

## Article

# Discovering the Depths Within: Kook's Zionism and the Philosophy of Life of Henri Bergson

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**Abstract:** This article reexamines Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook's (1865–1935) approach to Zionism, by proposing a reading of Kook's Zionism through the lens of the *Lebensphilosophie* (The Philosophy of Life) of the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941). I show that we can clarify Kook's view of freedom, the self and creativity and its essential connection to Zionism, therefore, proposing a new understanding of the meaning that Jewish nationalism assumes in Kook's thought, thanks to the application of the model of freedom and creativity developed by Bergson to Kook's writings. Especially for Kook, I show that Jewish nationalism is seen as a means for the Jewish People to return to their true self and through this connection attain true freedom. Only when a nation realizes its freedom by a return to its own original self, it can be creative. This is how I explain the connection that Kook draws between a return to the Land of Israel and the ability of Israel as a people to finally be able to be creative. Finally, I argue that this understanding of nationalism adds a new layer to the essential place that the territory assumes in Kook's thought. A State of Israel outside its original land can attain the goal of autonomous self-governance but lacks the ability to inspire the reconnection of the nation to its own original self. The Jewish People as a collective cannot connect to their authentic self away from the Land of Israel, consequently, the Land of Israel is the only place in which they can be truly free.

**Keywords:** Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook; Henri Bergson; religious Zionism; Jewish nationalism; *Lebensphilosophie*; philosophy of life; freedom; creativity; authentic self; Land of Israel; Jewish settlements



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## 1. Introduction

In the following pages, I reexamine Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook's (1865–1935) approach to Zionism. I propose a reading of Kook's Zionism through the lens of the *Lebensphilosophie* (The Philosophy of Life)<sup>1</sup> of the French philosopher Henri Bergson.<sup>2</sup> I show that thanks to the application of the model of freedom and creativity developed by Henri Bergson to Kook's writings, we can clarify Kook's enigmatic and aphoristic view of freedom, the self and creativity and its essential connection to Jewish nationalism, therefore, proposing a new understanding of the meaning that Jewish nationalism assumes in Kook's thought.

Kook was a theologian, mystic, and celebrated Jewish legal scholar who has been widely recognized as the most significant representative of religious Zionism, an ideology that combines Zionism with Orthodox Judaism.<sup>3</sup> His thought influenced the spiritual world of thousands of believing Jews, and, after the Six Day War, when the settlement boom in the Land of Israel began, also indirectly influenced the world of thousands of secular Jews (Lanir 2015; Gellman 1995, pp. 276–90).

The Zionism Religious movement, in light of its settlement enterprise, is often considered a fundamentalistic movement, which believes its rights to the Land of Israel derive from its being God's promised land and see the State of Israel as an embodiment of God's reign. Kook's reading in the context of the philosophy of life of Henri Bergson shows that

this is not the whole story and that for Kook the Land of Israel is the only place where a return to our true national self is possible and where true freedom and profound creativity can be attained.

This article wants to reflect on the profound theological and metaphysical roots of the settlement movement through a deep understanding of both its ideological and theological historical foundations and the philosophies of one of its forefathers'.

## 2. Nationalism as a Return to the Self

Kook wrote before the proclamation of the Israeli state, during the formation of the Zionist movement, and was engaged with questions connected to Zionism—secular and religious, especially after moving to Israel in 1904.<sup>4</sup> Most of his ideas on Jewish nationalism are conveyed in his edited book *Orot*<sup>5</sup> and in a few essays written before moving to Israel, known as the “Peles” essays: *Teudat Israel VeLeumiota* (1901), *Ezot MiRahok* (1902), and *Afikim BaNegev* (1903).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, after moving to Israel, he wrote the famous essay *The Course of Ideas in Israel* (1912) (*למה לְהִיאָה בִּשְׂרָאֵל*). His ideas were also conveyed throughout his personal diaries and letter exchanges.<sup>7</sup> In these works, Kook dealt with the problem of the relationship of orthodox Jews to secular Zionism, the uniqueness of the Jewish People and the Jewish Land,<sup>8</sup> the personal and universal goals of the Jewish People,<sup>9</sup> and Judaism and the Jewish State and the redemption it will bring to the world.<sup>10</sup> Many academic works dealt with all of these issues and aspects of Kook’s Zionism. To date, no studies have specifically examined the interconnection between nationalism, freedom, the self, and creativity in Kook’s thought, and their centrality to his understanding of Zionism, therefore, missing a fundamental aspect of his religious Zionist worldview. In the following pages, employing Bergson’s thought as a methodological tool, I attempt to fill this lacuna and I examine the deep meaning and value that Kook attributes to a return to the Land of Israel and the establishment of a Jewish State.

## 3. A Bergsonian Reading of Kook

There is disagreement among scholars about the sources of influence for Kook’s thought.<sup>11</sup> Some argue that it was largely influenced by European philosophy,<sup>12</sup> while others claim that it can only be understood through Kabbalistic writings.<sup>13</sup> A third perspective suggests that both Kabbalah and contemporary Western philosophy played important roles in shaping Kook’s thought (Ish Shalom 1993, p. 5; Ben Nun 2014; Ben Shlomo 1989; Rosenberg 1976).

This research takes the middle position, recognizing the influence of both Kabbalistic and Jewish religious writings and the contemporary philosophical context on Kook’s ideas. It acknowledges that it is impossible to deny the impact of Kabbalistic and Jewish religious writings on his literary production, but, also, notes that he was a man of his time who was aware of and influenced by modern philosophical ideas and trends.

This article primarily focuses on using Bergson’s philosophy of life as an interpretive tool for understanding Kook’s view of nationalism from a philosophical perspective, but it does not suggest that this should be considered the sole or even the most significant source of Kook’s thought. Therefore, while Kabbalah remains a crucial tool and backdrop for comprehending Kook’s thought, this paper demonstrates that other, Western philosophical sources can aid in making sense of and organizing Kook’s views, and highlights the integration of Kabbalah with modern Lebensphilosophical ideas.

Since Kook systematically negated and downplayed the influence of Western culture and philosophy on his thought, we must seek out indirect evidence of his connection to western sources. In 1912, Aharon Kaminka (1866–1950)<sup>14</sup> wrote about Kook that “the French philosopher Henri Bergson certainly does not know that there is a devout rabbi in Palestine who in his Hebrew essays came very close to his philosophy.”<sup>15</sup> Kaminka, thus, pointed out the shared characteristics between the writings of Kook and Bergson and informed Kook of these overlapping themes. David Cohen also compared the thought of

the two philosophers in the introduction to Kook's edited work *Orot HaKodesh*, arguing that Kook's views on continuous development and the modern concept of "creative evolution" align with those of Bergson. It seems that the two discussed Bergson's ideas together, potentially allowing Kook to gain knowledge of Bergson's thought from David Cohen.<sup>16</sup>

Ish Shalom (1993, p. 77) has noted the geographical proximity of Bergson and Kook during World War I. Kook may have read some of Bergson's writings during his time in Europe, as the latter was extremely popular both in French and in international circles (Goudge 1949, pp. 9–10).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Bergson was a famous figure not only in Western circles but also in Eastern ones. According to Evlampiev and Matveeva (2021) at the beginning of the 20th century, "in Russia, Bergson's philosophical thoughts were in high demand and just as popular as in Europe; no Western thinker after Friedrich Nietzsche provoked such incredible attention". The echoes of Bergson's popular ideas could, therefore, have also reached Kook through Eastern European channels from which he came.

It is also possible that Kook encountered Bergson's ideas through articles and discussions in Hebrew or Yiddish, as Bergson's philosophy was widely discussed in periodicals such as *Hazfira*, *Tchia*, *Haivri*, *Hashiloach*, *Hazman* and *Hazvi*<sup>18</sup> between 1904 and 1919. We know as a fact that Kook read some of these journals.<sup>19</sup> Kook himself published his famous work "The Course of Ideas in Israel" in the journal *Haivri* in 1911.

