

RETOS INTERNACIONALES

Revista de Relaciones Internacionales
del Tecnológico de Monterrey Campus Querétaro

EL CONFLICTO PALESTINO- ISRAELI: SOLUCIONES Y DERIVAS



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THE APOCALYPTIC WAR AGAINST GOG OF MAGOG. MARTIN BUBER VERSUS MEIR KAHANE

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS

apocalypticism, Gog and Magog, Martin Buber, Meir Kahane, religious extremism

In this article a confrontation on the classic Gog/Magog motive (end time battle between God and evil) is enacted between two opposite Jewish thinkers: Martin Buber and Meir Kahane. It shows how and on what conditions the biblical text can be interpreted so differently. The article also tries to shed a more general light on the chances and risks at stake in end-of-time accounts.

Introduction

Apocalyptic end of time speculations and assumptions about concomitant violence have always existed. One of these speculations can be identified as the Gog of Magog prophecy in the Hebrew bible (*Ezekiel* 38-39). It is referred to in the Greek New Testament in the Book of Revelation. In the Gog of Magog prophecy, a final battle between Israel's God and a Prince of Evil is described, a certain king Gog of Magog. Gog is finally to be slain on Israel's plains, after he will have attempted to destroy Israel.

One can imagine that this sort of prophecies displaying a conclusive war between God and Evil at the end of times, have attracted variegated interpretations all throughout history. Some of these interpretations seem to have legitimized sacred violence, others have strictly forbidden this, arguing that God alone will fulfill our world's messianic destiny. Violence as such, though, had seemed unavoidable to all interpreters. It was supposed to be an eschatological necessity anyhow. In this chapter I will confront two radically opposed views of the Gog prophecy, viz. Martin Buber's approach in his novel *Gog und Magog. Eine Chronik* (1949) (Cf. Martin Buber, 2009, 278f.), and Meir Kahane's, in his *Or hara' ayon (The Jewish Idea)*, a two-volume book that was published posthumously in 1998.

Martin Buber (1878-1965) was a German Jewish author who had collected many Hasidic tales and traditions among Jews in pre-War Eastern Europe. By doing so, he has preserved them for posterity, as most of the Hasidic story-tellers have been slaughtered by the Nazis. Buber's general spiritual orientation was mystical, he sought for connections between Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu mystical traditions. Peace-minded as Buber was, he not only paid many efforts to reconcile post-War Germany and the State of Israel, but he also made a hard case for a mutual recognition of Jews and Palestinians on Israel's territory.

Meir Kahane (1932-1990) was a radical American-Israeli rabbi who created the Jewish Defense League in the US to protect Jewish interests all over the world, especially in the USSR. After his emigration to Israel he launched the Kach-party, a party that promoted the mandatory expulsion of Arabs from Israeli territory. This party was banned and delegitimized by the Israeli Supreme Court after a few years. In 1990 Kahane was killed by an Egyptian activist in New York.

The Gog of Magog prophecy

Let's have a short look at the prophetic text of *Ezekiel* itself. In the Jewish liturgy, the Gog of Magog chapters are publicly read at the end of the feast week starting with *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), followed by *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles) and ending with *Simhat Torah (Rejoicing of the Torah)* on the "eighth day". The Tanakh lectionary already indicates the mutually implicative relation, one could say, between 'atonement' on the one hand, and the inevitable struggle against and the victory over the forces of Evil, on the other.

I will briefly mention here some elements of *Ezekiel* 38-39. Gog of Magog, the Prince of a northern nation, is aiming to besiege the people of Israel. To do so he will gather many other peoples and their kings.

(Ch. 38) 8. From many days you [i.e. Gog] will be remembered; at the end of the years you will come to a land [whose inhabitants] returned from the sword, gathered from many peoples, upon the mountains of Israel, which had been continually laid waste, but it was liberated from the nations, and they all dwelt securely.
9. And you will ascend; like mist you will come; like a cloud to cover the earth you will be; you and all your wings and many peoples with you.

10. So said the Lord God: It will come to pass on that day that words will enter your heart and you will think a thought of evil.
 11. And you will say, "I shall ascend upon a land of open cities; I shall come upon the tranquil, who dwell securely; all of them living without a wall, and they have no bars or doors.
 12. To take spoil and to plunder loot, to return your hand upon the resettled ruins and to a people gathered from nations, acquiring livestock and possessions, dwelling on the navel of the earth.

The people of Israel are living in ignorance about these plans, they are dwelling without any defense. God himself, however, will finally slay Gog of Magog and its armies, in order to sanctify his name among the nations:

- (Ch. 38) 21. And I will call the sword against him [i.e. Gog] upon all My mountains, says the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother.
 22. And I will judge against him with pestilence and with blood, and rain bringing floods, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone will I rain down upon him and upon his hordes and upon the many peoples that are with him.
 23. And I will reveal Myself in My greatness and in My holiness and will be recognized in the eyes of many nations, and they will know that I am the Lord.

Finally, all nations will know that God had exiled his people for its iniquity and betrayal of God:

- (Ch. 39) 24. According to their defilement and according to their transgressions I did to them, and I hid My face from them.
 25. Therefore, so said the Lord God: Now I shall return to the captivity of Jacob, and I shall have compassion on the House of Israel, and I shall be zealous for My Holy Name.
 26. And they shall bear their disgrace and all their treachery that they committed against Me when they dwell on their land securely with no one frightening them.
 27. When I return them from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, I shall be sanctified through them before the eyes of many nations.
 28. And they will know that I am the Lord their God when I exile them to the nations, and I shall gather them to their land, and I shall no longer leave any of them there.
 29. And I shall no longer hide My face from them, for I shall have poured out My spirit upon the House of Israel," says the Lord God.

