay attempts, first, to analyze Breuer's turn to radical politics, and second, to elucidate the philosophical considerations, stemming from his conception of “totality,” that anchor this turn. The argument follows Alan Mittleman's important insight, that *der Totalitätsanspruch der Thora* (the total demand of the Torah) is Breuer's core contribution to Jewish thought.⁴ Concretizing that, I demonstrate that Breuer developed

2. For general introductions to German orthodoxy with a particular focus on the secessionist community, see Matthias Morgenstern, *From Frankfurt to Jerusalem: Isaac Breuer and the History of the Secession Dispute in Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* (Leiden, 2002); Jacob Tzur, *Between Orthodoxy and Zionism: Religious Zionism and Its Opposition (Germany 1896–1914)* (Hebrew; Ramat-Gan, 2001); Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition: A Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*, trans. E. Petuchowski (New York, 1992).

3. I establish this argument in “How Jewish Orthodoxy Became a State: Isaac Breuer and the Invention of the Statist Theocracy,” *Harvard Theological Review* 116.1 (2023): 123–46.

4. Alan Mittleman, introduction to *Between Kant and Kabbalah: An Introduction to Isaac Breuer's Philosophy of Judaism* (Albany, N.Y., 1990), esp. 10–21

the idea of totality in the early 1930s as part of his attempt to overcome the cultural program of modernity, which he identified as wrong in light of its failure to achieve totality. Tracing the origins of Breuer's totality is essential for assessing his entire project.

"Totality" is not an innocent term; Breuer adopted it under the influence of the right-wing "Conservative Revolution" in Germany.⁵ The Conservative Revolution (sometimes called "New Nationalism") emerged within young German reactionary circles. The disappointment of right-wing youths with Weimar democracy led them not to simply adopt a conservative program but to long for a "total" revolution from the right directed against liberalism.⁶ This essay demonstrates how deeply these dreams, typically anti-Jewish in orientation, influenced Breuer and his circle in the early 1930s. Whereas established narratives emphasize the relations between German Jewish thought and liberalism (which enabled the Jewish emancipation),⁷ Breuer consciously posited liberalism as Orthodoxy's main foe, more dangerous than antisemitism. The reading follows David Myers, the first scholar to suggest that Breuer was a Jewish Conservative Revolutionary.⁸ The Jewish Conservative Revolution, this essay holds, represents an attempt to disentangle Judaism from neo-Kantian philosophies of culture.⁹ I situate Breuer's rejection of the liberal philosophies of culture and his decision for totality between Max Weber's and Carl Schmitt's paradigmatic reactions to neo-Kantianism, a movement that greatly shaped Breuer's thought before the Great War.¹⁰

5. For this concept and his utility in analysis the broad mixture of radical and reactionary thought, see Armin Mohler and Karlenz Weissman, *The Conservative Revolution in Germany, 1918–1952: A Handbook*, ed. N. Kouprianova, trans. R. A. Devlin (Whitefish, Mont., 2018). For an alternative, more pluralistic position, see Stefan Breuer, *Anatomie der Konservativen Revolution* (Darmstadt, 1993).

6. For a concise, helpful introduction, see Stefan Breuer, *Die Radikale Rechte in Deutschland 1871–1945* (Ditzingen, 2010).

7. See Jens Hacke, "Jewish Liberalism in the Weimar Republic? Reconsidering a Key Element of Political Culture in the Interwar Era," in *The German-Jewish Experience Revisited*, ed. S. Aschheim and V. Liska (Berlin, 2015), 155–70. On the relations between Jews and the right wing in Germany in the Kaiserreich and Weimar, see Philipp Nielsen, *Between Heimat and Hatred: Jews and the Right in Germany, 1871–1955* (New York, 2019).

8. David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton, N.J., 2003), 132.

9. This term was used by Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors [1955]*, trans. E. Adler (Albany, 1995), 41–43.

10. On Schmitt's philosophical influence on Breuer, see the panoramic introduction of Christoph Schmidt, *Die theopolitische Stunde* (Paderborn, 2009).

Breuer's conception of totality led to the invention of a new form of Orthodox politics. Against prevailing conservative tendencies, Breuer systematized his version thereof as a deliberate attempt to achieve a "total" revolution, thus adding an essential layer to Jewish politics, a layer that has remained partially operative up to the present. Modeling Jewish politics on the right-wing Conservative Revolution in Germany, Breuer invented Orthodox politics as an ideological radicalism, a commitment to countering modernity's malaise, an activist political agency (at the expense of Agudath Israel's more elitist attitude),¹¹ and a reactionary posture that defines liberalism as Orthodoxy's main enemy.

The essay is divided into four parts. The first demonstrates the extent to which Breuer and his circle were influenced by the Conservative Revolution in the early 1930s. The second analyzes this influence in light of the problem of culture that troubled Breuer throughout the 1920s and led him to reject his pre-Weimar neo-Kantianism. The third explores the philosophy of totality presented in Breuer's 1934 magnum opus, *Der neue Kuzari* (The new Kuzari). The last part assesses Breuer's importance for Jewish Orthodox politics in the twentieth century.

THE TOTAL STATE OF THE TORAH

In July 1933, Isaac Breuer published a peculiar article titled "Zeitenwende" (Turning point).¹² In the (now collapsed) Weimar Republic, argued Breuer, the liberty of the "philistine" citizen consisted of the existence of a private sphere free from state intervention. Luckily, though, "this generation has not yet sunk into such a grave, where its heart swells with longing for this lost Philistine happiness."¹³ Against the corrupted liberal model, the Nazi regime, claims Breuer, offers a better model: "the total state" (*der totale Staat*):

The total state does not tolerate the philistine anymore; it completely claims the individual and society to itself. It educates them and forces them into history [. . .] The total state desires the total person; who, then, could really be dissolved in it completely.¹⁴

11. On Agudah's political elitism (rejecting Mizrahi's more "democratic" and based on masses politics), see Daniel Mahla, *Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion: From Prewar Europe to the State of Israel* (Cambridge, 2020), ch. 1.

12. Isaac Breuer, "Zeitenwende," *Nahalat Zewi: Monatschrift für Judentum in Lehre und Tat* [henceforth: *NZ*] 3.10–11 (1933): 334–49.

13. Breuer, "Zeitenwende," 334. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

14. Breuer, "Zeitenwende," 335.

Given that “Jews and Philistines present irreconcilable opposites,” the total state finally enabled the overcoming of liberalism.¹⁵ There was, however, a little problem: instead of embracing Judaism, the Nazi total state excluded Jews. That, however, should not have led Jews to reject the total state as a model. What was needed was to build a proper total state—a Jewish one: “Educated by Rabbi Hirsch, we have learned to affirm and to bring life to the Torah in its totality [. . .] The innermost core of the principle *Torah im derekh erets* means nothing else than: *Torah im derekh Erets Israel!*”¹⁶

“Zeitenwende” introduced the slogan of *Torah im Derekh Erets Israel* for the first time; it achieved its systematization in the book Breuer was writing at that time, *Der neue Kuwari*.¹⁷ The slogan would later inform various Orthodox political activities in Palestine.¹⁸ Literally understood as “Torah with the way of the Land of Israel,” the sentence transforms the original formulation coined by Breuer’s grandfather, the founder of German secessionist Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888). Hirsch omitted “Israel” and called merely for *Torah im Derekh Erets* (literally, “Torah and the way of the world”; ideologically, Torah and accepted morality).¹⁹ Breuer’s decisive addition introduces a double break from Hirsch. First, instead of giving legitimacy to nonreligious spheres of activity as Hirsch did,²⁰ Breuer aims to subsume them under the Torah’s totality. Second, Breuer insists that achieving this subsumption requires a broader political outlook and program. As Breuer writes, the “Torah” he refers to

15. Breuer, “Zeitenwende,” 335.

16. Breuer, “Zeitenwende,” 339.

17. The idea is introduced in the epilogue of Isaac Breuer, *Der neue Kuwari: Ein Weg zum Judentum* (Frankfurt a. M., 1934), 437–48; hereafter *NK*. Breuer used the term in several other publications from this period. See Isaac Breuer, “Klarheit,” *Der Israelit*, August 9, 1934.

18. Two groups referred to Breuer’s call for activism in Eretz Israel (Palestine) as their organizing principle: the working movement of Agudath Israel and the German flank of Agudah youth movement. For the former, see Yosef Fund, *Religious Proletarians Unite! Poalei Agudat Israel—Ideology and Policy* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2018). For the latter, see Jacob Tzur, “Haredi Jewry in Germany during the Time of the Nazi Regime,” in *History of the Holocaust: Germany*, ed. A. Margaliyot and Y. Kokhavi (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1998), 2:839–910.

19. For Hirsch, attempts to reconcile “bourgeois” morality with Judaism, and a general genealogy of the term *derekh erets*, see Julius Carlebach, “The Foundations of German-Jewish Orthodoxy: An Interpretation,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 33.1 (1988): 67–91.

20. As Jacob Katz has already mentioned, Hirsch’s legacy is highly contested. See Katz, “Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: From Right to Left,” in *The “Torah Im Derekh Eretz” Movement*, ed. M. Breuer (Hebrew; Ramat Gan, 1987), 13–31.