Another example of Kook's involvement with the periodicals of the time is the testimony of Kook's son, Rabbi Zvi-Yehuda Kook, who argued in a letter to Brenner that Kook's two articles 'Knowledge of God' and 'Service of God', which conclude *Ikvei Hatzon* (1906), were inspired by and written as a response to one of Hermann Cohen's lectures (Cohen 1904, pp. 357–67), which was translated into Hebrew and published in the *Hashiloach*.<sup>20</sup> Since an important essay on Bergson, written by Hugo Bergman, was also published in the *Hashiloach* in 1912, and Kook's only direct reference to Bergson in his written works can be found in his fourth notebook, which was written after 1912 and after Bergman's essay, it is possible that Kook may have learned about Bergson's ideas, among other things, through this article.<sup>21</sup>

The passage in which Kook refers to Bergson also allows us to gain insight into the place of the French philosophers in Kook's thought. In the passage, Kook juxtaposes the ideas of Spinoza<sup>22</sup> and Bergson, suggesting that both philosophers approached profound truths about existence, yet, ultimately, fell short. Moreover, E.M. Lifschitz records a conversation in which Kook, likely in the context of this passage, utilizes the *Tikkunei Zohar*'s terms "mekatsets ba-net'iot" and "kofer ba-'ikkar" in reference to Spinoza and Bergson, respectively. (Shragai 1986, p. 146) Given our understanding of the centrality of Spinoza to Kook, it is reasonable to infer that he viewed Bergson as a significant and important philosopher.

Finally, Lebensphilosophical ideas were popular and widespread among the Zionists of Kook's time, as noted at length by Yotam Hotam (2013, pp. 92–97), and Kook might have been exposed to them from the writings of Zionist thinkers such as Brenner, Buber, Berdichevsky, Gordon and others.

In addition to the historical connection, several 20th century scholars have identified significant similarities between the philosophies of Bergson and Kook (Bergmann 1968; Orbach 1970, pp. 43–46; Gross 2012, p. 3; Ben Shlomo 1988, pp. 257–74; Ben Shlomo 1990, pp. 20–50, 62–72, 134, 139; Ben Shlomo 1981, pp. 289–309; Ross 2016, pp. 41–85). Moreover, Smadar Sherlo (1999, pp. 107–8) has observed Kook's growing interest in and engagement with the philosophy of life and discourse, including the ideas of Bergson, following his move to Palestine and with the composition of *Arpilei Toar* in 1912.

In a previous article (Amati forthcoming), I have examined the intersection between the concepts of freedom, the self, God and creativity in Kook's thought, exploring his use of these concepts through the lens of the philosophy of life of Bergson, and employing his philosophy as an exegetical tool for their interpretation. In this article, I wish to show that the application of this metaphysical/ethical model of freedom, the self and creativity, to Kook Zionists' views, can enlighten and endow them with a more profound meaning. I

now shortly summarize Kook's approach to freedom as a return to the self as it is explained at length in my article, I then show how the same model that is found on the individual level can be applied to the national one.

#### 4. Freedom as Effort and Return to the Self

Two of the most important concepts in Bergson's *Lebensphilosophie* are those of duration and the *élan vital* (the vital impetus or vital force).<sup>23</sup> His understanding of freedom rests on these concepts. The French philosopher argues that life as perceived internally and intuitively—rather than rationally and spatially—is duration, a constant and dynamic flow in which everything, both within and outside of our consciousness, is constantly changing and interconnected; past, present and future overlap each other and perpetual movement and change prevail. Time is not linear, but, rather, past, present and future overlap and there is constant movement and change. The *élan vital* is the fundamental principle behind this ongoing growth and duration, and it is the source of life for all that exists. It is the original, vital power that lies at the beginning of the universe and is a form of authentic and free creation.<sup>24</sup> In a later work, the *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson names this primordial source, the *élan vital*, God (or God's direct emanation), therefore, underlining its divine character. (TSMR 220).<sup>25</sup>

According to Bergson, freedom arises from the concepts of duration and the vital force, or *élan vital*. He asserts that the unpredictable flow of the *élan vital*, which is the source of all creation, leads to unpredictability in life. However, humans are not inherently free, and acts of freedom are exceptional and the self that is free is rare. This is because most of our actions are automatic and driven by habits, social conventions, and inertia (TFW 231). Instead, to encounter our deep selves and truly be free, Bergson argues that we need to transcend the spatial and artificial perception of the self, overcome unconscious patterns of behavior, reconnect with the fundamental source of life, and act in accordance with our true and deep inner selves (TFW 231–2). Moreover, freedom can have different levels. The more we are in harmony with our own self, the more our choices fuse with our whole character, and the more we are free (TFW 166).

It is possible to conceptualize a notion of freedom that takes into account degrees of freedom if we understand freedom as a product of effort. Freedom is not a binary concept, as it is often portrayed in liberal views, where one is either free or not free. Instead, freedom can be seen as the result of the life force's efforts to overcome its opposite material tendency, which on the human level is manifested as habits.

As shown in my previous article, Kook's conception of life and freedom becomes much clearer in light of Bergson's model of freedom.<sup>26</sup> Kook agrees that life is dynamic and permeated by incessant movement and a never-ending stream.<sup>27</sup> He repeatedly refers to life as a continuous flow and as "wet" and "thirsty."<sup>28</sup> This eternal movement and vital flow that is at the origin of everything is called "ratzon" (will) by Kook, and is identified with God. According to Kook, the divine will is completely unrestricted and permeates all aspects of the world, including both living and non-living things. These objects are infused with the divine will to varying degrees of awareness and are, therefore, internally free.<sup>29</sup> They all aspire for a complete reunion with the original source of life and, therefore, with God, which is absolute freedom. He states that the human 'will' is a small part of the overall 'will' of being, which is the will of God. Since God's will is completely free, there is also a spark of free will present in humans.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, to Kook, our will is derived from and connected to the will of God, which is completely free. As a consequence, our will also has the potential to be completely free. Regarding human beings, Kook distinguishes between freedom and slavery, which again evokes Bergson's thoughts. He claims that not all human beings attain the same degree of freedom, and some individuals may still be in a state of slavery.<sup>31</sup> To Kook, freedom means being faithful to our innermost self.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, the "spirit of slavery"<sup>33</sup> is characterized by the conflict between the content of our life and the inner self, and by the influence of social habits and conventions.

For both thinkers, there is a close connection between the concepts of “freedom” and the “self”. Kook agrees with the French philosopher that not everyone and everything in the world is equally free and that there are different levels of freedom—both among different beings and among different individuals—and the world did not yet attain a level of complete freedom.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, both Bergson and Kook agree that through a connection to our true self and, therefore, through a free act, we reconnect to what is for Kook, the “spiritual quality of God’s image” and to Bergson, the real essence of the *élan vital*, the original divine principle. Here, Kook is expanding on the kabbalistic model of the identification between repentance (return to a previous state free of sin), freedom (Binah) and return to the divine in Bergsonian and modern terms.<sup>35</sup>

### 5. Freedom as Creativity

The two thinkers link together the idea of creativity with the idea of freedom. According to both philosophers, one of the highest expressions of freedom is creativity. Freedom does not mean simply becoming who you are and to return to your true self for Bergson. Bergson is a philosopher who trusts dynamism, and, to him, there is no such thing as a crystalized self to which we go back. Rather, we reinvent ourselves incessantly.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, by reconnecting to ourselves, we recreate ourselves.

Therefore, self-creation is necessary for freedom to exist. Creativity, invention and creation are the most genuine expressions of our true selves, and, for this reason, actions that are creative are also free. When we act from our authentic selves, we are *always* creative because we are acting in an unpredictable manner. In the act of creation, we not only connect to our authentic selves, but we also merge with the primal source, the *élan vital*, whose essence is creation. In this sense, a creative act is a free act. This is the connection that Bergson makes between creativity and freedom. Being creative means being one’s true self, and expressing one’s true self means expressing freedom.

Kook also argues that the manifestation of our inward soul and complete freedom can be found in what he defines as “original thought”, i.e., in creativity and originality. Nevertheless, the connection between freedom and creativity is articulated elusively. Kook writes: “The intrinsic inwardness of the soul, thinking, living a true spiritual life, must have absolute inner freedom. Her freedom is *her life*, gained through *her original thought* that is her inward glimmer, enkindled and burning by study and reflection, but this essential spark is the basic element of idea and thought”. (OH”K I, 175) (Translated in ([Ish Shalom 1993](#), p. 116).)