While the *Ezekiel* text can be seen as the root text of the Gog of Magog tradition, its distorted echoes can be found not only in the *Revelation of John* in the New Testament (cf. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, 2007), but also in the Sibylline Oracles, and the Qur'an (Sura 18, 83-98). The Qur'an describes how an enigmatic ruler called Dhul Qarnayn is called upon to liberate a defenseless people from the mischief of *Ya'juj and Ma'juj*. The iron wall he builds to protect it hereafter will, however, be removed at the end of times. Sura 21 speaks about a "prohibition upon [the people of] a city which We [i.e. Allah] have destroyed that they will [ever] return, until [the dam of] Gog and Magog has been opened and thou shall see them, from every higher ground, descending." A hadith called *Al-Bukhari* claims that the city of Jerusalem is referred to in this Sura.

Who is this 'Gog'? Though it is not my aim here to engage in a separate exegesis of this mysterious text, it is perhaps worth mentioning that history has shown diverse explanations, varying from king Gyges – *Gugu* – of Lydia (historically the most probable exegesis) to Babel, the Romans, Attila, the Khazars, the Eastern European Jews (sic!), Napoleon, etc. Any enemy could be filled in, so it seems. The XV Century Spanish-Portuguese rabbi Abarbanel identifies Gog in his biblical commentaries with the 'Ishmaelites', i.e. the Arabs. Levinas tends to connect Gog and Magog with Hitler and Stalin.¹ Old English traditions have it that a giant called Goemagog, an original inhabitant of the Island, was conquered and thrown into the sea. Michael Drayton (1563-1631) writes in his *Poly-Olbion*:

Amongst the ragged Cleeves those monstrous giants sought:
 Who (of their dreadful kind) t'appal the Trojans brought
 Great Gogmagog, an oake that by the roots could teare;

A few miles south of Cambridge the Gog Magog Downs can be found, which name can be tracked down to the old tradition. An Irish tradition even claims that the Irish people are the offspring of a Magog (Japhet's son, according to the biblical book of *Genesis*, 10, 2-3).

Obviously all these explanations are hardly more than folklore. Unless one reinterpret the concept of the 'apocalyptic' itself, but that would lead us astray here. Explanations of Gog-like prophesies are always hazardous undertakings (which does not mean that they are necessarily false). As Buber observes in his commentary to *Gog und Magog*, three Hasidic rabbis who speculated on Gog's identity died in the same year (see below).

¹ "La guerre de Gog et Magog, le XXe siècle et son avenir ou sa crainte nucléaire, achèveront-ils notre maturité ou notre vieillesse de modernes façonnées par les promesses et les philosophies de l'histoire et du progrès et du messianisme, ou se laisseront-elles se consoler par la bonté invincible, mais désarmée, des justes et des saints, prétendument meilleure que le « souvenir de la sortie d'Egypte » ?" E. Levinas, 1988, 103.

Messianic tensions

The explanations of 'Gog' in the Jewish tradition can hardly be dissolved from messianic expectations. Although *Ezekiel* itself does not refer to a coming messiah, the text nonetheless refers to a divine deliverance of the Jewish people from harm and threat. This deliverance, so the prophecy suggests, can only take place *once* the Jews have been brought back to their land. We will see that this element, the so-called 'ingathering of the exiles', plays a key role in Meir Kahane's approach of the text.

The importance of the ingathering of the Jewish exiles was central to all different forms of Zionism that arose by the end of the XIX Century. In order to provide a background to the apocalyptic Gog of Magog prophecy I will first give a brief overview here of some noteworthy religious Jewish attitudes towards Zionism. A very good study on this subject on which I am largely dwelling here has been written by Aviezer Ravietzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*. (Also cf. Kriegel, 2000, pp. 153-165) It goes without saying that the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 was a major, astounding event that influenced the already extant ideas among the Diaspora Jews about a future Jewish state.

Anti-Zionism: Neturei Karta

Anti-Zionism prior and subsequent to the creation of the State of Israel (if not the holocaust) clearly makes much of a difference. However, anti-Zionism has not altogether disappeared and become extinct after 1948, as the fanatically anti-Zionist Neturei Karta movement has shown. Anti-Zionist movements in contemporary Jewry reach back by and large to Hasidic traditions originating in Eastern Europe. It is self-evident, though, that anti-Zionist sentiments only resurge at times in which certain Jewish circles actively promote settlement in the holy land. Be this as it may, none of the Jewish voices either promoting or prohibiting such settling had expected the actual establishment of a truly Jewish state in 1948.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Shalom Dov Baer Schneerson was one of the main castigators of XIX Century Zionism. Drawing on the so-called 'three oaths' he strictly declined any human effort to autonomously re-establish an independent Jewish state, as such would be the sole Messiah's responsibility. These three oaths refer to a Talmudic passage which 1) defends the Jews from "ascending the wall" (i.e. to massively settle in the holy land), 2) adjures Israel "not to rebel against the nations of the world", and 3) adjures these nations "not to oppress Israel too much" (cf. Babylonian Talmud

Ketubbot 111a). These oaths (or vows) have been subject to frequent debates as to their authoritative ('halakhic') status. Anti-Zionists have at least insisted on their binding character: Jews, so they maintained, are not allowed to massively settle in the holy land, let alone establish their own independent Jewish state (cf. Ravietzky 1996, 211-234; Firestone, 2006, pp. 954-982). By doing so, they would "force the end", or bring about a self-willed human redemption, which would be a grave wrongdoing against God's plans. Ravietzky quotes the anti-Zionist Rabbi Kahane-Shapira (1871-1943), who stated:

Heaven forbid that we walk in the ways of these sinful people, who strive for natural redemption. The striving is forbidden... The act of *teshuvah* (repentance) alone is a legitimate means to hasten the End, but acts of ingathering [the exiles] and of bringing [Israel to their land] depend solely upon the hand of God: 'Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it; unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman keeps vigil in vain' [Ps. 127:1].²

Post-war rabbis such as Joel Teitelbaum (1887-1979) do not hesitate to see the creation of the State of Israel as a catastrophe of the same order as the holocaust. They consequently downgrade any moderate form of redemption realized by human means (viz. the *fallible* State of Israel created in 1948). The only acceptable form, to them, is radical, full redemption, which can only be realized by God himself. Jewish visitors of the recent Iranian 'holocaust conference' for the most part come from these circles (e.g. *Neturei Karta*).

Haredi Jewry

Radical though the contemporary opposition may seem between orthodox anti-Zionists (such as *Neturei Karta*) and orthodox Zionists (such as mainstream *Haredi* Jewry), they share common Hasidic roots. The majority of the orthodox Jews today have accepted, albeit not always wholeheartedly, the existence of the State of Israel. However, such acceptance has only become possible at the price of a neutralization of this State's religious significance for them. For just as well as the Neturei Karta 'fanatics', they believe in the sole divine agency in matters of human redemption. The Jews themselves, they think, should remain purely passive and just persevere in the daily observance of the halakhic rules.

Ravietzky distinguishes in fact two Haredi responses to the reality of the Jewish State of Israel: one of them corresponding to the aforementioned "religious indifference to the political-historical dimension", whereas the other is "moved by the

2 A.B. Steinberg, *Da'at ha-rabbanim* (Warsaw, 1902), p.39, in: Ravietzky, 18.

ways of Providence in current history”. “They share a common consciousness of exile”, Ravietzky continues, “that does not allow an effective place for mundane Jewish activity, for collective national initiative that shapes the course of history.” (Ravietzky, p.161).

Haredi circles have always taken extremely seriously traditional notions such as the “birthpangs of the Messiah” or the “footsteps of the Messiah”, which refer to events generally supposed to precede divine redemption, and frequently identified with the Gog of Magog prophecy. The Haredis apply these notions to the increased suffering and persecution of Jews on the one hand, and to wide-spread religious transgression on the other. Shortly before the holocaust Rabbi Elhanan Bunem Wasserman writes in his *Ikveta de-meshiha* (Footsteps of the Messiah): “In our days, which are the footsteps of the Messiah, in which the heretics are the leaders of the generation, and do not permit Torah scholars to raise their heads, and wage open war upon the Torah... [there is] a terrible situation the likes of which we have not experienced since Israel became a people.” (*Ikveta di-meshihah*, pp. 6ff., in Ravietzky, p. 171). It is striking that *similar* quotations can be found by *post-war* thinkers such as Rabbi Schach. In a harangue addressed to ‘secular’ Jewish leaders he contends: “We see a terrible and frightening sight. A collective revolt against the kingdom of heaven. [...] According to our own conviction and faith, those who presume to maintain the state are those who endanger it”. (*Mikhtavim u-ma’amarim*, pp. 6, 13, in Ravietzky, 178, 179.)

Religious Zionism: Rav Kook

The contemporary Israeli Settler’s Block, *Gush Emunim*, overtly claims loyalty to Rav Kook, both son (Zvi Yehuda, 1881-1981) and father (Avraham, 1865-1935). Whether this claim is always justified cannot be answered here. Only their *religious* Zionism puts such a tremendous weight upon the ongoing colonization of the Land that it takes this colonization to be a precondition, rather than the upshot, of the future redemption. Avraham Kook draws here upon the Talmudic notion of the *athalta de-ge’ulah*, the beginning of redemption. Only collective human activity, so Kook claims, can bring about this beginning, which will only be completed by the Messiah. According to Kook, “Zionism is a heavenly matter”. “The State of Israel is a divine entity, our holy and exalted state!” (Z.Y. Kook, *Le-hilkhot tzibbur* pp. 244, 246, in Ravietzky, 82; also cf. A.I. Kook, 1978)

The Kooks continue older traditions dating from the 19th Century, e.g. those upheld by the ‘Harbingers of Zion’. These idealistic-minded rabbis saw redemption as closely linked to settling in the holy land. As opposed to the Kooks, they did not see this as a process also requiring severe crises (‘birthpangs’). If one would go further back into history, one could also think of the Nahmanides (13th Century) or Judah he-Hasid (1700), who already actively stimulated Jewish immigration in the Land of Israel.

Religious Zionism differs from the two previously mentioned approaches (i.e. *Neturei Karta* and the *Haredis*) in that it makes redemption conditional; human agency is required to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. As opposed to what we will find in Kahane, however, it also sees a positive role for ‘secular’ or ‘political’ Zionism. As a Hegelian philosopher in disguise, Kook the Elder would affirm that, “if the secularists represented the unconscious workings of the Jewish spirit, the religious Zionists [...] would raise this spirit to the level of conscious choice.” (Ravietzky, p. 122)

Martin Buber and immanent redemption

Let us return to the Gog prophecy more explicitly. Martin Buber has dedicated the only novel he wrote to this prophetic-apocalyptic text. *Gog und Magog* is a ‘chronicle’ (cf. Friedman 2002, 1955, Ch. 18, and HaCohen, in Buber, 2009, pp. 9-35), a record of discussions between Hasidic *zaddikim*, roughly between 1793 and 1815. Hasidism is a XVIII Century Jewish mystical revival movement, born in Eastern Europe with the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the ‘great teacher’ (*magid gadol*) or the *Besht* (an acrostic). Hasidic communities are generally centered around a *zaddik*, a holy rabbi whose religious and moral injunctions are considered to be binding for all his followers.