“is not the Torah per se, but rather the Torah of the state of God [*Gottesstaat*].”²¹ Only when *Jewish* politics anchors worldly activities, could they be legitimized.

The article was published in the journal *Nach'lat Z'wi*, established at the beginning of the 1930s by Breuer's ideological circle. This circle rejected the main Orthodox newspaper *Der Israelit*, edited by Agudath Israel's leader, Jacob Rosenheim (1870–1965), on the grounds that it lacked the religious zeal appropriate for contemporary challenges.²² The bad blood between Breuer and Rosenheim was also personal, and it was evoked again during the late 1920s when Rosenheim cooperated with those who refused to hand the Frankfurt rabbinate to Breuer's brother, Raphael (1881–1932), in part because of his radicalism.²³ *Nach'lat Z'wi*'s editorial board included prominent figures committed to the strict secessionist stance Breuer recommended for Agudath Israel, including Pinchas Kohn (1867–1941) (who helped establish Agudah's activities in Poland)²⁴ and Salomon Ehrmann (1885–1965) (who would soon lead the Agudath Israel's Palestine office).²⁵ Interestingly, Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (1848–1932), the rabbi of the anti-Zionist Old Yishuv in Palestine, was also listed as a member of the journal's board. Far from indicating his active or even consensual participation in the journal, however, Sonnenfeld's inclusion demonstrates Breuer's desire to appeal to more “mainstream” conservative Orthodox movements.²⁶

Around the time of the Nazi seizure of power, *Nach'lat Z'wi* became an important locus for exploring the possibility of radical Orthodox politics.²⁷ Breuer himself published a number of essays there, declaring war on

21. Isaac Breuer, “Unser Weg,” *NZ* 3.1–2 (1933): 3. On the term *Gottesstaat*, see Ben Ami, “How Jewish Orthodoxy Became a State.”

22. Breuer discusses at length this circle and his ideological enmity with Rosenheim in his autobiography: Isaac Breuer, *Mein Weg* (Jerusalem, 1988), ch. 9. See the editors' stance in *NZ* 1.1 (1930): 2–5.

23. For the affair, see Ernst Simon, “Die Bedeutung der Frankfurter Rabinnerwahl,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, October 16, 1928.

24. Mordechai Breuer, “Orthodox Rabbis from Germany in Poland and Lithuania during the German Occupation 1914–1918” (Hebrew), *Bar Ilan Annual* 24/25 (1989): 117–53.

25. The center was built as part of the conflict with the old Yishuv. See Menachem Friedman, *Hevrah va-dat: Ha-ortodoksyah ba-lo tziyonit be-Eretz-Yisrael, 1918–1956* (Jerusalem, 1978).

26. Isaac Breuer wrote an obituary for Sonnenfeld, anointing him as an enthusiastic supporter of his movement: Breuer, “Oberrabbiner Josef Chajim Sonnenfeld,” *NZ* 2.7–8 (1932): 193–201. Compare Breuer, *NK*, 128.

27. For example, Leo Breslauer had written a series of articles titled “Kurze Geschichte des Gottesstaates” that was later published as *Uvakshu: Ein jüdisch-geschichtlicher Wegweiser* (Frankfurt a. M., 1935).

Agudah's moderate positions and supporting the establishment of a theocracy in Palestine.²⁸ What was new is not Breuer's theocratic positions: after all, he had already conceived the idea of theocracy in 1921²⁹ and criticized Agudah for focusing on "religious matters" instead of politics throughout the 1920s.³⁰ What marked Breuer's radicalization in the early 1930s was his adoption of the language of the Conservative Revolution, and especially his deep enthusiasm for the concept of "totality." The total state, which would eradicate the private, "philistine" sphere, was part of a broader program of "totality" that would create a cultural revolution.

Breuer's adoption of Conservative Revolutionary language during the early 1930s was unequivocal. He envisioned a "movement" (*Bewegung*)³¹ aspiring for "the unification of land, people [*Volk*], and Thora."³² He began to play with the idea of blood (based, perhaps, on Franz Rosenzweig's dubious heritage): "It is correct that God formed the Jewish nation from Abraham's blood [. . .] The concern for the purity [*Reinheit*] of the blood [. . .] has preserved the distance between the Jewish people and the people of the earth [. . .]" The total commitment he demanded was "to make out of every Jewish child a politician in the sense that his entire essence would be anchored in Jewish history."³³ Breuer longed for a "real Volksgemeinschaft"³⁴ that would reject liberal ideals of toleration and parliamentary politics.³⁵ "We need a rabbinic Führer," he declared.³⁶ The most radical statement appeared in the epilogue of Breuer's *NK*, which was published

28. See the series *Die Lage des deutschen Judentums*, published in seven parts between 1930 and 1932, and especially the abovementioned essay Breuer, "Unser Weg."

29. Isaac Breuer, "Die Idee des Agudismus" (1921), in *Werkausgabe*, ed. M. Morgenstern and M. Hildesheimer, vol. 2: *Schriften zum Zionismus und Agudismus* (Munster, 2017), 101–30.

30. Isaac Breuer, "Das jüdische Nationalheim [1925]," in *Werkausgabe*, vol. 2, 199–205.

31. See, for example, the report in Breuer, "Erez Jisroel Kudebung der Berliner Agudas Jisroel und des Noar Agudati," *Der Israelit*, May 31, 1934. The idea of a movement is central for Breuer's thought during that period. See Breuer, "Zurück in die Gechichte," *NZ* 4.9–10 (1934): 229.

32. Isaac Breuer, "Was heißt Agudismus?," *NZ* 4.11–12 (1934): 289.

33. Isaac Breuer, "Die Aufgabe der Gegenwart," *Der Israelit*, July 5, 1934.

34. On the *völkisch* terminology and its influence on Judaism, see George L. Mosse, *Germans and Jews: The Right, the Left, and the Search for a "Third Force" in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York, 1970), ch. 4.

35. Isaac Breuer, "Keneßeth Jißrael," *NZ* 5, no. 1–3 (1934): 15.

36. Isaac Breuer, "Die Lage des deutschen Judentums VII: Die Organisationen," *NZ* 2.11–12 (1932): 351.

as an article immediately after the collapse of the Weimar Republic.³⁷ This epilogue, which should be read as Breuer's theological response to the rise of National Socialism, called liberalism "demonic" and defined the Torah as "the perfect embodiment of the national socialism of the state of God."³⁸ The godly state needs then its proper national socialism.

Breuer's radicalism resonated with the new Orthodox generation. Some young thinkers began to reject the main Orthodox youth movement, Ezra, for being overly liberal owing to its expressed commitment to "neutrality." This rejection of neutrality was central to the Weimar critique of liberalism,³⁹ and Breuer indeed insulted his own rivals as defenders of neutrality.⁴⁰ Neutrality, according to Breuer, implied a "treasonous" toleration of heretics.⁴¹ The more radical activists among the youth established the movement Noar Agudati, a small, zealous group aspiring to promote a "total" revolution through pioneering work in Palestine. The anti-Zionist youth activists followed their religious Zionist fellows, who had left Ezra before the Nazi seizure of power, in contesting the movement's lack of interest in Palestine.⁴² The young anti-Zionist activists, however, sought to revolutionize Palestine while declaring war on Zionism.

The leader of Noar Agudati, a young man named Manfred (Fred) Lustig, published the group's program in December 1933 in the pages of *Nach'lat Z'wi*. He used the notorious title "Der dritte Jischuw."⁴³ As sharp critic Gershom Scholem quickly noticed,⁴⁴ what Lustig had in mind is *das dritte Reich* (indeed, Lustig used the term *Reich der Thora*).⁴⁵ The third

37. This last chapter of *NK* was also published separately in *Nach'lat Z'wi*. See Breuer, "Thora im Derech Erez Jisrael," *NZ* 4.3–4 (1933): 68–79.

38. Breuer, *NK*, 446.

39. For the history of that term, including its peculiar antiliberal life in Weimar, see Michael Schweitzer and Heinhard Steiger, "Neutralität," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 4, *Mi-Pre*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck (Hamburg, 1978), 315–70.

40. The term was used often in Breuer's earlier writings. It informed the discussion in *Judenproblem* (1917) but appeared also in the writings from the period examined here. See Isaac Breuer, "Erez Jisroel-Probleme [1935]," in *Werkawgabe*, vol. 2, 249.

41. Breuer, *NK*, 112.

42. Tzur, "Haredi Jewry in Germany during the Time of the Nazi Regime," 848–51.

43. Manfred Lustig, "Der dritte Jischuw," *NZ* 4.3–4 (1933): 88–92.

44. Gershom Scholem, "The Politics of Mysticism: Isaac Breuer's New Kuzari" (1934), in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, trans. M. A. Mayer (New York, 1971), 325–34.