By applying our reading of Bergson to Kook, it emerges that, for the Rabbi, only by performing out of “original thought”, i.e., out of creativity—can we truly blend with our authentic self and the inner spark of God and, therefore, with the freedom that is hidden inside ourselves. In other words, acting creatively means acting in conformity to our true self and, therefore, freely. “The free soul is a creative soul”,<sup>37</sup> Kook states, and its creativity cannot be restricted.<sup>38</sup> Creativity, then, is not an *expression of freedom*, but, rather, creativity *is* freedom. This is because, only when we are really free, truly blended with our deep self, only then can we be creative; only then can we merge with the free and infinite divine will of life and actually be free. Equally, only by being creative can we rejoin our true self and enact our freedom. Freedom is an unceasing act of creation.

### 6. From the Individual to the National

I wish now to extend the Bergsonian model of freedom, the self and creativity depicted above from the individual level to the national one.<sup>39</sup> I claim that the concepts of freedom, the return to the self, creativity and nationalism are strongly interconnected and that Kook’s view of nationalism is grounded in his metaphysical and ethical understanding of freedom, examined in the previous section.

In the nationalistic conceptions of the nineteenth century, national and political freedom was associated with freedom from a foreign sovereign and was seen as a movement

that supports the interests of a certain nation (Smith 2013; James 1996), particularly intended to acquire and uphold the nation's sovereignty, i.e., its self-governance, self-rule, and independence over its homeland to create a state. For Kook, Jewish nationalism is different from this republican–liberal western view (Hammersley 2020). In contrast to the ideas of other radical Zionists (See for example: (Ben Yehuda 1943) see also (Klausner 1978, pp. 110–12; Hevlin 2001, chap. 6).), he believes that the goal of Jewish nationalism should not merely be to achieve emancipation and normality for the Jewish People and normalization of the Jewish condition in the reconstituted homeland (Ben Nun 1991, p. 193; Yaron 1974, p. 233). To him, Jewish nationalism is qualitatively different from other kinds of nationalism as it cannot be detached from religion and God as the “Jewish People are linked essentially to the soul (*הנשׁה*) of *Knesset Israeli* and cannot break this connection, even if they wished to.”<sup>40</sup> Kook writes explicitly that the divine actually remains fully imbued in us, even when we think we can completely detach ourselves from God and his spirit. This argument is connected to his Messianic orientation, which saw the modern world’s combination of exceptional material advancement and spiritual deterioration as potential indicators of its Messianic nature. Through this Messianic perspective, Kook justified heresy and secularism as part of this process of redemption (Ravitzky 1996):

The *ruach* (spirit) of the nation<sup>41</sup> that awoke now, which many of those who hold it say they do not need the *ruach* of God, if they could really establish such a national *ruach* in Israel, they would have represented the nation in a state of defilement and destruction. However, what they will they do not know themselves. So connected is the *ruach* of Israel with the *ruach* of God that even he who says that does not need the *ruach* of God, since he says that he desires the *ruach* of Israel, still the divine *ruach* is present in the heart of his point of aspiration even against his will. The individual can detach himself from the source of life; not so the nation, *Knesset Israel*, as a whole. Therefore, all the possessions of the nation that are beloved to him from the aspect of the national *ruach*, all of them are suffused by the divine *ruach*: her land, language, history, costumes. (SH”K vol. 1, 71)

The scholar Zvi Yaron underlines Kook’s perception of Jewish nationalism as unique and different from the nationalism of other nations. He writes that for Kook: “Religion penetrates Jewish nationalism and gives it a holy meaning, to the point that the general term “nationalism” does not fit it. Against the secular zionist trends in Zionism, which demands that Israel be a people like all the nations and the Land of Israel be a land like all the lands, Zionist theology comes and interprets what is special about the Jewish national gathering and Israel’s ties with its country”. (1979, pp. 234–35) Assuming, therefore, that there is something more profound in Kook’s nationalism than simply a normalization of the Jewish situation and that Zionism is tightly connected with God, still, a question remains open: what is so unique in Jewish nationalism? What will the Jewish People achieve through a return to their land?<sup>42</sup>

In this article, I claim that the Jewish People’s return to the land of Israel can endow them with something more than sovereignty and independence. The return to the land of Israel will endow the Jewish People with *true freedom*. The freedom achieved by Jewish nationalism—as in, our discussions above regarding the freedom of the individual self—is not the freedom to make decisions, and its goal is not the merely social and political emancipation of the Jews as a nation. Rather, it assumes the meaning of a return to the national original self and is intrinsically connected with God and creativity. Only in the Land of Israel will the Jewish People reconnect to their own true nature, identity and destiny and will, therefore, be free in the Bergsonian—and Kookian—sense of the term. In this sense, for the Zionist Rabbi, Jewish nationalism becomes the condition for the Jewish People to attain freedom in the metaphysical meaning explored in the previous sections that is not simply freedom to make decisions, but, rather, the freedom to act out of the authentic and

original self that is found deep inside each individual and that was—because of the life in the Diaspora—forgotten by the Jewish nation.<sup>43</sup>

I claim, moreover, that this return to the self is associated—as in the model depicted above—with creativity. Only when a nation attains its freedom by a return to its own original self, it can be creative. This is how I explain the connection that Kook draws between a return to the Land of Israel and the ability of Israel as a people to finally be able to be creative and to create an exemplary society that will bring redemption not only to Israel but to the entire world.

Finally, I argue that this understanding of nationalism adds a new layer to the essential place that the territory assumes in Kook's thought. The State of Israel outside its original land can attain the goal of autonomous self-governance but lacks the ability to inspire the reconnection of the nation to its own original self. The Jewish People as a collective cannot connect to their authentic and true self away from the Land of Israel, consequently, the Land of Israel is the only place in which they can be really free. Let us examine these claims step by step.

## 7. Nationalism as a Return to the Self

The fact that Jewish nationalism is substantially different from other forms of nationalism is expressed by Kook clearly. In an important passage, he argues that there is something special in the Jewish State that cannot be achieved by any other national state, i.e., ultimate felicity. He writes:

האושר העליון (האושר העליון). This can be said of an ordinary state, which has no greater value than a huge corporation (חברת אחראיות גدول), where the multitude of ideas that are the living crown of humanity float above it and do not touch it. That is not the case with a state that is founded on the ideal, and imprinted in its being with the supreme ideal content that is truly the supreme felicity for the individual. Such a state is truly the highest on the ladder of felicity, and such a state is our state, the State of Israel, the foundation of God's throne in the world, whose only aim is that God be one and his Name one, which is indeed the highest felicity. (Israel VeTechiat 20).<sup>44</sup>

Ultimate felicity (האושר העליון) cannot be achieved by other nations as they merely see in their nation state, "חברת אחראיות גدول", i.e., a place which merely worries about the individual interests of its citizens.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, the Jewish State endows the concept of nationalism with a much higher meaning. Through it, the deep divine unity that pervades all that exists will be finally revealed and recognized, and a direct connection between the Jewish People and the divine will—will be established. It is this connection that will bring true happiness to the individual.

As we have seen earlier through the help of the Bergsonian model as an interpretative tool, Kook identifies—on the individual level—between the divine source and a return to the self. This is because our true self is embedded and completely part of the divine. The above passage already hints that the profound meaning of the Jewish State is that, through its establishment, the Jewish People will be able to deeply reconnect with the divine and, therefore, with their authentic self and truly be happy and fulfilled. In the following passage, it becomes clear that, as in the metaphysical model of freedom, also at the Theopolitical level the return to the national self coincides with a return to God. Kook describes explicitly the importance for the Israeli nation to return to its true self and the divine source within it, and to liberate itself from strange influences:

The hour has arrived; the light of the world, the light of the true God, the light of the God of Israel, revealed by His Nation, a wondrous Nation, *must be revealed in consciousness*, and the recognition *must come to the [Israel] Nation from within*, and *[the nation must] recognize the unity of her talents, recognize God who rests within her*. When she [the nation] will recognize that there is a God within her, she will understand how to *tap the spring of her life*, she will know how to orient her

redemptive vision to her essential source. *She is not called to draw from foreign wells but rather to tap her depths.* She will draw will from the depth of her prayer, life from the well of her Torah, strength from the root of her faith, organization from the straightness of her mind, courage from the fortitude of her spirit. (*Orot Hamilchama* 9).<sup>46</sup>