The chronicle’s protagonists are the ‘Seer of Lublin’ (Yaacov Yitzak), his disciple, ‘the Jew’ (Yehudi, *der Jude*) of Pžysa (whose proper name is, as a matter of coincidence, also Yaakov Yitzak), and some other rabbis. The ‘Seer’ and Yehudi represent two religious positions that together undoubtedly make up for Buber’s own inner struggle. (Friedman 2002, Ch. 18 and HaCohen 2009, p. 22f) These two positions do not just regard the interpretation of the Gog of Magog prophecy but, more generally, two opposite tendencies within Hasidism

as such. Even a third position can be distinguished, i.e. Rabbi Menachem Mendel's. Though in the wider context of the book Menachem Mendel plays a smaller role, I think his views can be seen as a 'shadow' (to use a Jungian term) of the Seer's. It can even be defended that they virtually anticipate to Meir Kahane's approach, as we will see. However, these views rely upon the more basic ones which are held by the Seer of Lublin himself. Actually, in the wake of *Gog und Magog* Buber published another, similar though non-narrative text: *Bilder von Gut und Böse* ('Images of Good and Evil'), in which especially Yehudi's views return but now assimilated to Buber's own. (Buber 1952)

According to Yaakov Yitzhak the Seer of Lublin, 'Gog' refers to Napoleon, someone who also comes from the 'North' or the 'Northwest' (of Israel) and who destroys many countries. Yaakov Yitzhak 'the Jew', however, internalizes the Gog prophecy, applying it to the so-called *yetzer hara*, the traditional Hebrew name for the 'evil inclination' in the human heart.

More generally speaking, the Seer represents a line in Hasidism which has a magic, if not theurgist orientation. The *zaddik* is taken as a vessel or an intermediary between God and the religious community. By means of magical 'incantations' he intends to accelerate or hasten the end. For if Napoleon is indeed the announced 'Gog', as the Seer claims, the final redemption is near.

We have already met with the notion of "hastening the end" before, in Rabbi Kahane-Shapira. This rabbi had warned against Zionism, which he saw as a dangerous hastening of the end of times. A more general caveat in the Jewish tradition has it that he who "hastens the end" by eliciting the forces of evil, risks to bring about unprecedented catastrophes. Had not Maimonides already emphasized that the future messianic redemption would come as a natural process, independent of human interference? However, despite such warnings, a certain strand in Hasidism still attempted to hasten the end by magical practices and procedures. This magical strand has often been neglected in Hasidism research, due to the 'romantic' conception invigorated by thinkers as Martin Buber himself. The Israeli Kabbala expert

Moshe Idel does not hesitate to compare the role of the *zaddik* to the *shaman*, who also functions as a vessel to convey divine influxes. (Idel, 1995, pp. 214, 218, 225; Idel, 2005, pp. 148-150) In the introduction to *Der grosse Magid und seine Nachfolge* Buber writes about the Seer of Lublin:

He was filled with ceaseless waiting for the hour of redemption and finally initiated and played the chief part in the secret rites [*jener geheimnisvollen Handlung*] which he and certain other *zaddikim* ... performed with the purpose of converting the Napoleonic wars into the pre-Messianic final battle of Gog and Magog. The three leaders in this mystic procedure all died in the course of the following year. They had 'forced [*bedrängt*] the end,' they died at its coming. The magic, which the Baal Shem had held in check, broke loose and did its work of destruction. (Buber, 1927, 395)³

As stated previously, the Seer's position is radicalized by Rabbi Menachem Mendel, a rigorous rabbi who is very restrained in matters of exuberant clothing and of giving in to life's pleasures. Just as other rabbis, so it is said, he believes in "the influence of the *Zaddikim* on the course of events". Like the Seer of Lublin, he thinks it is "the duty of the *Zaddikim* to make Napoleon into Gog. Yet his meaning and our Rabbi's meaning are not identical. He interprets it as praying and taking spiritual risks that Napoleon may be the universal victor [*Beten und Sich-Einsetzen, dass Napoleon alles besiege*]." (Buber, 2009, p. 205; trans. p. 222) In a discussion with Yehudi, Mendel even remarks: "God [...] is with us, wherever we are and however we are constituted. But the dawn of His kingdom can arise only among us, only in Israel, when, and not before there exists this 'in', this place within us [*nicht eher als bis es dieses 'in', diesen Ort gibt*]." (Buber, 2009, p. 213; trans. p. 232) Mendel's logic, we could add here, reminds us of some of the Russian revolutionaries who wanted to await Russia's becoming an industrialized nation with a proletariat of its own *before* starting the revolution itself. It manifests certain Gnostic traits already inherent, though less clearly, to the Seer's views.

