

God, Being, Pathos: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Theological Rejoinder to Heidegger

Abstract

Martin Heidegger's philosophy has elicited many theological responses; some enthusiastic, others critical. In this essay I provide an organized and critical analysis of Abraham Joshua Heschel's theological critique of and rejoinder to the thought of the German philosopher. By looking at Heschel's 1965 *Who is Man?* as well as earlier and later texts, I demonstrate the way in which Heschel presents his biblical theology in contrast and as an alternative to Heidegger's philosophy. I also show that this rendering is a result of an inadequate interpretation of Heidegger's views.

Keywords

Martin Heidegger; Abraham J. Heschel; Modern Jewish Thought; Philosophy; Existentialism

Author: Daniel Herskowitz¹

University of Oxford

Daniel.herskowitz@wolfson.ox.ac.uk

* A footnote in Shai Held's excellent book *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2014) reads "a comprehensive study of *Who is Man?* as a Heschelian response to Heideggerian ontology is a desideratum" (p. 249). The current essay is an attempt to take a step toward the fulfillment of this desideratum. I would like to thank Yiftach Ofek, Judith Wolfe, Zohar Atkins and Dror Bondi for reading earlier versions of this essay and providing insightful comments which, I believe, improved it in many ways. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers assigned by the JJTP for their constructive comments, and especially its editor, whose remarks on earlier versions of this paper as well as his overall work has greatly informed my understanding of the subject.