This passage clearly illustrates that Zionism is not just a national liberation movement for Kook, even if that is how it appears to its flag bearers; the secular pioneers which are anxious about security and economic issues and disregard the nature of the powerful force that stands behind their awakening. The Zionist movement is the movement that will allow the scattered people to discover the deep internal connection between them and the divine will, and, through this, will allow them to attain true freedom.<sup>47</sup> Through this reconnection to their true self and God, the Jewish People will not only renew their own nation and spirit but also the spirit and beliefs of other nations and humanity as a whole. Kook writes:

All the world's civilizations will be renewed *through the renewal of our spirit*, all opinions will be straightened, all life will glisten with the joy of rebirth at our emergence, all beliefs will don new clothes, will take off their dirty clothes and wear precious raiment, will abandon all the abominations in their midst, and unite to suckle from the dew of the lights of holiness, which were preestablished in the well of Israel for each nation and individual. (*SH"K* vol. 5, 64)

In another important passage, Kook reiterates that the return of each Jewish individual to their true self and the development of authentic and original ideas and imagination which are faithful to their true essence can only happen in the Land of Israel. He writes:

It is impossible for a Jew to be faithful to his thoughts and visions outside of the Land in the same way that he is faithful in the land of Israel. Manifestations of holiness, of whatever level, tend to be pure in the Land, and outside of the Land, mixed with dross. However, in relation to the longing and attachment of a person to the Land of Israel, his thoughts become purified by virtue of the "air of the Land of Israel that hovers all over who long to see her. (*Orot Eretz Israel* 4).<sup>48</sup>

It is with the return to Israel that, slowly, the Jewish People will rediscover their authentic self, their language, their unique morality, and knowledge. With the return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel says Kook:

The authentic (*ימצָע*) color of *Knesset Israel* is revealed, its powers develop, its wisdom returns to it, the potency, righteousness and inner purity, the nation is built up, eternal redemption, it blossoms with the glow of its majesty...The zeal of the people intensifies, its knowledge of its force increases. It *knows already that it has a land, that it has a language, a literature, that it has an army*—it began to know in this world war. Above all, *it knows that it has a special light of life*, which crowns it and crowns the entire world through it, and through all this together it knows its firmness that it has strength in the true God. (*Orot Ha-Milhama* 7).<sup>49</sup>

This rediscovery of the Jewish nation's essential self, its wisdom and true and authentic culture stands in opposition to what happens in exile and is a "Negation of Exile."<sup>50</sup> In the following passage, Kook refers to the exile of the Jewish People as a time of loss of the self and compares the diaspora quoted in the verse of Ezekiel to a time of estrangement from our true 'I'. This seems to imply that a return to Israel would bring about a return to the self as well. He writes:

Additionally, I am among the exiles (in the midst of the exile)" (*Ezekiel* 1:1), the inner, essential *I* of each person and of the community is truly revealed not only according to its holiness and purity, its supreme might, consumed in the pure illumination of sublime brightness burning within it. We have sinned as our fathers have, the sin of Adam, the first Man, who was *estranged from his essence*, who heeded the snake and *lost himself*, could offer no clear answer to the question, "Where art thou?" because he did not know his own mind, because he had lost

his true *I-ness* by his sin of bowing down to an alien god. Israel sinned—it went whoring after strange gods, deserted its own essence; Israel neglected the good. The Land sinned, denied her *selfhood*, sapped her own strength, pursuing aims and ends, did not devote all her hidden virtue to making the taste of the tree be as the taste of its fruit. She cast her eye outside of herself, taken up with fortunes and careers. She cursed the moon, lost her inner orbit, her contentment with her lot, began to dream of glorifying foreign kings. Additionally, thus the world *sinks ever deeper in loss of self*, of each and every individual and of the whole. (SH"K vol. 3, 24).<sup>51</sup>

Consequently, the return to Israel by the Jewish People is seen as a return to its real essence and is compared by Kook to a process of internal repentance (teshuva): "The awakening of the desire of the nation in general to return to its land, to its nature, to its spirit, to its character –truly, this striving contains within itself the light of repentance." (Orot Hatshuva 17:2) (Translated in [\(Kook 1968, p. 111\)](#)).

In the process of acknowledging its true self as a nation, the Jewish People need to acknowledge their uniqueness in relation to the rest of humanity. So again, Zionism is essential for the attainment by the Jewish People of a true knowledge of themselves. Kook writes:

A great mistake is the turning back from all of our advantage, the cessation of the recognition that, "You have chosen us". Not only are we different from all the peoples distinguished by historical life that has no comparison among other people and tongues, but we are also exalted and much greater than any people. *If we know our greatness, then we know ourselves, and if we forget our greatness, then we forget ourselves, and a people that forgets itself certainly is small and lowly.* Only when we forget ourselves do we remain small and low, and the forgetting of ourselves is the forgetting of our greatness. (Orot Ha-Tehiyah 5) (Translated in [\(Kook 1993, p. 144.\)](#))

In a different passage, Kook underlines the intrinsic connection between the national self and the individual self for the Jewish People. The nation is for the Jewish individual, the source of their individual spirit and the connection between the two—the individual and the nation—is unique to the Jewish People and cannot be found in any other nation. He writes:

The relation of *Knesset Israel* to its members is different from the relations of any other national group to its members. All national collectives give their members only the exterior aspect of their nature, but his essence each man draws from the universal soul, from the Divine Soul, without the mediation of the group, because the (national) group has no divine entity, meaning a divine tendency diffused in its midst. Not so in Israel, the *neshamah* (soul) of the individuals originates from the source of Eternal living in the collective, and the collective gives *neshamah* to the individuals. If he wishes to detach himself from the nation, he must detach his *neshamah* from its place of life; therefore the affinity of each individual Jew to the collective is great and he always sacrifices his life in order not to be torn from the totality, because the *neshamah* and its inner mending require this of him. (Orot Israel, Perek 2, 3) (Translated in [\(Yaron 1991, p. 234\)](#) with some changes made by me.)

Thus, if it is true that the return to our original self is necessary for the attainment of true freedom on both a personal and metaphysical level, I argue that Kook applies this same conception on a national level. *Knesset Israel*, but also each one of the Jewish People, can only attain true freedom once they return to their national authentic and true self, and this can happen only through the establishment of a Jewish State. On the opposite side, a state of exile is a state in which the Jewish People are estranged from their own self.

## 8. Creativity, the Self and Nationalism

In this political realm, the return to the self is not only associated with the freedom that is achieved by the Jewish People reconnecting as a nation to their true collective self. This return to the self is also associated—as in the Bergsonian model described earlier—with creativity. This is how we can explain the connection that Kook makes between a return to the Land of Israel and the ability of Israel to finally be able to be creative and to create an exemplary society that will bring redemption not only to the Jewish People but to humanity.<sup>52</sup>

We have seen that, for Kook, the individual is completely free when he reconnects to his own original self and to his divine inner source. When this happens, when the individual is really acting out of his own true self, they are creative. Creativity bursts out of true freedom, and there is no real freedom without creativity. The same model that is valuable at the individual level is applicable also at the level of the nation. Kook writes clearly that real creativity and creative actions can only develop and take place in the Land of Israel. Furthermore, on the contrary, the Jewish People outside of Israel are estranged from their own authentic self and are unable to be creative. In his own words:

An authentic (*יצירה עצמית*) Israeli creation, in the thought in life and action, is impossible for Israel only in the Land of Israel. In everything produced by Israel in the land of Israel, the universal soul is subsumed under *the unique self form of Israel*. (*הצורה העצמית המיוודה*) The sins that cause exile are the very ones that muddy the self-spring (*המעיין העצמי*) and the source emits impure issues “The Tabernacle of the Lord he defiled”. Additionally, when the unique self-source is destroyed, originality rises to the supernal portion Israel has in mankind. This is drawn upon in exile, and the land is laid waste and desolate and her destruction atones for her. The spring stops flowing and is little by little filtered and the manifestations of life and thought are emitted through the general conduit, which is spread throughout the globe, “As four winds of heaven I have scattered you”, until the impure oozing of the self stops and the power of the original source is restored to its purity. Then, the exile is detested and superfluous, and the universal light reverts to flowing from *the personal self-spring* (*מעיין העצמי הפרט*) in all its glory,...and “there is hope toward your end, said God, and the children will return to their borders”. Additionally, the creation of distinctive life in with all its light and particularity, drenched in the dew of the universal wealth of the “great man among giants”, the blessing of Abraham, reveals itself through this return. (*Orot Eretz Israel* 3).<sup>53</sup>

This creation is not just about creating a new society. It is a creation in the most humanist sense of the word and regards both the renewal and creation of the Torah, but, also, of arts, literature and other works that can be created in an authentic and deeply personal manner only with a return to the national territory and the end of exile. This kind of creation and creativity comes from our inner and authentic self, is unique and unpredictable, and, therefore, is completely free. The diaspora and its sins drove away the Jewish nation from its true self and, therefore, limited its ability to freely create. With a return to the Land of Israel, the Jewish People will reconnect to their national identity, reconnect to their true national self, and reestablish their creativity and originality.