45. Lustig, "Der dritte Jischuw," 90.

Jewish *Reich*, so Lustig claims, differs not only from the new Yishuv (the modern Jewish settlements in Mandatory Palestine)—which he rejected anyway for being illegitimately secular—but even from the old anti-Zionist Orthodox Yishuv (the traditional Jewish communities living in the Holy Land). According to Lustig, the latter wrongly rejected a more revolutionary political stance and limited Torah to mere “religion.” Lustig uses the language of Conservative Revolution: he demands a *Stoßtrupp* (shock troop) of youth to storm Palestine in a “movement” led by “Führer” rabbis. This effort would be the first step in constructing an economic and political community—“the whole life”—on the basis of the Torah. Noar Agudati should commit itself to the revolutionary building of Palestine under the sovereignty of the Torah.

Lustig’s most radical statement, however, came a month later on the pages of *Der Israelit*. By this time relations between Isaac Breuer and the editor Jacob Rosenheim had begun to thaw. Returning to *Der Israelit* after several years of absence,⁴⁶ Breuer published a joint statement with Rosenheim declaring unity.⁴⁷ Breuer, however, continued to position himself as a radical while identifying Rosenheim as a pragmatist (soon enough, *Der Israelit* would attach an editorial warning next to another radical article of Breuer’s).⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Agudath Israel drew nearer to Breuer’s demand to focus on Palestine. It appointed Breuer the head of Keren Hajischuw, a fund supporting Haredi immigrants to Palestine, who, lacking any organizational help, found themselves relying on Zionist structures.⁴⁹ Breuer preferred to interpret his new position as a sign that Agudah had finally acknowledged the need to establish a theocracy in Palestine.⁵⁰ Needless to say, this was clearly not the case. The tension between Agudah’s generally conservative stance and Breuer’s activist politics was apparent in *Der Israelit* itself: Breuer and his circle were given a separate supplement in the newspaper, which was published several times under the title *Keren Hajischuw Blätter*.

The anonymous editorial article published in the supplement’s first issue,⁵¹ possibly written by Breuer himself (the article mentions all the rel-

46. The first article with which Breuer returned to *Der Israelit* expressed a strong criticism of Agudath Israel, while distinguishing between Agudism and Agudah. See Isaac Breuer, “Zeitenwende,” *Der Israelit*, June 21, 1934.

47. Isaac Breuer and Jacob Rosenheim, “Eine Erklärung,” *Der Israelit*, April 12, 1934.

48. Breuer, “Klarheit.” See the editorial comment on p. 7.

49. Fund, *Religious Proletarians Unite!*, 77–89.

50. See for example Breuer, “Klarheit.” He elaborates in his biography, *Mein Weg*, ch. 11.

51. “Die Palästina-Konferenz,” *Der Israelit*, January 4, 1934.

evant people in Keren Hajischuw apart from Breuer), elaborates on Manfred Lustig's positions. Lustig, so it is reported, claims that "the Torah, as the total law of life, demands to shape the entire life of the people [*Volkseleben*]." That led him to reject Jewish life in exile (a highly provocative position, it should be noted, for an Agudah member) and to adopt "the idea of the third Yishuv, which aspires to build, on the soil of territorially closed individual-settlements, a total life of the people of the Torah." The anonymous author does not fail to mention Lustig's *Stoßtrupp* that would storm Palestine, but the truly astonishing conclusion comes toward the end of the article: "The ideal model for the future life of the people of the Torah on the soil of the land of Israel [*Erez Jisroel*] is the total state of the Torah [*der totale Staat der Thora*]."

There is a connection between Breuer's praise of the "total state" in July 1933 and Lustig's adoption, in Breuer's supplement, of "the total state of the Torah" in January 1934 (Lustig indeed acknowledged Breuer's influence on his ideas).⁵² Breuer himself wrote extensively at that time about the idea of *Reich*, creating, perhaps, a Jewish version of *Reichstheologie*.⁵³ The very term *totale Staat* was coined two years earlier by Carl Schmitt and was widely discussed within Conservative Revolutionary circles.⁵⁴ The idea of a total state ignited radical Jewish minds. Hans Joachim Schoeps,⁵⁵ Orthodox at that time, published in *Der Israelit* an independent account of a Jewish total state;⁵⁶ as a reaction, *Nach'lat Z'wi* published an anonymous review praising some elements of Schoeps's stance, while lamenting that he failed to recognize his debt to Breuer, whom he quotes "almost verbatim," instead relying on Protestant dialectical theology.⁵⁷

Breuer and Lustig thus present a double break in the genealogy of political Orthodoxy. First, in modeling Orthodox politics on a theological-political constellation closely associated with the right wing's Conservative Revolution, they depict Orthodox politics as radical—not as simply

52. See, for example, Manfred Lustig, "Vom Noar Agudati," *Der Israelit*, January 16, 1936; "Aus der Agudas Jisroel Bewegung," *Der Israelit*, June 25, 1936.

53. See Breuer, *NK*, 191–93. On *Reichstheologie*, see Andreas Koenen, *Der Fall Carl Schmitt: Sein Aufstieg zum "Kronjuristen des Dritten Reiches"* (Darmstadt, 1995), 152–72.

54. These arguments will be discussed below. For an helpful contextualization, see Stefan Breuer, *Carl Schmitt im Kontext: Intellektuellenpolitik in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin, 2012), ch. 6.

55. See the recent biography Micha Brumlik, *Preußisch, konservativ, jüdisch: Hans-Joachim Schoeps' Leben und Werk* (Vienna, 2019).

56. Hans Joachim Schoeps, "Deutsches Judentum in dieser Zeit," *Der Israelit*, August 30, 1933.

57. "Bücherschau," *NZ* 5, nos. 4–6 (1935): 141–42.

promoting concrete Orthodox needs (as Agudah did) but rather as an effort to bring about a “total” revolution. The sphere of the political itself became an arena for a cultural revolution. Second, they decided to oppose liberalism not from the left but from the right. What the crisis of culture demanded was not a revolutionary left-wing program (be it communism or anarchism) but rather a fascist longing for totality and authority (whose contours will be analyzed below). Gershom Scholem was the first to notice these novel Haredi tendencies. In his devastating critique of Breuer’s *NK*,⁵⁸ he penned a peculiar footnote:

These “independent” [referring to their separatist status] Orthodox, who can draw from the deepest wells of Halakhah and Kabbalah, who with so much fervor unmask Zionism as an abomination spawned by the worst—because the most internalized—assimilation, employ a style, a terminology, that is rather startling; not only is it replete with the entire Zionist vocabulary, delicately draped in orthodoxy, but lately it also teems with terms like *Front* and *Führer*, nationalist socialism and the third Yishuv—and that in purely inner Jewish contexts. Some, who have a sense of shame and are sensitive to the sound of such expressions—borrowed from another world—out of the mouths of Jews, must sometimes have silently hidden their faces when they read the Frankfurt *Israelit* and other literary products of the Hirsch school.⁵⁹

To clarify this “startling” terminology, it might be useful to focus on totality as a hermeneutical key. Totality illuminates the range of problems occupying Breuer during the last years of the Weimar Republic and the first two years of the Nazi regime (before his immigration to Israel in 1936).⁶⁰ Starting around 1933, Breuer relentlessly called for “total Judaism,” “total Torah and the spirit of the total Torah,” and “total Torah-Judaism”—an understanding he himself acknowledged as “revolutionary.”⁶¹ Totality, on the one hand, is an ideational configuration that Breuer encountered in the Conservative Revolution’s radical critique of modernity and, on the other hand, a deliberate plan to build an Orthodox revolution as an alternative to modernity.

58. Werblowsky considered this as the “harshest” critique Scholem ever wrote. Zwi Werblowsky, “Politika ve-ḥasidut: Ben ratsionalism le-mistika,” in *Isaac Breuer: Iyunim be-mishnato*, ed. R. Horwitz (Ramat-Gan, 1988), 61–66.

59. Scholem, “The Politics of Mysticism,” 363.

60. For several reasons, the discussion here ends in 1935. Breuer began around that time to lead the worker movement of Agudath Israel, and that influenced his relations with both Zionism and Agudah.

61. Isaac Breuer, *Die Tragik des Misrachi* (Frankfurt a. M., 1934), 15–18.

Breuer and his circle insisted that their call for totality was anchored in Samson Raphael Hirsch's philosophy, which allegedly invented "totality."⁶² The motivation behind this claim is presumably the need to legitimize a radical politics that they themselves invented. It is apparent, however, that despite his public allegiance to his grandfather (which he almost overdid), Breuer privately criticized Hirsch, whom he saw as liberal; Breuer rebuked Hirsch for being tolerant of "individualism" and "capitalism," both of which Breuer harshly rejected as anti-Jewish.⁶³ Breuer's attempt to disguise himself under a Hirschian cloak has unfortunately distorted the scholarly assessment of Hirsch's heritage. The historian Mordechai Breuer—the son of Isaac—defined, in his masterly *Modernity within Tradition*, the whole Hirschian Orthodoxy as an attempt to realize the *Totalitätsanspruch der Thora* (the total demand of the Torah),⁶⁴ a statement that has also found echo in more recent accounts.⁶⁵

I argue that the attribution of totality to Hirsch is inaccurate. Following Mittleman and Myers, Breuer should be read as the conceiver of the *Totalitätsanspruch der Thora* ideal, as part of his entanglement with the "crisis of modernity" as it came to light in the last years of the Weimar Republic.⁶⁶ Indeed, there is no evidence that the word *Totalitätsanspruch* existed in German before the 1920s. Breuer's totality belongs to his attempt to create a novel, radical Orthodox politics that could challenge secular modernity. As part of this attempt, Breuer contested Hirsch's legacy: whereas Hirsch presented the Torah as a harmonious horizon enabling the preservation of the modern differentiation, Breuer saw totality as a negation of modern differentiations altogether.⁶⁷ The next two parts of this essay

62. Breuer claimed that, for example, in "Zeitenwende," 206. See also Breuer, "Zurück in die Geschichte," 234. Compare Isaac Breuer, "Was heißt Agudismus?," *NZ* 4.11–12 (1934): 291. Also figures who did not fully share Breuer's views, such as Pinchas Kohn, accepted that Hirsch's project is best described by the language of totality. See Kohn, "Kusari III: der Thedaismus," *NZ* 4.11–12 (1934): 299.

