Reviewing Elliot R. Wolfson’s *The Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow* is a difficult task, but not in the sense that the book is challenging or intellectually weak; the book is neither of those things. Nevertheless, *The Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow* is the prequel of sorts to Wolfson’s *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, which will appear in the fall of 2019 with Indiana University Press. I have not seen the manuscript of the forthcoming book, and so in this review I will tell a story about Wolfson’s orientation to the Heideggerean corpus and the Jewish tradition in full awareness that the forthcoming book may require readers to fine-tune, or perhaps even abandon, judgments that I make here.

The last several years have seen a number of essays and books devoted to Martin Heidegger’s recently published *Black Notebooks*, which contain jottings originally written between 1931 and 1951. When *Black Notebooks* first appeared in 2014, the contents about Jews and Jewishness returned Heidegger scholarship to the fervent debates about the relationship between Heideggerean thought and Nazism, given Heidegger’s membership in the Nazi Party after May 1933. In the last generation, this debate reached a high pitch in the wake of the publication of Victor Farias’s *Heidegger and Nazism* in 1987, but the set of questions of whether Heideggerean thought is made worthless by his membership in the Nazi dates back to Karl Löwith’s “The Political Implications of Heidegger’s Existentialism,” originally written in 1939 but published in French in *Les temps modernes* in 1946.

Wolfson’s book serves as a kind of one-stop shopping for analyzing these issues after the publication of the *Black Notebooks*. The first two chapters (approximately half of the book) are a dazzlingly complete treatment of everything that everyone has had to say about Heidegger and Nazism. Wolfson displays a thorough knowledge of the secondary literature, as well as a thorough knowledge of the Heideggerean corpus from various phases of Heidegger’s authorship, and of course the posthumously published notebooks. One might aptly describe Wolfson’s position on Heidegger and Nazism as moderate. Those scholars who wave away or otherwise minimize the problems of Heidegger’s flirtation with Nazi ideology are simply blind to what Heidegger himself wrote, but neither is it the case that we should never cite Heidegger again. Wolfson repeats the line from the *Black Notebooks* about the “worldlessness of Jewry” that was highlighted in press accounts as soon as they first appeared, and he correctly points out that given the importance of the world to human existence in Heidegger’s thought, Heidegger’s “translation of the leitmotif of the wandering Jew as an inherent worldlessness can be seen as a form of philosophical dehumanization” (p. 37). However, the *Black Notebooks* also contain critiques of Nazism—Wolfson quotes a long passage from the fall of 1932—as well as general anti-volkish thoughts from the fourth notebook. The failure of the *Black Notebooks* to represent an ideology, or the difficulty of sussing out a systematic philosophy from them, leads Wolfson to conclude that the notebooks represent a failure on Heidegger’s part to follow the path of his own thinking, although they are not antisemitic all the way down.

However, *The Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow* is not simply a book about how deep an antisemite Heidegger...
may or may not have been. Rather, the ambiguity of the *Black Notebooks* serves as a clue to Wolfson’s own thinking throughout the book. What does it mean for evil and wisdom, for bigotry and brilliance, to exist in the same thinker? And what are scholars supposed to do with this ambiguity? I will now, with some fear and trembling, try to reconstruct Wolfson’s answers to these questions.

The ambiguity of the *Black Notebooks* is not simply the ambiguity of a set of documents that show that their author “Heidegger” is the author of words that are both anti-Jewish and anti-Nazi. Moreover, it is the ambiguity of a set of documents that show that their author “Heidegger” is the author of words that are anti-Jewish, as well as words that scholars of Jewish studies should recognize as being like words that appear in the canons of their own discipline. After all, if Heidegger describes the Jews as worldless in the 1930s, isn’t this what Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) had said in 1920 in his *The Star of Redemption* when he described the Jews as outside history? How Heidegger and Rosenzweig assessed the situation was surely different—as Wolfson points out, Rosenzweig turns Heidegger’s “vile rhetoric about Jewish parasitism and cowardice on its head”—but there is a “kinship” between their descriptions nonetheless (pp. 72, 76).