Kook also makes a connection between the following of the *mitvot* (commandments) and acting in line with the “natural spirit,” i.e., with the inner self. He claims that the Jewish People, acting in line with God’s commandments, as a nation in the land of Israel will connect to their “natural spirit,” with new scientific inquiry and creativity naturally blossoming from this connection when this happens. This fulfillment of the Jewish Law as a collective and, therefore, the connection to the true self and the outburst of creativity can only happen if the Jewish People are reunited as a nation:

If she will adhere to the system that promotes the health of her natural spirit, namely the ways of Judaism in life, in the nation at large, officially and publicly,

and among individuals to the maximum that their education and psyches allow—then creativity and free inquiry will find in her midst a broad and secure environment.... The nation longs for the fulfillment of its character. *This fulfillment requires also free creativity and science in its fullest sense.* (Orot Ha-Tehiya 2).<sup>54</sup>

With this idea of a return to the land of Israel as a way to renew the Jewish creativity and culture, Kook's Zionism somewhat reminds us of the cultural secular Zionism of Ahad Ha'am who believed the main goal of the establishment of a Jewish State to be the development of a Jewish culture and a Jewish "spiritual center". Nevertheless, differently from Ahad Ha'am<sup>55</sup> secular's Zionism, according to Kook, the enhancement of creativity in the Jewish State will blossom naturally for the Jewish People—instead of happening through a programmed immigration of particular intellectuals in the land of Israel—by the reestablishment of a connection with their own original nature. Moreover, this creativity cannot truly burst in a secular context and will not develop in a secular state, rather, it will blossom out of our connection to the divine, which is achieved simultaneously with the Jewish nation's return to its own true self.

## 9. The Connection to the Territory

This understanding of Zionism as a way to endow the Jewish People with true freedom, which is, in turn, understood as a return to the real self, God and creativity adds a new layer to the essential place that the territory assumes in Kook's thought and later on in the ideology of political religious Zionism.<sup>56</sup> The Land of Israel, in fact, should not be settled only because it is the promised and sacred land of the Jewish People. Rather, from Kook's perspective, the return to the Land of Israel is strictly connected with the attainment of deep and internal freedom for the Jewish People. The State of Israel outside its original land can attain the goal of autonomous self-governance but lacks the ability to enhance the reconnection of the nation to its own *origins* and, therefore, to its own authentic original self. He writes:

The Land of Israel is not something external, not an external national asset, a means to the end of collective solidarity and the strengthening of the nation existence, physical or even spiritual. *The Land of Israel is an essential unit* עצמותית חטיבה (bound by the bond-of-life to the Nation, united by inner characteristics to its existence, החבוקה בסגולות פנימיות עם מציאותה). Therefore, it is impossible to appreciate the content of the sanctity of the Land of Israel and to actualize the depth of love for her by some rational human understanding. (Orot Eretz Israel 1).<sup>57</sup>

This passage shows that the Land of Israel is deeply connected to the true essence of the Jewish nation and to its existence.<sup>58</sup> The connection between the Jewish People and the land is not only instrumental but is a connection to the true self, the חטיבה עצומתית of the Jewish nation. Through the settlement of the Land of Israel, the true spirit and nature of the Jewish People will be awakened; Kook writes in a different passage:

The *Yishuv* (Settlement) in Israel will develop; the national home will be built. Out of it will blow a mighty spirit. The soul of the nation will be reawakened. *From the depth of its nature, it will recognize its essence.* With mighty strength, *it will establish its self life-patterns* (סדרי חייה העצמיים): the special spirit of the nation will establish the faith of the Lord God of Israel in the world, and it goes without saying, within her own midst. (Orot HaTehiyah 31) (Translated in (Kook 1993, p. 187)

The true value of the Land of Israel stands in its ability to allow the Jewish People to reconnect to their own authentic self in an intuitive and unmediated manner and, therefore, endow them with freedom. The true essence of the Jewish nation in its all its authenticity and colors cannot be expressed fully in a foreign country, and the pain of exile experienced by the Jewish People is caused by their inability to fulfill their true self. Kook writes:

The secrets of Torah bring the redemption and return to Israel to its land, for the Torah of Truth, with the strength of its inner logic, demands with its broadening the whole soul of the nation, and through it, the nation begins to feel the pain of Exile, and how *it is utterly impossible for its character to be actualized, as long as it is oppressed upon foreign soil.* (Orot HaTehiyah 64) (Translated in (Kook 1993, p 210). My italics.)

The true self of the Jewish People and the land are intertwined in Kook's thought: "The Land of Israel holiness (קדושת הארץ)<sup>59</sup> in its inherent uniqueness (סגולותיה הפנימית<sup>60</sup>) was matched by God with the *authentic and essential spiritual nature* (*הטבע הרוחני העצמי היסודי*) of the Jewish People" (Olot HaReya, 1, Psukei De Zimra, 54). There is complete harmony between the Land of Israel and the Jewish People both on a national and a personal individual level, and the Land of Israel adapts herself to the true essence of each individual of Israel. Kook writes: "The Land of Israel is suitable (מתאימה) for the *Knesset of Israel* as a whole, for its generations, forever and ever, and together with this, it is very suitable to the lives of all the individuals, of each individual of Israel, according to its value, according to its measure and essence of his own self (בעצמו)" (Olot HaReya, 1, Psukei De Zimra, 54). It is for this reason that the consideration of the Land of Israel only as an instrument for bringing back the Jewish People from the diaspora is not acceptable and is merely superficial:

The view of the land of Israel as only an external value serving as a cohesive force—even when it comes to serve a Jewish idea in the Diaspora, to preserve its identity and to strengthen faith, fear (of God) and observance of *mitzvot* (commandments)—bears no permanent fruit, for this foundation is shaky compared to the holy might of the Land of Israel. (Olot HaReya, 1, Psukei De Zimra, 54)

The holy might of the Land of Israel stands in the fact that a return to the true and authentic self can only take place if the Jewish People are found in their original territory. It is not possible for the Israeli nation to reconnect to its own original self away from the promised land of its forefathers. The return to the original land and territory is essential. It is this return to the territory and to the specific land of Israel that allows the Jewish People to reconnect to the "divine good in their midst and in the world". It is this connection that then enhances the creation and creativity of the Jewish nation. Therefore, the creativity of *Knesset Israel* is extremely connected to the land and cannot truly happen outside of it. Kook writes:

The divine good in her midst (=of the Jewish People) and in the world, which will be revealed through her complete dwelling in her *land*, is her ideal character. Free creation (*היצירה החופשית*) and progressive science are worthy adjuncts to their ideal character, but both of these will be capable to reaching their heights only if her sublime spirit is preserved in her midst according to her unique nature, which is beyond any human creation, science or vision—as heaven is loftier than earth, and the thoughts of God and his ways loftier of man and their ways. (Orot HaT-Tehiyah 2) (Translated in (Kook 1993, p. 149).)

The Land of Israel is the only place in which the Jewish People can attain true freedom. Kook expresses clearly that a desire for freedom is parallel to a desire to return to the Land of Israel:

In the nation at large *all desire of freedom* and longing of life (the life of the individual and the community), all hope of redemption flows only from the spring of life, in order to live full Israelite life without contradiction and constriction. *And this is the desire for the Land of Israel*, the holy soil, the Land of God, in which all the *mitzvot* (commandments) are actualized. (Orot Eretz Israel 9) (Translated in (Kook 1993, p. 94) with some changes.)