63. One should read between the lines of Isaac Breuer, "Rabbiner Hirsch als Wegweiser in die Jüdische Geschichte," *NZ* 5.4–6 (1935): 69–84.

64. Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, 37.

65. See the otherwise excellent book of Ofer Chen, *Continuity and Turn: Neo-Orthodoxy Facing the Zionist Revolution* (Hebrew; Bnei-Brak, 2015).

66. On the notion of crisis as a paradigm for Weimar, see M. Föllmer, R. Graf, and P. Leo, "Einleitung: Die Kultur der Krise in der Weimarer Republik," in *Die "Krise" der Weimarer Republik: Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters*, ed. M. Föllmer and R. Graf (Frankfurt a. M., 2005), 9–41. See also the helpful introduction of Denis Maier, *Isaac Breuer: Philosophie des Judentums Angesichts der Krise der Moderne* (Berlin, 2015).

67. Efraim Podoksik's reflections on Simmel's turn to totality during World War I have significantly influenced my understanding of Breuer's similar turn.

identify the context in which totality appeared to Breuer first as a problem and then as a solution.

THE COLLAPSE OF CULTURE: BREUER'S
GNOSTICISM DURING THE 1920s

This section analyzes the *problematique* of totality in Breuer's philosophy as a response to the neo-Kantian philosophy of culture. Breuer was educated in both neo-Kantian schools, in Marburg and in Baden.⁶⁸ The argument is that Breuer's thinking underwent a significant change after the Great War, from generally approving of the modern project of culture as perceived by neo-Kantianism to strongly rejecting it. The beginning of this change can be traced back to his book *Messiaspuren* (Messiah's footsteps), written immediately after the war, which addressed what he took to be the crisis of culture.⁶⁹ Breuer did not elaborate on the meaning of this crisis, however, until his monograph *Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur* (The world as creation and nature; henceforth *WSN*), published in 1926.⁷⁰ Totality would appear later, in the early 1930s, as the solution to the crisis presented in *WSN*.

WSN represents an important development in Breuer's corpus. First of all, it was the first book of Jewish philosophy that he wrote; formerly, Breuer wrote either short Jewish-philosophical essays, or Jewish *or* philosophical books. *WSN*, as a Jewish *and* philosophical book, denoted a revolution in the place assigned to Judaism in Breuer's philosophical system.⁷¹ The notion of system was important in neo-Kantianism, which divided reason into distinct modes (such as pure reason and practical reason). It is generally known that religion has never found a settled place in the neo-Kantian system. In his earlier, pre-World War I works, Breuer

See Podoksik, *Georg Simmel and German Culture: Unity, Variety and Modern Discontents* (Cambridge, 2021).

68. For a general assessment of the two schools, see Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914* (Detroit, 1978), 150–54. See the differences between Windelband (Baden) and Cohen (Marburg) in Frederick Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796–1880* (New York, 2017), chs. 12–13. See Breuer, *Mein Weg*, ch. 5.

69. See Isaac Breuer, "Messiaspuren" (1918), in *Werkausgabe*, ed. M. Morgenstern and M. Hildesheimer, vol. 1, *Frühe Religionsphilosophische Schriften* (Münster, 2017), chap. 10.

70. Isaac Breuer, "Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur" (1926), in *Werkausgabe*, vol. 1, 459–559.

71. The question of how to organize the triangular Kantian corpus was central to neo-Kantianism. For a helpful introduction, see Efraim Podoksik, "Neo-Kantianism and Georg Simmel's Interpretation of Kant," *Modern Intellectual History* 13.3 (2016): 597–622.

claimed that Judaism contributed to the sphere of practical reason.⁷² Breuer thus accepted more or less Marburg religious philosophy, which, following Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason*, understood religion as completing morality and not, as the Baden school did, as constituting its own value sphere.⁷³ *WSN*, however, changes this picture substantially, assigning to Judaism a surprising function, which is entirely anti-neo-Kantian. Religion begins to contribute to epistemology: Judaism intervenes in the realm of pure reason.

The focus here will be on the question of culture. Breuer's writings before World War I supported the neo-Kantian philosophy of culture. His dissertation provides a systematic defense of the notion that culture is merely concretized values that could be found within the realm of society.⁷⁴ Breuer adopted the typical stance of those who opposed Max Weber's position in the *Werturteilsstreit* (value-judgment controversy).⁷⁵ Weber assumed that the study of culture could not supply humans with valid values but could only identify empirical, accepted values; accordingly, social science should remain *wertfrei* (roughly translated as "nonjudgmental").⁷⁶ Weber's position sounds trivial now, but on its formulation, it revolutionized the perception of culture and the method of social research. Breuer's dissertation contested the value-free understanding of society and defended an evaluative social science, a "science of truth" in the form of a science of morality.⁷⁷ According to early Breuer, the Kantian categorical imperative provides an ultimate moral basis not only for individual judgment but for social action as well, to the extent that it legitimizes social coercion.⁷⁸

Breuer's positive assessment of culture reflected his stance in his early Jewish writings, where statements such as "the common ground of

72. Breuer formulated this, for example, in "Frauenrecht, Sklavenrecht und Fremdenrecht [1910]," in *Werkausgabe*, vol. 1, 131–84.

73. See Hans Ludwig Ollig, *Der Neukantianismus* (Stuttgart, 1979), 161–70.

74. Isaac Breuer, "Der Rechtsbegriff auf Grundlage der Stammerschen Sozialphilosophie," *Kant-Studien: Philosophische Zeitschrift der Kant-Gesellschaft* 27 (1912): 29–30, 43, 61, 81. For the philosophy of value, see Herbert Schnadelbach, *Philosophy in Germany, 1851–1953*, trans. E. Matthews (Cambridge, 1984), 161–91; Hans Joas, *The Genesis of Values*, trans. G. Moore (Chicago, 2000), chs. 5–6.

75. For a general, succinct introduction, see Albert Gert, "Der Werturteilsstreit," in *Soziologische Kontroversen: Beiträge zu einer anderen Geschichte der Wissenschaft vom Sozialen*, ed. G. Kneer and S. Moebius (Berlin, 2010), 14–45.

76. Max Weber, "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. E. A. Shils and H. A. Finch (Glencoe, Ill., 1949), 1–49.

77. Breuer, "Der Rechtsbegriff," 30.

78. Breuer, "Der Rechtsbegriff," 62.

historical becoming is that of culture” were typical.⁷⁹ Accordingly, Judaism seems to constructively contribute to, not to radically challenge, the project of culture as understood by neo-Kantianism. A Jewish order is simply a proper Kantian order, where revelation merely substantiates Kant’s contentless categorical imperative.⁸⁰ Breuer’s optimism regarding culture, however, dissipated after World War I, when cultural pessimism took hold of Weimar. Breuer began to depict Judaism not as a refinement of Kantian morality but as a radical alternative to it. The first formulation of crisis appeared in Breuer’s book *Messiasspuren* (1918): “The epoch of culture [*Kulturepoche*], of the Enlightenment has nowadays been long overcome [. . .] It has nothing more to say to the world.”⁸¹ Humanity as a whole—not only the Jews—is henceforth presented as being in exile.⁸² For Breuer, because Judaism signifies the possibility of overcoming the crisis, it lost its assigned place as “religion” in the neo-Kantian system. If it had previously completed morality and the project of culture, now it became an alternative to both.

Breuer’s postwar pessimistic turn notwithstanding, *Messiasspuren* did not offer a revision of his neo-Kantian commitment. Such a revision emerged only in the *WSN*. From the very name of the book, *The World as Creation and Nature*, one hears echoes of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*, with its pessimistic emphasis on the gap between the mere appearance of the phenomenal world and the deeper, hidden reality of the unapproachable thing in itself.⁸³ The dualism between the two opposite worlds is irreconcilable to such an extent that phenomenal reality loses all its significance. Reality becomes a problem from which humans should urgently free themselves.⁸⁴ The dualism underlying Breuer’s analysis affects both pure and practical reason. The knowledge attained by reason is corrupted, and the categorical imperative is contaminated with “beastly” human desire.⁸⁵ This account could not be further removed from Breuer’s earlier presentation of the categorical imperative as “the truth.”