In a chapter treating Heidegger’s postwar silence about the Holocaust, Wolfson points out that Heidegger often referred in his writings (especially the 1934-35 lecture courses on Friedrich Hölderlin, the 1937-ish *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, and several postwar essays on language) to language as something that wells up from an originary saying that remains silent and mysterious. Could we not use this to understand Heidegger’s own refusal to speak about the Holocaust? Wolfson hypothesizes that “it seems plausible ... [to infer that] only by not speaking could he [Heidegger] properly speak, only by heeding the silent voice could he respond to and thereby resay what could be heard from the saying” (p. 121). Only such silence, for Wolfson, “is commensurate to the horridness of the Holocaust.” Nevertheless, in this narrative of heeding the ground that keeps to itself and does not speak or manifest itself in history, Wolfson sees an affinity with Kabbalistic accounts of the impure forces known as the “other side” (*sitra aḥra*), in which the forces of unholiness do not have their origin in something other than the divine; indeed, they originate “in the aspect of the divine that precedes the division into holy and unholy” (p. 122).

If we cannot say for certain that Heidegger is wholly other than Judaism—even if Heidegger at moments held himself as the polar opposite of the worldlessness of Jewry—then for those committed to Judaism as a site of truth, Wolfson’s claims have deeply significant implications about how truth wends its way through history. One of Wolfson’s touchstones in *Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow* is the account of the errancy of truth, beginning in Heidegger’s 1930 essay on truth and extending through his later writings (pp. 140-141, 145). In the 1930 essay, because humans in their worldhood determine beings in a certain framework, the truth of being remains occluded in all of the true sentences that humans speak; truth and untruth/errancy belong together. For Wolfson, this seems not to be simply a claim about how true sentences leave truth itself veiled. Rather, it seems to be a claim about how errancy itself justifies the counterintuitive scene of recognition that Wolfson stages in *Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow* between Heidegger and the Jewish tradition.

In his excursus on Kabbalistic notions of the *sitra aḥra*, Wolfson writes that the goal of Kabbalistic action on this model is not to eliminate evil but to reintegrate it with its opposite. *The Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow* is an integration of Heidegger with Jewish thought. The peak of Wolfson’s narrative is the last chapter, a jaw-dropping fifteen pages in which Wolfson insists that the model for reading Heidegger ought to be the Bible’s narrative of Balaam in Numbers 22-24. Balaam, the Moabite (in other words, non-Israelite) prophet who “knows the knowledge of the Most High,” the God of Israel (Num. 24:16) is the outsider who becomes an insider; similarly, Wolfson’s Heidegger is the German who ends up speaking the truth that the Jewish tradition has long proclaimed. Yet this is not simply a move of inclusion that redeems Heidegger from his sins. If “Heidegger is the twentieth-century Balaam,” then this means that the opposition between Jewish and non-Jewish evaporates (p. 161). If Judaism is recognizable in Heidegger, then there is nothing natively Jewish any longer. The Jewishness of Heidegger is also the Heidegger-ness of Judaism.

This “x of y = y of x” language, long a staple of Wolfson’s prose, is not simply a postmodern formula that makes audiences in a conference go “oooh!” It should also send a shiver of fright through Wolfson’s readers. For Wolfson’s insistence on estranging his readership from what they thought they knew (about Heidegger, about Judaism), from a system of references that they thought had been stable (Judaism good, Heidegger evil), makes it difficult to evaluate anything securely. At the end of Wolfson’s book, both Heidegger and Judaism are left as examples of tragedy. Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks* describe originary being as tragic, simply because
the origin always withdraws from the world. As Wolfson explains by summing Heidegger’s appropriation of Schellingian philosophy, a truly moral orientation is not to be found in Heidegger. Morality remains conventional; at the origin, good and evil are equally valid (p. 125). Similarly, in a Kabbalistic text that Wolfson comments on, “the demonic shell arises from the divine core, and there is no purity except through impurity” (p. 156).

*The Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow* is a book that is about how to wrestle with Heidegger’s antisemitism and membership in the Nazi Party, and so it is also about the Holocaust. It is worth asking what the claim that Heidegger is the twentieth-century Balaam implies about how we are to think about the Holocaust. It seems to me that on the basis of the fact that Wolfson is not simply describing the tragic orientation of Heidegger (at his best) and the Kabbalistic tradition but endorsing it, one cannot but conclude that Wolfson also endorses the claim that God is amoral (beyond good and evil), and that death and destruction are natural parts of life in the wake of the withdrawal of the ground of life—aspects of post-Holocaust theology that resonate with the work of Richard L. Rubenstein in *After Auschwitz* (1967) and later books (although Wolfson’s knowledge of mystical traditions runs deeper than Rubenstein’s does). Post-Holocaust theology has largely been dormant in this century. But it silently speaks from every page of *The Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow*, and I hope that it will be more explicit in Wolfson’s next book on Heidegger and Kabbalah.

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