## 10. The Spontaneity of the Land of Israel

As we have seen above, a return to the self and a return to God are extremely interconnected in Kook's thought. When we return to our authentic self, we automatically

reconnect to the divine original source of all that exists. For Kook, in the Land of Israel, “divine abundance” (*השפעת האלוהי*) arises spontaneously and “the spiritual stream of the inner holiness” (*המעין הרוחני של פנימיות הקודש*) is revealed without the need for spiritual effort. On the contrary, outside of Israel, there is a need for deliberate human effort to attain it.<sup>61</sup>

This natural and spontaneous return to the divine source of all things, to God, I argue can only happen in the Land of Israel as it is only there that the Jewish People can naturally reconnect to their divine origins, their true self and God. In exile, the proper conditions for the emergence of spontaneous divine abundance and presence are absent, and this divine presence can only be found by the result of an effort. The Jewish People, in the Diaspora, are far from their true essence and God. On the contrary, in the Land of Israel the connection to the divine will is simple and direct and, thus, is the connection to the Jewish People’s true self and its uniqueness (*סגולות*): “As soon as the nation settles in the land it covets, all the unique virtues (*הפטולות*) will return to being established in their proper order, and the great spiritual property, which was accumulated throughout the days of exile” (SH”K vol. 7, 106)

This bond with the land of Israel is not only spontaneous but is also very different from the bond the other nations develop with the land. The bond of other nations is the result of a long experience, but the bond of the Jewish People with the land of Israel is immediate, similar to a revelation:<sup>62</sup>

Israel’s sacred bond with the Holy Land transcends the natural affection of other peoples for their countries that mirrors a long drawn-out historical process initiated by the settlement of a multitudes in a particular country. This generates a sense of identity fed by habit that eventually matures into a spiritual bond between the nation and its country. Not so is the divine holy connection of *Knesset Israel* with the holy desired land, flowered spontaneously “while you were few in number” even before entry into the Land, inspired by the transcendental and Celestial, in the hearts of ‘sojourners’, without a natural basis for this sensation, whose genesis was Divine”. (Olot HaReya, 1, Psukei De Zimra, 54).<sup>63</sup>

When the Jewish People go back to the Land of Israel, their special unique qualities (*סגולות*) will be finally revealed and will come back to life and “Israel’s pristine genius will manifest itself with the national spirit’s resuscitation in the revived Jewish homeland” (IG”R 3, 158).

## 11. Conclusions

I hope to have demonstrated in this article that certain aspects of Kook’s views on Jewish nationalism can be revised and better understood through the lens of Bergson’s philosophy of life, particularly with regard to the concepts of freedom, the self, and creativity at the national level. I have shown that both Bergson and Kook believe that the essence of life is freedom, and that this freedom is manifested through a deep connection to our inner selves and, by extension, to the original flow of life and God. In this sense, creativity becomes a central aspect of freedom for both thinkers, as it represents the ultimate expression of our inner selves and allows for the revelation of God and God’s freedom. I have argued that it is possible to understand something about the specific shade of Kook’s Zionism, the self, and creativity from this Bergsonian model of freedom. For Kook, the return to Israel and the self-determination of the Jewish People is not just a matter of political governance, but, rather, a return to the Jewish People’s deep and authentic national self, and, therefore, to God and freedom. In Israel, the Jewish People will reconnect to their true nature, identity and destiny and will become truly free. This connection to the self will then allow for the greatest expression of both individual and collective creativity and the final attainment of redemption. The Bergsonian model helped us, therefore, to systematize Kook’s view of freedom and to understand how the different aspects of nationalism, freedom, creativity, and the land are all harmoniously interconnected in his thought.

This theological framing of Kook’s views of Jewish nationalism and the return to the Land of Israel as a political action that allows freedom might bring the Israeli–Palestinian

conflict into a deterministic deterioration and a violent struggle whose solution cannot come from the Kookian current of religious Zionism. This is because, according to Kook's views, the settlement enterprise and the Gush Emunim movement are movements that do not merely aim to claim a hold on a 'sacred' territory but, rather, aim to achieve collective, national, and political freedom. The 'occupation' of the territories, if we understand Kook as I suggested above, is the only way to attain this freedom. If we have learned in the liberal tradition that freedom is the most essential need for human beings, then, understanding the Jewish settlements in Israel as a movement of freedom—and not only as a fundamental movement engaged with a certain interpretation of the scriptures—is the political explosive that Kook's theological view ensures us. It is one thing to conquer a stranger nation, but another thing to believe that you are fighting for the possibility of your own deep and internal freedom when conquering it.

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## Notes

- 1 For further readings on the *Lebensphilosophie* movement see ([Schnädelbach 1984](#), pp. 139–251; [Bianco 2019](#), pp. 153–75; [Fellmann 1993](#); [Albert 1995](#); [Große 1993](#); [Midgley 2013](#), pp. 161–85; [Lebovic 2013](#), pp. 1–21). For further readings on Zionism and the philosophy of Life and philosophy consider: ([Golomb 2002](#); [Sherlo 2002](#); [Hotam 2013](#); [Ellerin 1970](#)).
- 2 Bergson's work has recently gained renewed attention and has been studied in innovative and significant ways and also from a political and national perspective, see ([Lefebvre and White 2012](#); [Lefebvre 2013](#)).
- 3 Consider ([Ravitzky 1996](#); [De Lange and Freud-Kandel 2005](#)); On the use of Kook in Religious Nationalism today consider: ([Schwartz 2008](#); [Sagi and Schwartz 2018](#); [Gorenberg 2006](#); [Inbari 2012](#); [Inbari 2021](#), pp. 15–36).
- 4 As [Mirsky \(2021](#), pp. 234–77) notes Kook only payed little attention to question on nationalism in his pre-Jaffan thought.
- 5 ([Kook 1920](#)). On studies on the editing of the book *Orot* and the selective way in which the edited volumes in general were assembled consider ([Munitz 2008](#), pp. 125–70; [Avramovich 2007](#), pp. 121–52; [Meir 2005](#), pp. 163–247; [Rosenak 2007a](#), pp. 111–47) I use a number of abbreviations in the notes. When referring to Kook's works, SH"K, followed by the volume and paragraph number, stands for ([Kook 2004](#)); OH"K, followed by volume and page numbers, stands for ([Kook 1946](#)); IG"R, followed by volume and letter numbers stands for ([Kook 1961–1965](#)); A"T for (A. I. [Kook 1983](#)); Eder for ([Kook 1967](#)); Ma'amarei for ([Kook 1984](#)) All translations from Kook's works are mine unless stated otherwise. For Henri Bergson's books I use the following abbreviations: CE for ([Bergson 1911](#)) TFW for ([Bergson 1913](#)); TSMR for ([Bergson 1935](#)).
- 6 For further reading on the essay on Zionism written by Kook before moving to Israel consider: ([Goldman 1983](#), pp. 103–26; [Mirsky 2021](#), pp. 234–77).
- 7 For further readings on the essays written by Kook after moving to Israel and on the essay "The Course of Ideas in Israel" consider ([Goldman 1996](#), pp. 87–120; [Shtamler 2020](#), pp. 183–208; [Yaron 1974](#), pp. 285–323; [Gross 2012](#); Z. Y. [Kook 1983](#), pp. 214–27).
- 8 On Kook's views on the Jewish People as a unique nation consider: ([Garb 2004a](#), pp. 68–96; [Strassberg-Dayan 1995](#), pp. 102–6, 130–39, 188–93; [Yaron 1974](#), pp. 285–32; [Schwartz 2001](#), pp. 233–46). On the meaning of the role of the Jewish People in Kook's Halachic thought consider ([Rosenak 2007b](#), pp. 58–88).
- 9 On this issue consider ([Ben Nun 1991](#), pp. 207–55; [Belfer 1995](#), pp. 257–76).
- 10 For further studies on Kook and Jewish nationalism consider ([Warren 1995](#), pp. 290–301; [Ross 1995](#), pp. 301–30; [Lanir 2015](#); [Schwartz 1997](#), pp. 62–80). On Zionism and redemption consider ([Schatz-Uffenheimer 1978](#), pp. 211–22). On Kook "militarism" consider ([Ben-Pazi 2017](#), pp. 256–78).
- 11 For an extensive review of this debate, see ([Sternberg 2018](#), pp. 537–61, at 537–42) and for a well-done mapping of this debate into three different categories of Kook as a philosopher, as a mystic, and as a figure occupying a position in between, consider ([Pachter 2001](#)) Mirsky claims there is a forth category, that of the study of Halacha see ([Mirsky 2021](#), p. 13). Consider also