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4 ***God, Being, Pathos: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Theological Rejoinder to Heidegger***
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7 In May 1963 Abraham Joshua Heschel delivered the Raymond Fred West Memorial Lectures at Stanford
8 University. This lecture series, comprising of three lectures - 'In the Likeness and Unlikeness of God', 'In
9 Search of Meaning' and 'Existence and Exaltation' – was later compiled into the book *Who is Man?*,
10 published in 1965. In this condensed and mature expression of many steadfast positions, Heschel engages
11 with Martin Heidegger by situating the latter's fundamental ontology in confrontation with his own
12 'theology of man'¹. Heschel observes, "the first seeks to relate the human being to a transcendence called
13 being as such, whereas the second, realizing that human being is more than just being, that human being
14 is living being, seeks to relate man to divine living, to a transcendence called the living God".² The main
15 aim in what follows is to flesh out and evaluate the assumptions and theological corollaries of this
16 condensed encapsulation of Heidegger's problematic from Heschel's point of view.
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30 Heschel was made familiar with Heidegger's thought as a philosophy student in cosmopolitan Berlin
31 between 1927 and 1931, the very years of the publication of *Being and Time* (1927) and Heidegger's rise
32 to philosophical stardom.³ In 1936 Heschel befriended Henry Corbin (1903-1978), a French Islamic
33 expert who was among the first to translate Heidegger into French. Their conversations and
34 correspondence dealt, among other things, with Heidegger's thought and with Corbin's progress with the
35 translations.⁴ Also after Heschel fled from Nazi Germany to America, occasional references to
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45 ¹ Marvin Fox, "Heschel's Theology of Man", in: *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*, Vol. 8 No. 3, (Fall,
46 1966) pp. 79-84.
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49 ² Abraham J. Heschel, *Who is Man?* (California: Stanford University Press 1965) p. 69 (Henceforth: WM).
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51 ³ That Heschel is said to have "admired" Ernst Cassirer, who rivaled Heidegger in the famous 1929 dispute in
52 Davos, makes it likely that already in those early years Heschel did not subscribe to Heidegger's philosophical
53 outlook. See: Edward K. Kaplan & Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness* (New Haven:
54 Yale University Press 1998) p. 99.
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59 ⁴ *Ibid.* p. 235, 258
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4 Heideggerian ideas and vocabulary are discernable in his works. While the relative scarcity of references
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6 to Heidegger before *Who is Man?* may attest to a relatively limited occupation with his thought, it also
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8 largely reflects the intellectual environment in America, where in the 1940s and most of the 1950s only
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10 few works by Heidegger were available in English – *Being and Time* not among them.⁵ Although
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12 Heschel’s interest in Heidegger began earlier, *Who is Man?* is his most comprehensive treatment of
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14 Heidegger and the culmination of an ongoing-albeit-sporadic engagement with the German thinker.
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22 ⁵ In *Who is Man?* Heschel quotes a translated passage from *Being and Time* as it is found in Thomas Langan’s *The*
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24 *Meaning of Heidegger: A Critical Study of an Existentialist Phenomenology* (New York: Columbia University Press
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26 1959) with which he apparently consulted. That Heschel does not translate this passage on his own from the German
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28 edition or use the English version of the now-canonical Macquarrie and Robinson translation which was published
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30 already in 1962 is noteworthy, if only for its indication of the rather superficial depth with which Heschel immersed
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32 himself with Heidegger’s works. The works by Heidegger available in English at the time were: a number of essays
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34 gathered under the title *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Block (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), Ralph
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36 Manheim’s translation of *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), two short
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38 bilingual volumes translated by Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback with *The Question of Being* (New York:
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40 Twayne, 1958) and *What is Philosophy?* (New Haven: College and University Press Publishers 1958), and Walter
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42 Kaufmann’s translation of *The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics*, Heidegger’s introduction to *What is*
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44 *Metaphysics?*, added to the fifth printing of the lecture, in: Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to*
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46 *Sartre*, (New York: Meridan Books 1956). Heschel seems to be unfamiliar with William Richardson’s monumental
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48 *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, published in 1963. Heschel treats Heidegger as a unified thinker,
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50 i.e., he holds no noticeable distinction between an ‘early’ and ‘late’ Heidegger, or, in Richardson’s formulation,
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52 between Heidegger I and Heidegger II. On the reception of Heidegger in America, see: Martin Woessner, *Heidegger*
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54 *in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2011). Woessner makes no mention of Heschel. See also:
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56 Walter Kaufmann, “The Reception of Existentialism in the United States”, *Salmagundi* No. 10/11 (Fall 1969-Winter
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58 1970), pp. 69-96.
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4 The 'Jewish' rejoinder in Heschel's *Who is Man?* reflects the theological surge of interest in Heidegger's
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6 philosophy that took place in America in the 1960s.⁶ Some notable manifestations of this surge include,
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8 among others, a conference in Drew University conducted on April 1964, dedicated to the theological
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10 potential in Heidegger's thought, which drew public attention through a *New York Times* article reporting
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12 the controversial keynote address by Hans Jonas, a former student of Heidegger;⁷ the publication of a
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14 book entitled *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (1963), collecting various perspectives on the
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16 theological import of Heidegger's later philosophy;⁸ the extensive popularity of Paul Tillich's
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18 existentialist theology, overtly influenced by Heidegger;⁹ and the emerging theological currents that
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20 would soon produce the 'Death of God' movement which in part drew, directly or indirectly, from
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27 ⁶ "It was, after all, a Protestant theologian who had *Sein und Zeit* translated, a religious publisher who first brought it
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29 out, and the religious imprint of a major trade house in the United States that eventually sold it to the masses [...]
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31 And while the theological reading of Heidegger would eventually give way to other (philosophical) fads, it is
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33 obvious that in the 1960s, the theological question was still the central one". Quoted from: Woessner, p. 112.

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35 ⁷ The conference was officially titled "A Second Consultation on Hermeneutics: Theological Discourse and the
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37 Proclamation of the Gospel". See: Paul L. Montgomery, "Scholar Breaks with Heidegger", *New York Times* April
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39 11 1964. Jonas's lecture was published as "Heidegger and Theology", in: *The Review of Metaphysics*, 18: 2 (Dec.,
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41 1964) pp. 207-33.

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43 ⁸ *The Later Heidegger and Theology*, edited by James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb Jr. (New York: Harper &
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45 Row 1963).