The other protagonist in *Gog und Magog*, Yaakov Yitzak 'the Jew' (Yehudi), however, interprets Gog as the "evil inclination" within, the *yetzer hara*. "The Yehudi kept on the other side of

3 The German original lacks the final sentence ("they died at its coming. The magic, which the Baal Shem had held in check, broke loose and did its work of destruction"), it just reads "Sie hatten das Ende bedrängt; sie verbrannten in seinem Anhauch." Trans. 1948, p. 33.

the realm of magic”, Buber writes in his introduction to *Der grosse Magid*, “which the Seer and his friends entered at that time in an attempt to reach the Messianic sphere by affecting current events; he did not wish to hasten the end [*das Ende bedrängen*], but to prepare man for the end.” (Buber, 1927, p. 398; trans. p. 35)

The oral traditions that have inspired Buber’s chronicle relate that Yehudi was sacred on a perhaps even more profound, if not an altogether different level. Being the Seer’s disciple, Yehudi was supposed to have reached spiritual altitudes that made him even long for physical death. The Seer himself, so these traditions assert, was not able to understand his disciple’s views from the latter’s own *viewpoints*. Yehudi was inspired by a sense of urgency which made him call for immediate repentance: ““Turn! [*Kehret um*]”, he cried to them, “Turn quickly for the day is near [*denn die Zeit ist kurz*: ‘time is short’]. There is not time for new migration of souls [*keine Frist mehr verbleibt für neue Wanderung*], redemption is close.” (Buber 1927, p. 398; trans. p. 373) In more general terms, one could say that Yehudi, when compared to his master, showed a tendency towards *internalizing* faith.⁴ Doctrine and prayer, in his teachings, were to fuse into one service. ‘Magic’, then, would be a mere outward means of living one’s faith, the use of it as an instrument. To put this in still other terms, extending the drift of the argument: in the Seer’s eyes even evil can be used by the *zaddik* in order to achieve the good, for God will transform the effects of his actions or ‘manipulations’ into the opposite. Yehudi, however, contends that such attempts run the risk of assimilating good to evil. Evil must simply be endured, just as God himself endures it. Only God can finally transform evil into good; in man’s hands it will only get worse.

The following passage is taken from a dialogue between Yehudi and his master, the Seer: “Rabbi”, he said in an almost failing voice, “what is the nature of this Gog? He can exist in the outer world only because he exists within us.” He pointed to his own breast. “The darkness out of which he was hewn [*geschöpft*] needed to be taken from nowhere else than our own slothful and malicious hearts. Our betrayal of God has made Gog grow so great [*so gross gepäppelt*].” (Buber 2009, p. 82; trans. p. 54)

Redemption, in his view, means a delivery from evil. This does not come down to the destruction of evil but to the delivery of evil from itself (“Does not redemption primarily mean the redeeming of the evil from the evil ones that make them so [*Erlösung der Bösen vom Bösen*]?” Buber 2009, p. 132; trans. p. 121) Battling inexorably against evil should not consist in *solidifying* the “seven times walled citadel of their soul” [i.e. of the evil ones] but in “conquering” it; and it should also consist of “battl[ing] against ourselves”. “If we were to forget that, if we were to take the contradiction and, instead of annihilating it, let it cleave to the very depth of the primordial [*bis ins Urfeuer hinein vertieften*], would we not in the very midst of combat against Satan have become his followers?” (Buber 2009, p. 132; trans. p. 121)

Full redemption, Yehudi claims almost at the end of the chronicle, will consist of uniting God with his Shekhina (his “indwelling”). We cannot unite God with his Shekhina unless we *carry* it to him. (Buber 2009, p. 212; trans. p. 231) In so far, we could say that in this vein of thinking, the world’s redemption *depends on us*, i.e. on our repentance and acceptance of God’s kingship. (ib.) It also depends on us in the Seer’s views; however, whereas Yehudi wants us to fully submit to God, to prepare divine agency by *being passive* ourselves, by being actively passive so to speak, the Seer requires a far more active effort of man. Yehudi paves ways for divine agency within the soul, the Seer for it in the outside world.

Nonetheless, the moment of redemption, according to Yehudi, cannot be predicted whatsoever: “For this reason all calculations concerning the end of time are false and all attempts to calculate it to bring nearer the coming of the Messiah must fail. In truth all such things deflect us from the one thing needful, which is this, to reunite Him and the *Shechinah* by virtue of our return to good.” [...] Redemption is at the door. It depends only and alone upon our return to good, our *teshuvah*. “(Buber 2009, p. 213; trans. p. 231)

The opposition between the extreme positions becomes most clear in a final discussion between Yehudi and rabbi Mendel: “‘It were well”, cried Rabbi Mendel, “that Jewish blood flow until one can wade therein up to the knees from Prystyk to Rymanow, if thereby our exile be brought to an end and our redemption dawn.” “But supposing”, said the Yehudi, “that this fire is nothing but a fire of destruction? God can kindle such a fire and blow upon it, too, and know what He does. But we? What gives us the right to wish the evil an increase of power and lend it such increase, if we may? Who tells us whom we serve thereby, the Redeemer or the adversary. Who dare be bold enough to speak today in the words of the prophet: ‘The word of the Eternal came unto me’?” (Buber 2009, p. 228; trans. p. 255) The Yehudi replied: “Never will a work of man have a good issue if we do not think of the souls whom it is given us to help, and of the life between soul and soul, and of our life with them and of their lives with each other. We cannot help the coming of redemption if life does not redeem life.” (Buber 2009, p. 228f; trans. p. 256)

On the eve of his death, Yehudi is once more seized by a profound religious ecstasy. He explains to one of his disciples that, between the final battle with Gog and Magog and the Messiah’s coming, three hours of “silent horror” (*stummen Grauens*) will occur. These hours will be much heavier to bear than this battle itself. Only (s)he who sustains them will see the Messiah. But he immediately adds: “But all the conflicts of Gog and Magog arise out of those evil forces which have not been overcome in the conflict against the Gogs and Magogs who dwell in human hearts. And those three mirror what each one of us must endure after all the conflicts in the solitariness of his soul”. (Buber 2009, p. 248f; trans. p. 284)⁵