- (Bindiger 2021, pp. 182–83). There are some slight differences between my classification of the authors included in each of the three camps and that of Pachter’s and Bindiger’s.
- <sup>12</sup> Many scholars have examined Kook’s ideas in the context of western philosophy. Consider (Goldman 1983, pp. 125–26; Rotenstreich 1985, p. 369; Rotenstreich 1987, pp. 252–76; Bergmann 1968, pp. 121–41; Schatz-Uffenheimer 1978, pp. 211–12; Rosenberg 1976, pp. 317–52; Ish Shalom 1996, pp. 525–55; Ish Shalom 1993; Rappoport 2004, pp. 99–129; Rynhold and Harris 2018, pp. 199, 203; Sherlo 2002, pp. 347–74; Sherlo 2013, pp. 123, 128–30, 177, 283, 291, 407; Shilo 1999; Ross 2016, pp. 41–85; Barak 2015, pp. 27–55) consider also Cherry’s (2003, pp. 250–63) discussion on Kook’s view on evolutionary theories.
- <sup>13</sup> For instance, Yoseph Avivi has argued that it is possible to find in Kook’s thought a coherent kabbalistic system. See (Avivi 1992, pp. 709–71) Tamar Ross has claimed that kabbalah must be the starting point for any adequate interpretation of Kook’s views. See (Ross 1982, pp. 109–28). Other scholars have underlined the place of kabbalah in Kook’s thought; see (Zeitlin 1979, pp. 235–37; Garb 2004b, pp. 79–80; Garb 2004a, pp. 69–96; Pachter 1987, pp. 59–90; Pachter 2001, pp. 69–100; Fine 1995, pp. 23–40; Wolfson 2017, pp. 131–60). See also Scholem’s comments in “Hirhurim ‘al Efsharutah shel Mistikah Yehudit be-Yameinu”, 71–83 quoted in (Mirsky 2021, p. 12, n. 38). See also (Mirsky 2014, p. 80) for further discussion on the shared source of Neoplatonism that influenced both Hegelian thought and Kabbalah, and therefore also Kook.
- <sup>14</sup> These chapters were later collected and printed in the work *Meine Reise nach Jerusalem*. See (Shtamler 2016, pp. 321–46, at 322; Epstein 1951).
- <sup>15</sup> In a letter to Kaminka, Kook replied that his ideas were not influenced by western philosophical thinking, but rather “flow . . . solely from the tents of Shem, from the wellspring of Torah”. Quoted in Shtamler (2016, p. 322). Despite Kook’s negation, however, I claim the parallelism between the two thinkers is undeniable.
- <sup>16</sup> On the parallelism made by David Cohen between Kook and Bergson see OH”K, vol. 1, 34; also consider (Seeman 2019, pp. 13–55, at 32). I have previously discussed this in my forthcoming paper (Amati forthcoming).
- <sup>17</sup> Ben Shlomo has gone as far as claiming that it is likable that Kook may have read Bergson’s *Introduction to Metaphysic*; see (Ben Shlomo 1988, pp. 257–74, at 258 n. 5). Kook could probably not read French, but many are the hints that he knew English and therefore he could have read Bergson’s works in their English translation see (Kook 2001, pp. 26, 361) Kook’s knowledge of English was also noted in a newspaper at the time of his visit to the United States; (Hamador LeYitonut BeHArzot HaBrit 1924). Bergson wrote the ‘Introduction to Metaphysics’, in 1903, and it was translated into English in 1912. Kook could therefore theoretically have read the English translation of Bergson’s work during his time as a rabbi in London between 1916–1919. I have also found a short translation of Bergson works titled “Sod HaYezira” was published in Hebrew in the journal *Techia* (Henri Bergson 1913). Kook, could have been exposed to this and other translations of Bergson’s work in Hebrew. Translations of Bergson’s works also appeared in Russian during the same time period, so that Bergson could have read Bergson in Russian.
- <sup>18</sup> Consider: (Leodiofel 1912; HaZvi 1914; Frishman 1914; Kaplan 1918a, 1918b); Essays by Hugo Bergmann, Nahum Slouschz and Rappoport were published in the journals *Hashiloach*, *HaZfira*, *HaAm* and *HaOlam* (Slouschz 1904; Slouschz 1911; Bergmann 1912; Rappoport 1913; Slouschz 1916).
- <sup>19</sup> For example, in 1886, a riddle with 32 rhyming lines was published on page 6 of the journal *Hatzfira*, and a month later, in a later issue, the complete solution to the riddle was published. Among the ten who solved it, the name of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen was mentioned (*HaZfira*, 72 1887). Moreover, in a letter dated 1910, Kook explicitly refers to the journal *Hazfira* (IG”R 2, 376).
- <sup>20</sup> (Kook 1997, p. 2). In the same letter Zvi Yehuda places his father’s thought in the realm of philosophy: “My father... in addition to learnedness in ‘Torah’... is also a scholar and free-thinking philosopher, impeded by nothing, in the full sense of the term. He has taken great care to search out and understand the philosophical teachings of the nations”. Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> See: SH”K, vol. 4, 68.
- <sup>22</sup> Even though he does not refer to Spinoza explicitly.
- <sup>23</sup> For a much more detailed description of the connection between these elements in Kook’s thought see my forthcoming article: (Amati forthcoming).
- <sup>24</sup> Bergson’s entire literary works seem to be devoted to the concept of duration and he highlights this in a letter to Höffding; see (Henri Bergson 2001, p. 367).
- <sup>25</sup> On the unpredictability of the *élan vital* see (Pearson 2018, p. 67; Schwartz 1992, p. 293).
- <sup>26</sup> It is debatable whether the *élan vital* is identical to God or rather as a *creation* of a transcendent God in Bergson’s thought. In Creative Evolution, (254) Bergson defines the *élan vital* as finite, which suggests that it cannot be identical to God. Additionally, in letters to the Belgian Jesuit Father de Tonquedec, Bergson explicitly states that the *élan vital* is not God, but rather a product of a transcendent God. Kook also seems to reject pantheism, as Ben Ben Shlomo (1990) notes that in Kook’s writings, “it is always not God himself, but God’s supreme will.”
- <sup>27</sup> On the concept of development and evolution in Kook consider: (Ben-Pazi 2011; Mirsky 2014; Cherry 2003; Ben Shlomo 1990, pp. 136–53).
- <sup>28</sup> See ‘Eder, 143. Beyond this instance, many of Kook’s writings contain images of stream, stream of life, wetness, flow, water, thirst, and so on.