79. Isaac Breuer, “Judenproblem,” in *Werkausgabe*, vol. 1, 290.

80. See for example Isaac Breuer, “Was läßt Hermann Cohen vom Judentum übrig?,” in *Werkausgabe*, vol. 1, 61.

81. Breuer, “Messiasspuren,” 408.

82. Breuer, “Messiasspuren,” 356.

83. Schopenhauer enjoyed revival in Weimar. See Frederick Beiser, “Weimar Philosophy and the Fate of Neo-Kantianism,” in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. P. E. Gordon and J. P. McCormick (New Haven, Conn., 2013), 115–32.

84. See the narrative of “way-out” in Norbert Bolz, *Auszug aus der entzauberten Welt: Philosophischer Extremismus zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Munich, 1989).

85. Breuer, “Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur,” 483–84.

This pessimistic turn led Breuer to reject his earlier commitment to an evaluative social science and forced him to agree with Weber.⁸⁶ The deep division between the world of *sollen* (ought) and the World of *Sein* (being) prevents humans from finding values in reality.⁸⁷ If in his pre-Weimar dissertation Breuer contested the Weberian division of fact and value and aspired instead to find in the realm of society the axiological directives of the practical reason, now he acknowledges that society is simply devoid of any value whatsoever. Unlike Weber, however, Breuer did not see any positive elements in nonevaluative social science. Science simply fails to guide humans regarding their goals and purposes, and humans are left to pursue their own arbitrary demonic goals.⁸⁸ Breuer therefore began to perceive the crisis of culture precisely in light of Weber's pessimism regarding the human ability to derive values from being or reality. It should be noted that Weber himself, with his insistence on a strong separation between fact and value, cleared the way for pessimistic assessments of culture and its judgment in a tragic light.⁸⁹

WSN represents the collapse of Breuer's early neo-Kantian worldview regarding culture. Judaism does not corroborate the harmonious project of culture, providing it with revealed moral content. Rather, the Kantian worldview is presented as the very embodiment of crisis, where reality is divided into antagonistic entities standing against each other: facts and values, nature and creation, appearance and the thing in itself, reason and will. Judaism should aspire to offer an alternative to neo-Kantianism and, thus, must be a system of both knowledge and morality. Breuer does not allocate to Judaism a position within the Kantian system anymore but depicts it as an alternative to that system itself. Judaism functions as an alternative episteme, against which the entire philosophical tradition can be negatively judged and pessimistically dismissed.

As one of his contemporary readers noted, Breuer's radicalism in *WSN* brings him close to Gnosticism.⁹⁰ On my reading, two Gnostic elements are apparent in *WSN*.⁹¹ First, Breuer develops a dualistic epistemology

86. Breuer, "Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur," 528.

87. Breuer, "Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur," 516–24.

88. Breuer, "Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur," 511–12.

89. Especially in Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. D. Owen and T. B. Strong, trans. R. Livingstone (Indianapolis, Ind., 2004), 20–31.

90. See Max Dienmann's remark, "Should Gnosis be thought of here?" Dienemann, "Isaac Breuer: Elischa," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 73 (1929): 501–2.

91. On Gnosticism in Weimar, see Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the World Wars* (Princeton, N.J., 2010), especially

that sharpens the radical break between the phenomenal world and the true, hidden world to such an extent that the present world becomes evil. God functions in this world as “the God of destruction” (*Vernichtungsgott*).⁹² This dualistic epistemology becomes manifest in the antagonistic figures of “creation” and “nature.” The world of creation enjoys the direct presence of God, whereas the world of nature is the world of sin and fallenness, a world that Breuer calls *Nichtgott* (Notgod).⁹³ The present world of nature represents the negation of freedom, where causality and natural laws prevail.

Second, Breuer develops a radical theology of godly absence from the present world.⁹⁴ This theology may sound familiar in the context of post-Holocaust theology, but, to the best of my knowledge, no other Orthodox theologian offered such a radical position before the Holocaust. It echoes the Protestant elaboration on the idea of *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God, popularized in Weimar thanks to dialectical theology.⁹⁵ For Breuer, godly absence emerges in the transition from the world of creation to the world of nature and, most paradigmatically, on the seventh day of creation (when God had his “rest”).⁹⁶ This transition signifies an ontological change: God ceased to be the creating Creator (*schöpfender Schöpfer*) and instead left nature to its own devices. The world became autonomous, and God transformed into the sleeping Creator (*ruhender Schöpfer*) who is noticeably absent. The absence of God is both ontological and moral. Ontologically, the world *is* Notgod and therefore it *is* regulated by the autonomous laws of nature. Morally, the absence of God marks the beginning of human history, which is nothing other than a series of catastrophes piled onto each other. Heretics, driven by their unrestrained egoism, render the world a place of misery and suffering.⁹⁷

Breuer bases his argument not on rabbinic sources but rather on a partial reading of the Bible. Although, as Mittleman has asserted, kabbalistic

ch. 3. Compare Yaniv Feller, “From Aher to Marcion: Martin Buber’s Understanding of Gnosis,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 20.4 (2013): 374–97.

92. See Breuer, “Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur,” 483–84.

93. Breuer, “Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur,” 513.

94. Breuer, “Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur,” 594–505.

95. For some theological implications, see Michael J. Murray, “Deus Absconditus,” in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. D. Howard-Snyder and P. Moser (Cambridge, 2001), 62–82.

96. Somewhat unintuitively, Shabbat for Breuer marks not God’s revelation but the opposite, God’s concealment.

97. Breuer’s argument hints again at Karl Barth. For the latter’s pessimist reading of history, see Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. E. C. Hoskyns (Oxford, 1968), 139–42.

sources clearly influenced his argument,⁹⁸ Breuer's insistence on godly absence is both antikabbalistic and Gnostic. This insistence assigns to the world the independent status of Notgod (or, better, the status of Sitra Aḥra, an alternative, vicious God). Breuer's Gnosticism should be read as part of Weimar radical theologies that rejected the optimistic, liberal theology of the Kaiserreich and their aspiration to deduce God's presence from experience.⁹⁹ It was also part of Weimar existentialism, in which, as Hans Jonas later describes, "the disruption between man and total reality" was paradigmatic.¹⁰⁰ It should be emphasized that Protestant dialectical theology was simultaneously defending the idea of the world as a corrupted Notgod.¹⁰¹

Breuer, however, goes a step further. Although God is emphatically absent from the world, and despite God's factual inability to govern actual historical events because of his "rest," God has left operative in the world of nature some remnants of the free world of creation. Breuer calls these remnants, in an anti-Kantian manner, the "thing in itself."¹⁰² The most paradigmatic remnant is God's "word"—namely, the Torah.¹⁰³ It is striking that Breuer puts so much emphasis on God's "word"; this terminology corresponds directly to Protestant dialectical theology's most important feature, the "theology of the word of God."¹⁰⁴ Breuer follows the midrashic reading of God's word as continuous and never ceasing.¹⁰⁵ In *WSN*, in any case, Breuer preserves a dualistic structure, emphasizing that the Torah is not itself the hidden essence behind the phenomenal world but rather a possible basis for building an alternative cultural project, a distinctively human effort, which enables the re-presentation of God on earth despite his absence.

The Torah, then, is a portable entity, present both in the world of nature and the world of creation. It enables one to build a cultural world despite

98. Mittleman, *Between Kant and Kabbalah*, 95–96.

99. See Samuel Moyn, "From Experience to Law: Leo Strauss and the Weimar Crisis of the Philosophy of Religion," *History of European Ideas* 33.2 (2007): 174–94; Mark D. Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany* (Oxford, 2001), ch. 6.

100. See Hans Jonas, "Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism," *Social Research* 19.4 (1952): 452.

101. See, for example, Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 43. On Barth's illiberalism, see Wilhelm Friedrich Graf, *Der Heilige Zeitgeist: Studien zur Ideengeschichte der protestantischen Theologie in der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen, 2011), 425–45.

102. Breuer, "Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur," 503.

103. Breuer, "Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur," 496.

104. See the helpful introduction of Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Theologie des Wortes Gottes: Positionen, Probleme, Perspektiven* (Göttingen, 2001).

105. Breuer, "Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur," 485.

the godly absence; however, it is a counterculture that stands opposed to secular culture. The Torah does not enrich the Kantian project (as Breuer's earlier neo-Kantianism assumed) but entirely negates it. It is telling that Breuer calls God the "sleeping creator" in *WSN*. Richard Tuck, who recently discussed the early modern idea of "the sleeping sovereign" at length, suggests that it enables a distinction between sovereignty and government; the sovereign is the author of order but not the one who actually governs. The sovereign "goes to sleep" after it has authorized the actual ruler—the government. Thomas Hobbes (*De cive* 13) uses God as an example: after initiating the original movement, God fell asleep and allowed the laws of nature to perform the actual work of government on his behalf.¹⁰⁶ Like Tuck's Hobbes, it seems that Breuer's Jewish politics in *WSN* performs the ruling in light of the sovereign/creator's decision to step aside.