Meir Kahane and the imminent redemption

“Hasidism”, Moshe Idel writes, “namely, the way to reach mystical experiences and the possibility of operating on the material level characteristic of the Besht and of later Hasidic masters, is immanently redemptive, and not imminently, as in what are conceived by scholars to be acute forms of messianism.” (Idel, 1998, p. 219) We have seen in what I have

described above that this rather applies to Yehudi’s than to the Seer’s and Menachem Mendel’s approaches. For whereas the latter tended to ‘conjure up’ all Gog’s darkness in Napoleon’s historical presence such as to “hasten” the end, Yehudi made a case for inward struggle and self-purification. It should not surprise that both Buber and Hasidism have been inspiring many later existential psychologists. (cf. Rotenberg, 2004, 1983; Buber, 1997; Neumann, 1968)

Let us now turn to a 20th Century rabbi who in many respects seems to be comparable to the Seer of Lublin’s and Menachem Mendel’s “imminent” redemption. In the following I will draw on Kahane’s *Or hara’ayon / The Jewish Idea*, a series of Biblical and Talmudic commentaries with a view to the actuality of Israeli politics and the question of Arabic presence within Israel’s borders. The penultimate chapter of his book is entitled ‘Gog’. One could say that Kahane’s explanation of this prophecy more or less belongs to his very last published words – although this was not intended, obviously (Kahane was murdered). Anyway, all the chapters of the second volume of his book deal with the notion of redemption. They betray a growing eschatological awareness. (Cfr. Sneller, 2011) The chapter which is entitled ‘Gog’ (Ch. 38) is not even the chapter that pays most attention to a scriptural exegesis of *Ezekiel* 38-39; such an exegesis can rather be found in the previous chapters which have titles such as ‘The Final Redemption’, ‘Atchalta De’Geula (The Beginning of Redemption)’, ‘The Time of Redemption’, ‘Signs of the Redemption’, and “‘I will hasten it’”.

Kahane’s main thesis goes as follows: the Jewish people have a choice. *Either* they can try to bring divine redemption “in haste”, to accelerate it (viz. by collectively repenting, by showing full obedience to Torah, and by completely *separating* from the nations of the world, and by purging the land of Israel from non-Jewish elements), or to do nothing and await for divine redemption to come “in its time”, i.e. the time determined by God, which will bring with it “Messianic birth pangs”: war, violence, huge catastrophes etc. (cf. Kahane, 1998, pp. 844, 866, 969 and passim)

Interestingly, Kahane interprets the Gog prophecy (in which Gog together with all the nations of the world prepares for a war against Israel) as something that *might or could* happen. It refers to the option of a redemption coming “in its time”, with

⁵ Also cf. Martin Buber, 1952. In the preface of this book Buber quotes Yehudi from *Gog und Magog* (“Rabbi”, sagte er mit fast versagender Stimme, „was ist es mit diesem Gog? Es kann ich doch da draußen nur geben, weil es ihn da drinnen gibt.“, p.11)

Messianic birth-pangs. “If redemption comes ‘in its time’, there will be troubles such as have never been, and only afterward will come redemption. [...] And even ritual observance will not save Israel from Messianic birthpangs, unless we demonstrate our faith and trust in G-d through bold deeds without fear of the nations.” (Ib., p. 839) If Israel does not repent, the suffering will be longer and redemption will come “in its time”. (Ib., p. 841) “The trouble and grief of Gog and Magog will surpass all the troubles and holocausts of the past, Heaven help us.” (Ib., p. 932)

However, the coming of redemption “in its time”, with the messianic birthpangs, can be avoided. The war against Gog can be avoided and so, the Ezekielic prophecy need not necessarily come true. For the other option which Kahane shows enhances that God will “hasten” redemption. “Israel will then suffer briefly”, “according to Israel’s merit”. (Ib., pp. 839, 841)

We have encountered the notion of God “hastening” the end earlier, but then in a negative sense. Anti-Zionists such as Rabbi Kahane-Shapira had warned against “hastening” the end, for in their view, this would bring with it giant catastrophes. However, the terminology may be confusing here. The anti-Zionists primarily base their admonitions upon a passage from the *Song of Songs* (2, 7): “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you neither awaken nor arouse the love while it is desirous.” Kahane, on the other hand, rather has in mind the following verses from *Isaiah* (60, 21-22): “21. And your people, all of them righteous, shall inherit the land forever, a scion of My planting, the work of My hands in which I will glory. 22. The smallest shall become a thousand and the least a mighty nation; I am the Lord, in its time I will hasten it (*be’itto achishenna*)”.

It is precisely the *option* which Kahane sees as being offered to the Jewish people which gives his call such an urgent, apocalyptic bent. The cruel final battle with Gog *need not* take place, if the Jewish people but repent and purify their land from all non-Jewish residents, remnants and remainders.

I will now describe some general elements of Kahane’s Gog account as they appear mainly from the remarkably lengthy Chapter on ‘The Beginning of the Redemption’ (*Atchalta De’Geula*, Ch. 28).