- <sup>29</sup> See A"Т 2.
- <sup>30</sup> See OH"K vol. 3, 39; SH"K, vol. 3, 47, my italics.
- <sup>31</sup> See Kook, *Ma'amarei*, 159.
- <sup>32</sup> (Ish Shalom 1993, p. 108). In terms of the liberal distinction articulated by Isaiah Berlin, Kook is talking here largely of “positive freedom”, the freedom to be one’s truest self see (Berlin 1969, pp. 118–72). Charles Taylor characterizes the focus on the inner self as the “expressivist turn”, which he sees as a significant aspect of the formation of modern identity. Romanticism is not simply a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, but rather, is an attempt to understand the truth of existence through exploration of the “inwardness”, and a connection to a higher, external good and deity. For Taylor with what we define Romanticism the “mode of access to the truth has changed and shifted to a less intellectual view which can ground all this instead in inner conviction.”(423) See (Taylor 1992, pp. 423–46). Taylor in his book also clearly refers to Bergson (Taylor 1992, pp. 521–22).
- <sup>33</sup> See Note 31.
- <sup>34</sup> See SH"K vol. 5, 100.
- <sup>35</sup> (Bergson 1968, pp. 73–87, at 75). Bergson’s conception of freedom as self-overpassing is close to Nietzsche’s. For research on the parallels between these two views see (François 2008, p.127). This research underlines my thesis that Kook should be considered in the larger context of *Lebensphilosophie*.
- <sup>36</sup> As shown extensively in my forthcoming article: (Anonymous forthcoming).
- <sup>37</sup> See OH"K vol. 1, 191; SH"K vol. 4, 85, translated in (Ish Shalom 1993, p. 107).
- <sup>38</sup> See OH:K I, 166, 188; SH:K IV 72; SH"K III, 338.
- <sup>39</sup> Scholars have examined the role of nationalism within Bergson’s philosophy. Bergson presents a cosmopolitan and universal perspective, viewing nationalism as a necessary aspect of human nature, but not necessarily as an ideal. This concept has been analyzed by (Lefebvre and White 2012; Lefebvre 2013; Vernon 2003). In a future study, I plan to explore the potential similarities between Bergson’s perspective and the thought of Kook on this topic.
- <sup>40</sup> On the connection between God and Israel consider (Ben Nun 1991, pp. 236–37).
- <sup>41</sup> According to, (Yaron 1974, p. 233) the concept חירות האומה was first developed by Montesquieu (1989) in his book *De L’Esprit des Lois*. This concept was also used by Nachman Krochmal in the seventh section of his book, *Moreh Nebuke ha-Zeman*. This idea assumes also a central place in the thought of Ahad Ha’am (Krochmal 1991).
- <sup>42</sup> In this article I won’t focus on the moral and universal role of the Jewish People as a nation. Yet, this is also an essential aspect of the uniqueness of Jewish nationalism—its humanist and universalistic aims.
- <sup>43</sup> Among secular Zionists A. D. Gordon is the main representative of this conception of Jewish nationalism and the Land of Israel as a means to return to the self, yet this return is secular and disconnected from the divine. Gordon has already been considered in the context of vitalism and lebensphilsophie by Yotam Hotam (2013, pp. 156–85). Yotam writes referring to the connection between the self and the Land in Gordon’s thought: “From Gordon’s perspective, the human ‘I’ that defines a person resides in a location at which they are in direct contact with the cosmic energy that pervades the entire universe. Gordon’s interpretation is nevertheless unique, since to him contact with the ‘cosmic’ is physical and focuses on working the land”. See also: (Gordon 1982, pp. 49–71; Avineri 1980, p. 175; Schweid 1990, pp. 327–28). Similarities between Kook and Gordon on other aspects of their thought have already been considered by (Strassberg-Dayan 1995). On this existential kind of Zionism in general and Gordon’s specifically consider (Neumann 2009, pp. 219–31).
- <sup>44</sup> Translated in (Ish Shalom and Rosenberg 1991, p. 23)with some changes by me.
- <sup>45</sup> Ben Nun (1991, p. 236) suggested that with חברה אחרויות גדולה Kook is referring to the idea of the “social contract” formulated in the works of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau as the reason for the organization of human beings within the framework of a state.
- <sup>46</sup> Translated in (Kook 1993, p. 100) with some changes. The italic is mine.
- <sup>47</sup> See (Gross 2012, p. 104).
- <sup>48</sup> Translated in (Kook 1993).
- <sup>49</sup> Translated in (Ish Shalom and Rosenberg 1991, p. 236 with some changes by me). My italics.
- <sup>50</sup> The theme of negation of exile was a prominent theme in Zionist thought, especially among those who were antagonistic to the Jewish religious tradition. See (Don-Yehiya 1992, pp. 129–55) for an extensive discussion of the various approaches to the Exile issue within the context of Zionist thought. See also (Rotenstreich 1966, pp. 160–215; Schweid 1984, pp. 21–44; Gorni 1977, pp. 74–84) for further discussions of this theme.
- <sup>51</sup> Translated in (Ish Shalom 1993, p. 108) my Italics. Consider a similar passage by Gordon on the difference between the estranged life of the Diaspora and the return to the self and freedom that is allowed by Zionism and the return to the Land of Israel. Gordon writes: “The path of regeneration...demands of each individual who aspires to regeneration and a life of regeneration...that he transforms and turns the diasporic Jew within him into a free Jew; the flawed, shattered, unnatural person within him—into a healthy person true to himself; his diasporic life, imprinted with an external stamp foreign to his spirit or with an inner stamp foreign to his time—into a natural, full and complete life” (Gordon 1957, p. 244) (Hebrew). See also in (Avineri 1980).
- <sup>52</sup> Kook’s discussions on creativity largely revolve around Torah study, his educational programs, and his overall approach to halacha and haggadah (Rosenak 2007b) and his discussion on freedom: SH"K vol. 4, 85; OH"K vol. 1, 191; SH"K vol. 4, 85;

- OH"K vol. 1, 175; See OH"K vol. 1, 188; SH"K vol. 4, 7; OH"K vol. 1, 166; SH"K vol. 3, 338; Kirva Eloym, 33; SH"K vol.5, 1; SH"K V, 2. On innovation of Kabbalah teachings consider: Pinchas 16:3 and see ([Mirsky 2021](#), pp. 172–75) In this essay I show how Kook's discussion on creativity is extended also to the political and national level.
- <sup>53</sup> ([Kook 1993](#), p. 91) with some changes. My italics. See also SH"K V, 17.
- <sup>54</sup> Translated in ([Kook 1993](#), p. 149) with some changes. My italics.
- <sup>55</sup> Ahad Ha-Am was an important figure for Kook in his discussions and debates on culture and nationalism, but they also repeatedly disagreed with each other consider ([Mirsky 2014](#), pp. 103–42.) For a summary of the cultural Zionism of Ahad Ha-Am consider ([Hevlin 2001](#), chap. 6).
- <sup>56</sup> [Lanir \(2015](#), p. 271) argues that only in Kook's late writings the Land of Israel assumes a central role and the difference between Tora in the land of Israel and outside of the land of Israel is highlighted for the first time; [Schwartz \(1997](#), pp. 63–69) defines three different stages in Kook's relation to the land of Israel. In the first stage (until 1908) the Land of Israel was considered a territorial instrument for the cultural and national development of the Jewish People and the achievement of the "שְׁמָרָה" the unity of all different aspects of reality and redemption, in the second stage the Land of Israel was seen by Kook as a personal entity which expressed feelings and a personality but which was still dependent on a relationship with the Jewish People (1908–1910), only in the third and last stage the land of Israel becomes an "independent entity that stands on its own merits (around 1920)" and is not necessarily connected to the Jewish People. I argue that both Lanir and Schwartz are missing an essential aspect of the return to the Land of Israel, that is, its ability to help the Jewish People reconnect to their true, authentic, and original self and thereby be free and creative. For other studies on the relation between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel in Kook's thought consider ([Nehorai 1978](#), pp. 35–50; [Halpern 1961](#), pp. 461–62; [Schweid 1979](#), pp. 186–203).
- <sup>57</sup> Translated in ([Kook 1993](#), p. 90) in with some changes. The italic is mine.
- <sup>58</sup> This connection between the Land of Israel, Knesset Israel, and the Divine is extensively explored in Kabbalistic writings, which influenced Kook. This essay aims to use Bergson's views as a methodological tool to highlight the unique, modern way in which Kook understands and presents these Kabbalistic concepts and to highlight their relation to freedom, the self, and creativity, and to show the larger context in which Kook was developing his views. Moreover, the Bergsonian model helps us explain this connection in a philosophical, modern manner that is understandable to the modern reader, and therefore endows these Kabbalistic concepts with modern meaning, rather than leaving them as esoteric. Bergson gives us a fresh perspective on Kook's words and helps us make sense of them in a philosophical manner, rather than an esoteric one.
- <sup>59</sup> As [Schwartz \(1997](#), p. 64) explains, with the term holiness (הַשִׁׁינָסִים), Kook refers to the unity of all the different aspects in a specific area: psychological, ethical, ontological or national.
- <sup>60</sup> The term [הַלְּגָנָס](#) is another key term in Kook's views of the Jewish People in relation to the Jewish land as noted by [Schwartz \(1997](#), p. 64). Kook's concept of [הַלְּגָנָס](#) is influenced by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in the Kuzari according to Schwartz.
- <sup>61</sup> See SH"K vol. 7, 10.
- <sup>62</sup> [Yaron \(1974](#), p. 245) argues that Kook's view of the connection between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel Kook was strongly influenced by the Kuzari. For further reading on the influence of Kabbalah and Rabbi Yehuda Halevi's thought on Kook's religious Zionist relation to Israel consider ([Schwartz 1997](#), pp. 62–66).
- <sup>63</sup> This translation is based on the translation in ([Yaron 1991](#), pp. 208–209) with some changes by me.

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