Breuer finds a solution to the dualistic Weberian distinction between fact and value in the shape of an alternative project of *Jewish* politics, but he does not manage to overcome the antagonistic modes of existence. Breuer does not offer in *WSN* a synthesis between the worlds of creation and nature. Instead, he hopes to discover some godly guidance within the forsaken world, despite the latter's ongoing status as forsaken. For the sake of our inquiry, it is notable that Breuer identifies the malaise of culture precisely in the constellation of fragmentation and differentiation, where facts and values are separate and the "liberal" antagonism between public and private spheres, governed by different logics, constitutes the "philistine" state.¹⁰⁷ Whereas before World War I Breuer saw politics as an application of Kantian practical reason, he becomes now distinctively Weberian: the modern state rigorously separates politics and morality.¹⁰⁸ Yet, unlike Weber (who, as mentioned earlier, also recognizes the "tragedy" of this separation), Breuer echoes Carl Schmitt in assessing this situation negatively and in deeming the liberal constellation of "neutrality" as the heart of the malaise of modernity.¹⁰⁹

To sum up, during the 1920s Breuer developed a Gnostic theology according to which the project of culture is identified with the corrupted world of the sleeping sovereign, which stands diametrically opposed to the

106. See Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge, 2016), 82–88.

107. Breuer, "Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur," 480–85, 535–38.

108. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber: Collected Essays* (Chicago, 1989), 20. See also the famous analysis of Weber's position in Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 2.2 (1973): 160–80.

109. See Carl Schmitt, "The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations" (1929), *Telos* 96 (1993): 130–42.

godly world of creation. Judaism does not corroborate the neo-Kantian project of culture. Instead, it constitutes an alternative form of culture and politics capable of overcoming the liberal state through the unification of politics and morality. Jewish politics is emphatically antiliberal: it aims precisely at overcoming the opposition between the public and private spheres. At the same time, it remains Gnostic in its form as an emphatic counterculture. In the next part, I will explore how the concept of “totality” transformed Breuer’s efforts to find a solution to the malaise of culture and enabled him to overcome Gnosticism.

OVERCOMING GNOSTICISM: BREUER’S TOTALITY

WSN, published in 1926, simultaneously represented an accentuation of and departure from Kantian philosophy.¹¹⁰ In this work, the gap between the phenomenal world and the world in itself—the world of being and the world of ought—widened so much that culture became irredeemable. Breuer found himself obliged to claim that Judaism embraces one side of this dualism. However, even with *Jewish* politics, the world’s basic configuration remained Gnostic; Judaism offered only a decisionist stance in favor of moral politics in light of the latter’s emphatic absence.¹¹¹ Compared to the position he adopted in *WSN*, Breuer’s stance in *Der neue Kvari* signified a philosophical revolution. In *NK*, Breuer offers a novel metaphysics aimed at bridging the gap between the phenomenal world and the world in itself. Written during the heyday of the Weimar crisis (the first part was published in 1931, while the epilogue was written as an immediate theological response to the Nazi seizure of power), *NK* offers an alternative not only to neo-Kantianism but also to Weber, through a novel metaphysics of totality. Totality would overcome dualism, separation, fragmentation, and godly absence. It is this book that clarifies the radical positioning of Orthodox politics.

NK is a complex book, in part because Breuer attempts to develop what seems to be an original philosophical system aimed at replacing Kant’s differentiation of reason into distinct modes.¹¹² The book presents Kant’s

110. On Breuer’s radicalization of Kantian philosophy, see Mittleman, *Between Kant and Kabbalah*, ch. 3.

111. On decisionism in Weimar, see Christian Graf von Krockow, *Die Entscheidung: Eine Untersuchung über Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger* (Frankfurt a. M., 1990).

112. For a general appreciation of Breuer’s relation to Kant, see George Y. Kohler, “Is There a God an Sich? Isaac Breuer on Kant’s Noumena,” *AJS Review* 36.1 (2012): 121–39. Kohler similarly describes Breuer’s attempts to reach the thing in itself.

system as the zenith of human tragedy.¹¹³ Against Kant, Breuer attempts to find the world in itself within the horizon of experience (using will instead of reason). Breuer's novel metaphysic, especially as it appears in part 3 of *NK*, cannot be elaborated here; this essay's presentation limits itself to discussing the implications of this metaphysic for radical Orthodox politics. In general, *NK* replaces the "Gnostic" understanding of culture (which led Breuer to adopt the Weberian separation between facts and values) with a new metaphysics of totality, which insists on the possibility of overcoming dualism. This move enables Breuer to present Jewish politics as the negation of the fragmented world of culture and the replacement of plurality with totality.

NK should be read against the backdrop of the broader dissatisfaction with rational philosophy in Weimar.¹¹⁴ The infatuation with totality had already begun in the 1920s, especially in Marxist circles.¹¹⁵ As Martin Jay has shown, Marxist thinkers like György Lukács and Ernst Bloch formulated "totality" as a way of overcoming modernity's inability to achieve a holistic order.¹¹⁶ However, by the early 1930s, enthusiasm for totality had reached the Conservative Revolutionary circles. Two events helped popularize totality in these circles: first, the republication, in 1930, of Ernst Jünger's essay *Die totale Mobilmachung*; second, Carl Schmitt's introduction of the term *totale Staat*.¹¹⁷ Breuer's turn to "totality" exemplifies the profound influence that the language of Conservative Revolution exercised over his thought.

Two elements are characteristic of totality in Conservative Revolutionary thought. First is the longing for a singular experience that would bring the separate spheres of activity under an all-encompassing, absolute horizon. Jünger describes it as "an inner lawfulness, to which human laws must correspond in order to be effective."¹¹⁸ This longing for an actual experience of a deeper sense found resonance in Weimar in different strands of

113. Breuer, *NK*, 356–57.

114. For a general introduction, see the first chapter of Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, Mass, 2012).

115. Martin Jänicke, *Totalitäre Herrschaft: Anatomie eines politischen Begriffes* (Berlin, 1971), offers a general genealogy of the concept. See 30–46.

116. Interestingly, Martin Jay emphasizes the contribution of the "bourgeois" philosophy of neo-Kantianism to the formulation of totality. See Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986), 76.

117. For a useful genealogy, see Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1978), ch. 8.

118. Ernst Jünger, "The Total Mobilization," in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. R. Wolin (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 134.

existentialist thought. Franz Rosenzweig, for example, insists on the “absolute empiricism” of his philosophy, according to which concepts such as God and metahistory become available to human experience.¹¹⁹ The effort to find an experiential basis capable of uniting different spheres also had its roots in the *Lebensphilosophie*, which begun to influence Breuer in *NK*.¹²⁰ Whereas in *WSN* Breuer had rejected concepts associated with life and irrationalism,¹²¹ in *NK* Breuer praises them. Consider Breuer’s remarks on *Erlebnis* (a singular experience), which present “life” as an overcoming of reality’s fragmentation:

Experience? Certainly an experience. Every miracle is an experience. The historical miracle of the Jewish nation in its entire metahistorical prophecy is an experience as well. Yet this experience happens not from the inside out, but from the outside in [. . .]. “Experience” means nothing else than accepting the infinitely high demand of a process [arriving] from outside, without depriving this experience of its “life”; it means destroying the wall which otherwise separates the human from the outside world; it means not a purely subjective-individual apprehension but, on the contrary, the highest objectivity, wherein the human at first loses itself completely in the object of experience, in order to seize this object in its living uniqueness and keep it in himself as a living thing.¹²²

The second element of totality is a revolutionary cultural program that aims at overcoming the “neutrality” identified with liberalism’s rejection of modern culture as contradictory. If the idea of culture as the realization of values received its paradigmatic formulation in neo-Kantianism, Weber makes clear that the conflict between values or worldviews (what Weber calls “the polytheism of values”) is permanent and unsolvable and forced us into value neutrality.¹²³ Against the “polytheistic” culture of modernity,

119. Franz Rosenzweig, “‘The New Thinking’: A Few Supplementary Remarks to the Star [of Redemption],” in *The New Thinking*, ed. and trans. A. Udoff and B. E. Galli (New York, 1999), 101.

120. On philosophy of life, see Schnadelbach, *Philosophy in Germany, 1851–1955*, 139–60.

121. Breuer, “Die Welt als Schöpfung und Natur,” 542.

122. Breuer, *NK*, 84–86. Breuer rejected earlier in *NK* subjective forms of experience, which he identified with Schleiermacher, the reform movement, and existential strands of religion. Yet unlike these strands, totality for him aims at “objective” experiences.