As follows from Ezekiel 38-39, Kahane writes, the war against Gog will only take place after “the ingathering of the exiles” (i.e. the creation of the State of Israel). (Ib., p. 849) It belongs to *Ikevot De-Meshicha* (“the footsteps of the Messiah”, Messianic birth-pangs); it is part of *Atchalta De’Geula*, the ‘beginning of the Redemption’. (Ib., p. 851) Relative to this, it will not surprise to see that Kahane does not make much trouble about the “three oaths”, which had inspired anti-Zionists from all ages. He claims that the nations have not kept their part of the deal, i.e. of not subjugating Israel too much. (Ib., Ch. 26, The Three Oaths’) As they have done far worse, so Kahane claims, the Jewish people are fully entitled to accept the land of Israel as God’s gift, moreover, to interpret it as a sign of the coming end. One could say that, out of the abovementioned Jewish orthodox groups, Kahane’s position most resembles the religious Zionists’ pretending to safeguard the heritage of Rabbi Kook. The main difference, though, lies in Kahane’s all-determining emphasis upon the need to ‘purge’ the land from non-Jewish traces.

“The Reign of Gog”, Kahane continues, “constitutes the end of this world as we know it and symbolizes the pinnacle of blasphemous pride.” (Ib., p. 851) “Through Gog’s war on the People of Israel, G-d will begin his punishment and revenge against all the rest of the nations who profaned his name and that of Israel.” (Ib., p. 846) If Gog repents, Kahane remarks, if it “is accepting the yoke of Heaven and submitting to G-d, and subjugates himself to G-d and Israel, thereby bringing the world the great and final *Kiddush Hashem*, G-d will certainly let him repent in this way. Yet, as long as he does not do this, as long as he and the world continue in arrogant *Chilul Hashem*, G-d will set the time for His revenge and, then, will entice him into receiving his punishment.” (Ib., p. 853)

It may surprise here, in light of the rest of his theology, that Kahane leaves open the possibility that Gog repents at all. Nonetheless, it is not altogether clear what particular chance is offered to Gog, in Kahane’s eyes. It is highly unlikely that Kahane is aiming at the classical Origenist doctrine of an *apokatasasis pantoön* (according to which God would finally redeem each and every creature, even the wicked). “G-d will certainly let him repent in this way” is a very vague and reticent formula in this respect. Even so, what is sure is that Israel will be alone with nobody to rely on except God. But “*Israel’s isolation*”, so Kahane continues in italics, “*is an immutable*

precondition for final redemption." (Ib., p. 991) Concretely, Israel should purge the land of "the false religion called Islam" and of "idolatrous churches and cults which are to be 'shunned totally' (Deut. 7:26), which arrogantly seek to influence the holy Jewish People to abandon the true faith." (Ib., pp. 908, 997) This 'purging' is an act which is similar to divine Creation as recorded in *Genesis*, for Creation also rested upon an act of separation and division (viz. between light and dark, or between sea and land, etc.).

Almost at the last page, Kahane affirmatively refers to the book of *Numbers* 25, 1-18. Here we find a narrative in which a man called Pinchas zealously kills another Israelite man who neglects God's prohibition to "yoke" with foreign idolaters: "Who shall rise up like Pinchas and, spear in hand, execute zealous judgment against the alien culture and abominable concepts which have destroyed the uniqueness, holiness and separateness of the chosen, supreme people?" (Ib., p. 996) I mention this reference to the (not so well-known) Pinchas story because in his book *The Secular Outlook*, the Dutch legal philosopher Paul Cliteur extensively dwells on it. Cliteur takes the Pinchas story to be paradigmatic for the risks of both organized and unorganized religion. It should be noted, though, that the adopted stance in Cliteur's rejection of religious influence is the state's, and the perspective taken is the *raison d'état*.⁶

Buber versus Kahane

Let us take stock of what have hitherto seen.

First, Kahane, by repeating Ezekiel's prophecy and actualizing it, claims for himself *prophetic* vision ('the end-time is near'). Buber's account, on the other hand, is a narrative. Although Buber's sympathy clearly lies with Yehudi's existential account, at least some weight is given to other positions simply by rendering them at some length. One could say that the chronicle's narrative character makes its 'argument' far more *cautious*. But even if we would fully identify Buber's position with Yehudi's, we must realize that Buber seems to make any actualization of the prophecy dependent on man's *repentance* and his or her *preparation* for God's coming. This complicates

any prophecy, in Buber, as it cannot be predicted in principle. (Buber, 2009, p. 213; trans., p. 231)

Next, both Buber and Kahane put apocalyptic weight on Jewish repentance. In Buber, repentance implies a *personal* activity, in Kahane it also entails a (violent) *collective* purging of the land of Israel from alien residents.

Thirdly, in Buber, God's kingdom will not come without repentance; in Kahane, it will come anyhow, albeit "in its time", with a lot of suffering and violence, and a final war with Gog.

Fourthly, Buber takes into account a *psychological* or *existential* level, which makes his 'argument' in my view stronger than Kahane's: fighting evil, so Buber's suggestion goes, *may* ultimately contribute to this very evil itself.

Fifthly, in Kahane, repentance requires separation and elimination of evil, or (sic!) foreign elements (mark the equation of 'evil' and 'foreign'). This procedure is given a religious dimension (God's creation also rests upon a separation etc).

Finally, in Buber, repentance requires an *assumption* of the 'evil', the 'alien' or the 'foreign'. They must all be "seized by the drive of the soul" (*vom Schwung der Seele ergriffen*) and brought to a full decision. (Buber, 1952, p. 93) If we would apply this Buberian precept to Israeli-Palestinian peace process (which is not impossible, as Buber himself was very concerned with this process during his lifetime): Israelis should persevere in trying to *entice* Palestinians to a common decision for peace.