123. Wolfgang Schluchter, “Polytheismus der Werte: Überlegungen im Anschluß an Max Weber,” in *Grundlinien der Vernunftkritik* (Berlin, 1997), 307–39.

in which “warring Gods” collided with each other,¹²⁴ totality promised to overcome neutrality by presenting an all-encompassing feeling of meaningfulness, where culture is organized around a self-evident value. In that regard, Carl Schmitt’s coinage of the term “total state” — as opposed to the liberal state — presents the aspiration to dispense with liberalism’s neutrality.¹²⁵

Indeed, although Carl Schmitt’s turn to the “total state” during the early 1930s has been well researched, analysis of how this turn transforms his earlier Weimar cultural philosophy has only recently begun.¹²⁶ In his earlier writings, Schmitt agrees with the Weberian “polytheistic” philosophy of culture, according to which each different sphere of activity (economy, morality, science, religion, etc.) attains an independent status.¹²⁷ Each demands an activity that either ignores or negates the activity peculiar to the other spheres. Only the sovereign transcends these cultural divisions by positing its own value as valid. In his later writings, however, Schmitt develops “totality” to overcome Weberian polytheism.¹²⁸ Whereas the earlier Schmitt had answered Weber with sovereign decisionism, by 1933 he deemed this option weak and overly subjective.¹²⁹ Schmitt’s turn to totality marks a new, anti-Weberian program of culture capable of ending the fragmentation and separation of values.

NK similarly accentuates the modern culture as a plurality of conflicting values. Criticizing the “fragmentary nature of humanity,” Breuer describes modern reality as an “innate and inevitable tragedy.”¹³⁰ He traces this tragedy to liberalism, which in his reading divides “truth” into “different jurisdictions”: “Understanding and reason are responsible for the sensual world; and the soul is responsible for the religious world.” Preparing

124. Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” 29.

125. In the last phase of Weimar, Schmitt still distinguished between “quantitative,” wrong totality and “qualitative,” positive totality. See Carl Schmitt’s 1931 “Die Wendung zum Totalen Staat,” in *Positionen und Begriffe: im Kampf mit Weimar—Genf—Versailles 1925–1959*, 4th ed. (Berlin, 2013), 166–78.

126. Jean-Francois Kervecjan, *Was Tun mit Carl Schmitt?*, trans. B. Schwibs (Tübingen, 2019), 113–20.

127. Most famously in the analysis of the different value spheres in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago, 2007), 27.

128. See the excellent analysis of Philipp Von Wussow, *Leo Strauss and the Theopolitics of Culture* (Albany, N.Y., 2020), ch. 5, which explains how Strauss’s critique exposed Schmitt’s debt to the neo-Kantian philosophy of culture.

129. See Carl Schmitt’s post-Weimar critique of decisionism as “modern” in Schmitt, *On the Three Types of Juristic Thought*, trans. J. W. Bendersky (Westport, Conn., 2004), 59–61.

130. Breuer, *NK*, 323.

the ground for totality, Breuer vehemently rejects this view, because, according to him, there can be no “double truths.”¹³¹ He offers as an alternative a united a priori that could reestablish clear, “absolute” moral guidance for culture. This value would unite all value spheres and suspend the fragmentary order of modernity under a pure existence without separation and fragmentation.¹³² Breuer imagines the religious state as the only possible vehicle for achieving this unity, where “the [otherwise] mutilated Torah [. . .] will be fully effective.”¹³³

According to Breuer, the Torah is precisely the revelation of an ontological modality where all separations cease.¹³⁴ The kabbalistic term *keneset Yisra’el* (the assembly of Israel) signifies this modality, available to those who perceive the world through the Torah’s eyes:

Just as in the phenomenal world, the laws of our thought apply—because only through these laws do we become aware of the phenomenal world as a comprehensible system—so virtually *keneset Yisra’el* is the a priori of the Jewish people, the epistemological presupposition for the comprehensibility of its unique history [. . .] *keneset Yisra’el* does not belong to the world of appearance, *keneset Yisra’el* is not itself an historical empiricism, but underlies empiricism and is the law of this empiricism.¹³⁵

The absolute Jewish a priori, thus, serves as a comprehensive principle underlying both the perception of reality and its evaluation, both facts and values. It accordingly enables Breuer to restore the earlier, anti-Weberian position he had held during the *Werturteilstreit*—namely, to anchor reality (facts) in values, thus going beyond the dualism of empirical and normative knowledge undergirding his 1920s philosophy; yet *NK* does so in a distinctively anti-Kantian manner. *keneset Yisra’el* restores an immediate experience of godly ontology.¹³⁶ *NK* is thus much more radical than *WSN*. If *WSN* operates within the Kantian restraints of reason (accentuating the human inability to reach true and absolute knowledge), *NK* shows how Judaism can overcome these restraints. If *WSN* adopts a pessimistic, Weberian analysis of culture as consisting of independent spheres of conflicting values, *NK* presents a unified system held together by a single a priori—*keneset Yisra’el*. If *WSN* adopts Schmitt’s decisionist stance in favor of moral

131. Breuer, *NK*, 31.

132. Breuer, *NK*, 86.

133. Breuer, *NK*, 110–11.

134. Breuer, *NK*, 288.

135. Breuer, *NK*, 343–44.

136. See the radical statement in Breuer, *NK*, 217–18.

politics (the enforcement of values in response to their absence from the world), *NK* aspires to overcome Weber and Kant and to reach an alternative ontological horizon.

In short, *NK* portrays an existence that defies separation, fragmentation, differentiation, and dualism. On an epistemological level, Breuer insists on the possibility of reaching here and now true knowledge beyond the boundaries of reason, by adopting an alternative ontology that shows the fallacy of perceiving the world through the dualistic and fragmented Kantian system. For Breuer, true knowledge must resist the Weberian distinction between facts and values. The Torah presents the lost totality, whereby all spheres of human activity, perception and action alike, are united under an absolute a priori. Against the “conflicted nature [*Zwiespältigkeit*] of the modern man,”¹³⁷ Breuer imagines an existence where the Torah is “law, morality, philosophy, art, science; in short: everything.”¹³⁸

From this formulation of totality, the political radicalism of *NK* unfolds. I will focus briefly on three elements that distinguish Breuer’s radical politics from earlier forms of Orthodox politics (most paradigmatically, the politics of Agudah): (1) Breuer’s negation of exile, (2) his invention of “Jewish saints,” and (3) his suspension of human/Kantian morality.

First, Breuer rejects Jewish life in exile. He does not simply call Orthodoxy to focus on Palestine (as some other leaders of Agudah did) but saw exile as “mutilated” in principle. While in *WSN* his criticism of exile is implied but not expressed, in *NK* Breuer declares war on the exilic community: “The whole severity of the misery of exile, the terrible extent of exilic mutilation, forced *keneset Yisra’el* to limit itself [. . .] to areas that modern man is inclined to relegate to the sphere of so-called religion, instead of dedicating itself to the historical unfolding of national life.”¹³⁹ The negation of exile commits Breuer to an activist politics that is not limited to self-preservation but aims at expansion and occupation: “Only a complete cleaving in the ‘kingdom of God’ permitted the creation of a bond with the world, a bond which did not lead even to a slight deviation from the Torah but, on the contrary, opened up new domains for the Torah.”¹⁴⁰ Totality,

137. Breuer, *NK*, 59

138. Breuer, *NK*, 61.

139. Breuer, *NK*, 169. The negation of exile was a prevalent topic in Breuer’s writings from this period, especially in the following: Isaac Breuer, “Die Lage des deutschen Judentums II: Weizmann,” *NZ* 1.2 (1930): 56; Isaac Breuer, “Die Lage des deutschen Judentums VI: Diptychon,” *NZ* 2.1–2 (1931): 349; Breuer, “Zurück in die Geschichte”; Isaac Breuer, “Zum deutschen Judenproblem,” *NZ* 3. 8–9 (1933): 245–49; Breuer, “Was heißt Agudismus?”; Breuer, *Die Tragik des Miwrachi*, 5–7.

140. Breuer, *NK*, 246.

then, obliges Judaism to conquer politics, to subsume more and more spheres under the Torah's (ultimate) value.

Second, Breuer aspires to mold Jews into zealous political actors who incorporate in their own personality the Jewish political fight. After characterizing those who resist his philosophy as "deadly enemies of the Torah state," Breuer expresses his longing for actors who are "death-defying, thirsty for action, idea-driven, idea-enthusiastic fighters that are certain of their ultimate victory."¹⁴¹ This "total" political agent mirrors Michael Walzer's conception of the "revolutionary saints" theologically committed to a political revolution.¹⁴² Walzer traces the invention of these "saints" to Calvinist theology, which demanded the exercise of religious virtue in the political arena. Similarly, Breuer recognized that his actors were not conservative: he calls them "the true and real revolutionaries of mankind."¹⁴³ Fredi Lustig and his zealous fellows in Noar Agudati clearly aspired to practice in the political arena the art of totality that Breuer aimed to create.¹⁴⁴

The third element concerns the moral commitment of these Jewish saints. Breuer's totality regards human morality with utter suspicion; the will unguided by the Torah is wicked. In *NK*'s language, even the good human will is a passive affection that is "bestly" by nature. Only those matters that the Torah deems worthy of desire should be willed and pursued. Breuer portrays two attitudes toward politics corresponding to these two modalities of will: the negative, human will that creates a politics of "love" (identified with Christianity); and the positive, Torah will that generates a politics of "law" (*Recht*). Whereas love is a "desire which lacks form," the Jewish saints are guided by law.¹⁴⁵ That should be read as a profound suspicion of human prudence and a deliberate rejection of human morality (Breuer calls this rejection "a sacrifice" that must be made), as part of Breuer's strategy to create zealous political actors capable of overcoming their own subjective commitments in the service of the holy text's directives, which encompass them "totally."

To sum up, *NK* opposes to the fragmentary nature of modern secular culture a revolutionary program of totality. The totality of Torah provides an overarching framework of meaning that guides both perception and action and encompasses all value spheres. At the same time, Breuer invents a new political agent, the Jewish saint, entirely committed to a revolution

141. Breuer, *NK*, 140, 141.

142. Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, 1–21.

143. Breuer, *NK*, 150.

144. See Breuer's discussion regarding "der Bund," in Breuer, *NK*, 257.

145. Breuer, *NK*, 368.

in the name of Torah. These agents struggle to erase a personal, “beastly” subjectivity as part of their total commitment to the political cause. The totality manages to overcome Gnosticism and to find godly presence in reality in an anti-Kantian manner.

SUMMARY: TOTALITY AND JEWISH ORTHODOX
RADICAL POLITICS

This essay analyzed Breuer’s turn to “totality” in light of the Conservative Revolutionary critique of secular culture’s fragmented, conflicted nature. During the 1910s, Breuer participated in the *Werturteilsstreit* that posed the question of the possibility of evaluation in the secular age. While the young Breuer believed in culture as a site where evaluations could be made—an optimistic position associated with neo-Kantianism—by the 1920s Breuer had adopted the Weberian position that facts and values are unconnectable; that “tragedy” led him to reject culture altogether. Instead, Breuer elaborated a highly pessimistic, Gnostic view that God has left the wicked world to its own devices. Only by the early 1930s had Breuer and a small circle around him found a way of escaping pessimism: “totality” as an alternative, revolutionary program capable of overcoming the fragmented configuration of culture.

A short clarification could be helpful at this point. This essay does not imply that Breuer was a supporter of the National Socialist movement. In the very book in which Breuer calls for the “national socialism of the state of God,” he takes to task the chauvinistic forms of nationalism and warns Jewish politics from them.¹⁴⁶ The argument, rather, is that the Weimar critique of liberalism (which, as presented above, was much broader than National Socialism’s), and the specific notion of the crisis of culture that had been developed in various German philosophies during the 1920s, amounted to a deep rejection of liberalism.¹⁴⁷ Breuer’s political position is remarkable from a Jewish perspective, given that the status of the Jews in Germany seemed to be dependent on liberalism; yet Breuer was not unique in positing the crisis of culture (and its ensuing antiliberal conclusion), and not the status of the German Jews, at the center of his reflections. One can find similar tendencies also in thinkers from the Jewish Left, such as Martin Buber (especially in his 1932 book *Kingdom of God*).

What was unique—and, from the perspective of the genealogy of Orthodox politics, decisive—is Breuer’s conclusion from the crisis, especially his opting for the Right and his formulation of the total state as an Ortho-

¹⁴⁶ Breuer, *NK*, 45–46.

¹⁴⁷ See the articles in Ewald Grothe and Ulrich Sieg, eds., *Liberalismus als Feindbild* (Göttingen, 2014).

dox model. Scholars have already noted the infamous 1934 letter sent to Hitler by the rabbis of the secessionist Orthodoxy, in which these leaders suggested that the Orthodox aversion to the heresy of communism could serve as a basis for coexistence with the Nazis.¹⁴⁸ That letter, however, although explaining why the Left did not present a viable alternative from an Orthodox perspective, cannot be used to articulate the Orthodox position. After all, the letter had been written by the leaders of a precarious group facing an existential threat and attempting to portray itself as being in line with the assumed ideological position of those holding the power. Instead, this essay has revealed Breuer's staggering (inner-Jewish, theological) attempt to model Orthodoxy on antiliberalism in the form of a unique right-wing take on authority, total state, and political radicalism.

Our story ends with Breuer's immigration to Palestine in 1936. As several scholars have noted, Breuer later significantly moderated his position and entertained, albeit hesitantly, cooperation with the Zionist movement.¹⁴⁹ This later moderation cannot be explored here. However, it is important to note that it required him to abandon the concept of totality. In his Hebrew book *Moriab*, published in 1944, Breuer wrote a short entry against "totalitarianism."¹⁵⁰ Modeling his state of God on Montesquieu's separation of powers, he praised division at the expense of totality.¹⁵¹ It is not impossible to guess the reason for this change. World War II may have exposed to Breuer the consequences of offering a kosher version of the Conservative Revolution.

At the same time, Manfred Lustig's Noar Agudati did not fulfill its "total" program. It failed to influence Agudath Israel and remained a footnote in Haredi history. The young Fredi moved to Palestine and became Shaul Lustig, the respected principal of a moderate Haredi high school for women, Seminar Lustig. He found himself in a Haredi society that deliberately rejected the revolutionary religious program he had previously endorsed. Instead, post-Holocaust Haredi society was gradually becoming

148. Marc B. Shapiro, *Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884–1966* (Oxford, Or., 1999), chs. 5–6. See the important remarks of Eliyahu Stern, "Anti-Semitism and Orthodoxy in the Age of Trump," *Tablet*, March 12, 2019.

149. Arie Edrei, "Multi-culturalism in Early Ultra-Orthodox Doctrine: Yitshak Breuer—from the Torah State to the Torah Community," *Dine Israel* 32 (2018): 187–222; Matthias Morgenstern, "Issac Breuer und die 'agudistische' Staatstheorie," in *Zionismus: Theorien des jüdischen Staates*, ed. S. Salzborn (Baden-Baden, 2015), 187–208.

150. Isaac Breuer, *Moriab: Yesodot ha-hinuch ha-leumi ha-Torati* (Jerusalem, 1944), 34.

151. Breuer, *Moriab*, 73.

“the society of learners,” devoting itself exclusively to the study of Torah and eschewing involvement in any other value sphere.¹⁵² However, Lustig’s turn to women’s education demonstrates some continuity with his earlier Weimar positions. Lustig may have realized that if he could not transform Haredi men into zealous Jewish saints (they were expected to remain within the protected walls of the house of study, after all), he might have more success with women. From then on, Haredi women would be the real Jewish saints, pursuing work as a mitzvah: *Arbeit als Beruf*.

Despite the demise of the ideal of the total Torah state, exploring the “totality” revolution contributes to the elaboration of a genealogy of twentieth-century Orthodox politics. Breuer’s philosophy systematized, for the first time, the option for a radical Orthodox politics. Other iterations of Orthodox politics from the time were far from radical. The anti-Zionist Agudath Israel was politically conservative, while Mizrahi, closer to a mass movement than Agudah, remained tied to the secular Zionist movement.¹⁵³ Even as the possibility of “theocracy” became a part of the wider discourse in Palestine, by the 1940s this theocratic discourse was attempting—as Alexander Kaye has recently showed—to graft conceptions of Jewish law onto liberal values of equality and freedom.¹⁵⁴ Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog, a devoted theocrat, announced explicitly that he rejected “a total theocracy,” arguably ruling out precisely Breuer’s program of totality.¹⁵⁵

The Orthodox fascination with “totality,” systematized by Breuer and apparent in the politics of both the anti-Zionist youth movement Noar Agudati and the Religious Zionist kibbutz movement,¹⁵⁶ represents the first time Orthodoxy turned to politics to achieve a cultural revolution. Although there is nothing self-evident in Orthodoxy’s rejection of liberalism, it began to see itself as antiliberal in nature, opposing the “neutrality” of the public sphere to an authentic Jewish life. Isaac Breuer is a paradigmatic thinker for this formulation of radical Orthodox politics. His total program, modeled on the Conservative Revolution, presented Jewish politics not simply as a useful means of securing Orthodox needs (as Agudah did) or even as the state’s partial adoption of Jewish law (as the various theocratic

152. Menachem Friedman, *The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society: Sources, Trends and Processes* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1991), ch. 5.

153. This is the telling narrative of Mahla, *Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion*.

154. Alexander Kaye, *The Invention of Jewish Theocracy: The Struggle for Legal Authority in Modern Israel* (Oxford, 2020).

155. Kaye, *Invention of Jewish Theocracy*, 76.

156. See the excellent account on the German origins of that movement in Aryei Fishman, *Judaism and Modernization on the Religious Kibbutz* (Cambridge, 1992).

programs of the 1940s did); rather, he thought Jewish politics offered an answer to secularism and its aporias.

Radical Jewish Orthodox politics is often associated with religious Zionism, while Haredi politics is associated with conservatism and segregation. Ironically enough, however, it is Haredi anti-Zionist thinkers like Breuer who invented radical Orthodox politics and who influenced religious Zionism (and not vice versa). Dreams of a radical religious politics continue to haunt Haredi politics.¹⁵⁷ This concealed layer of radical Orthodox politics, connected to the crisis of liberalism in Germany in the early 1930s, should be recognized in any genealogy of Orthodox politics in the twentieth century.

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157. See my essay “Modern Haredim and the Contemporary Haredi Society: Beyond the Paradigm of Liberalization,” *Jewish Social Studies* 27.2 (2022): 183–205.