Conclusive remarks

So we have two extremely opposed approaches of the Gog end-time prophecy. Buber (supposed we can identify his position with Yehudi's) internalizes Gog by equating it to the *jezer hara* or the evil inclination each human is endowed with. By doing so, he de-historicizes the prophecy, or at least, he brings predicted violent apocalyptic scenarios more or less within human reach. A similar approach we find, as a matter of fact, in Franz Rosenzweig's *Stern der Erlösung*: "Eternity, that is to say, must be hastened [*beschleunigt*], it must always be capable of coming as early as "today"; only through it is it eternity. If there is no such force, no such prayer that can hasten the coming of the Kingdom, then it does not come

⁶ Cliteur, 2010, 105-108 and *passim*. Cf. "It is clear that this attitude and the whole worldview connected with it is hard to reconcile with modern freedom of religion, freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, free inquiry and other fundamental rights ingrained in the concept of liberal democracy." (107)

eternally, but—eternally does not come.” (Rosenzweig, 1990, 1921, p. 321; trans., p. 306)

Kahane also brings them within human reach, but to a certain degree only. Final redemption will come at any rate, preferably “in haste” (if the Jews but repent), otherwise it will come “in its time”, unpredictably and beyond human interference. The last option, so we have seen, enhances a final battle with Gog, accompanied by a huge suffering.

Another interesting element is that Kahane only addresses the Jewish people, whereas Buber is at least ambiguous here. Of course, the *Gog und Magog* chronicle contains discussions between Jewish rabbis, but the reminiscences of these dialogues in Buber’s *Bilder von Gut und Böse*, especially of Yehudi’s views, suggest the possibility that these views apply just as well to mankind as such. Buber’s mystical, existentializing and psychologizing approach enabled him to enlarge his scope. One may remind Buber’s famous conversations with Carl Rogers, the famous psychotherapist, on therapeutic dialogues.⁷ While the non-Jewish reader of Kahane will all too easily find himself in the position of ‘Gog’, (s)he will be more able to positively acknowledge the Buberian struggle with an inward ‘Gog’.

One could emphasize here a certain incommensurability between both Jewish thinkers. While Buber has assembled pre-War materials from Hasidic traditions, Kahane is a post-holocaust author whose main drives are the *concrete* possibility that peoples of the world *can* unite and be relatively successful in eradicating millions of Jews. He is aware that the terrifying phenomenon of historical anti-Semitism can lead to much more than ‘limited’ pogroms; much worse, that not even the recent holocaust, nor the creation of the State of Israel, have not been enough to put an end to persecution of Jews once and for all. Against Buber, Kahane would probably argue that a generalization or a psychologization of Jewish morality runs the risk of neglecting a profound ‘exteriority’ inherent to the Jewish people. The Jewish people have a special, world historical role to play in history that cannot be fully ‘mastered’ philosophically, psychologically, not even mystically.

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Buber, 1997. Cf. “there is not as we generally think *eh* in the soul of a man good and evil opposed. There are —*eh*, there is again and again in different manners a polarity, and the poles are not good and evil, but rather [4.2] yes and no, rather *eh* acceptance and *eh* refusal. [...] And we can strength-, we can strengthen, we can help him strengthen, the one positive [...] pole. [...] And even, perhaps, we can strengthen the force of direction in him because this polarity is very off, *uh* often directionless. It is a chaotic *eh* state. We could bring in a cosmic note into it. *Eh*, we can help put order, *eh*, put a shape into this. *Eh*, because I think the good, or what we may call the good, is always only direction. [...] Not a substance.” Op. cit., 84f.

Kahane’s arguments here are as strong as the historical evidence of the Jewish people is. They lack, however, philosophical or psychological evidence. Buber’s insights, on the other hand, rest upon the latter. This does only give them a harder time than Kahane if one would take empirical or rational consciousness as a sole basis for normativity. However, it is essential for Buber that this be avoided, as such a form of consciousness (which is so dominant in today’s ‘scientific’ worldviews) may itself be subservient to an inner ‘Gog’. If this is the case, an inner ‘purification’ and ‘struggle’ are the only condition upon which Buber’s argument can be ‘tested’.

Is it relevant that Buber’s materials are pre-holocaust based and that they have been collected prior to the establishment of the State of Israel? I don’t think so. Not only did Buber first publish his Hasidic tales in ‘Israel’ in 1941, after having escaped Nazi-Germany; not only did he publish the German original a few years later. He even proceeded to give their subject matter a more ‘doctrinal’ form in his *Bilder von Gut und Böse* published in 1952. Moreover, his post-war efforts to reconcile Israel with Germany, and his laboring for a peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Arab Israelis testify to the weight his approach of Gog had for him, despite the holocaust.

In this article I have tried to present two extreme interpretations of one and the same apocalyptic end-time prophecy. Such prophecies also exist in other religious traditions, in which they receive equally opposite interpretations. It is my hypothesis that an explanation of these oppositions is not altogether unfamiliar to the one proposed in this article. For I think that, just as the metaphysical basis of end-time war may be said to lay *within* the human mind, the metaphysical basis of inner war of the human mind can be said to lay *outside*; they mutually presuppose each other. Furthermore, should one wish to speculate on the identity of an end-time Prince of Evil, of any such Prince, it would be my claim that the truth value of these speculations is to be *experienced* in the defeat of ‘apocalyptic’ enemies (i.e. “enemies that tend to destroy defenseless people”); it cannot be ‘rationally’ argued for. Finally, the previous claim entails another hypothesis (which I cannot elaborate here), according to which the ‘apocalyptic’ may be a *repetitive* structure, the apocalyptic end-time war repeating itself time and again, *probably* with increasing intensity and on an increasing scale.

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