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47 ⁹ See: Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1952); Idem, *Dynamics of Faith* (New
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49 York: Harper& Row 1957); Idem, "Existential Philosophy", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (Jan.,
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51 1944), pp. 44-70; Thomas F. O'Meara, "Heidegger and Tillich: A Structural Relationship", *The Harvard*
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53 *Theological Review*, Vol. 61 No. 2 (Apr., 1968), pp. 249-261. On Heschel and Tillich, see: Held, pp. 84-91, 262-
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55 264. See also: Alexander Even-Chen, "Faith and the Courage to Be: Heschel and Tillich", in: *Interactions between*
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57 *Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature*, edited by Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz,
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59 Joseph Turner (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2009) pp. 337-355.

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4 Heidegger.¹⁰ Heschel's rejoinder should be seen as an attempt to counter the increasing enthusiasm of
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6 Heidegger's thought that prevailed in the end of the fifties and through the sixties. It can also be read as
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8 an indirect anti-Tillichean text, for much of the accusations against Heidegger's notion of Being, as will
9
10 be discussed below, can be equally leveled, for Heschel's standpoint, against Tillich's notion of God as
11
12 the 'Ground of Being'.¹¹ Indeed, the mark of this theological fascination is apparent in *Who is Man?*, as
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14 are some of the typical misrepresentations and misunderstandings of Heidegger's thought that prevailed at
15
16 the time.¹² Heschel's engagement with Heidegger should also be considered in line with a subtle yet
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18 ongoing critique of the Freiburg philosopher by a number of Jewish thinkers, such as Rabbi Joseph B.
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20 Soloveitchik, Martin Buber, Hans Jonas, Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas.
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28 In his theology of pathos Heschel attempts to reestablish a pre-modern account in which the good is an
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30 actual, objective constituent of the nature of things due to their origin in a benevolent God:
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33 "After the Lord had created the universe, He took a look at His creation. What was the word that
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35 conveyed His expression? If an artist were to find a word describing how the universe looked to
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43 ¹⁰ Although the heyday of the 'Death of God' movement took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it should be
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45 remembered that Gabriel Vahanian's *The Death of God: The Culture of our Post-Christian Era* and Paul van
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47 Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel: Based on an Analysis of Its Language* were published in 1961 and
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49 1963, respectively. See also Woessner pp. 120-125.
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51 ¹¹ Heschel explicitly rebukes this Tillichean conception in: Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Interview with Carl Stern",
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53 *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, edited by Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux
54
55 1996) p. 408.
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57 ¹² See below, and, for example: Herbert L. Dreyfus's review of Thomas Langan's *The Meaning of Heidegger* in: *The*
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59 *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 70 No. 3 (Jul., 1961) pp. 416-419.
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4 God at the dawn of its existence, the word would be sublime or beautiful. But the word that the
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6 Bible has is *good*".¹³
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10 Being is good because God created it; it has an implicit normative value which is derived from its status
11 as creation. Without this understanding we cannot espouse normativity at all. "We may explore things
12 without God", announces Heschel, but "we cannot decide about values without him" (GSM 377). For
13 Heschel, "the problem of being can never be treated in isolation but only in relation to God" (GSM 412).
14 This applies to the status of humans as well: man's being is casually dependent on and naturally directed
15 towards God. A supernatural God, and consequently a supernatural good, is the condition of possibility of
16 human existence. For Heschel, importantly, only the biblical God of pathos could be the source of good
17 and therefore inhabit the path toward human fulfillment. Compassionate and caring, He is animated by
18 what Heschel terms 'transitive concern'.¹⁴ The biblical God engages with the world, makes demands on
19 humanity and is in need of human partnership to redeem the world: "Essential to biblical religion is the
20 awareness of God's interest in man [...] Our task is to concur with His interest, to carry out His vision of
21 our task" (WM 75). God is "in need of man", in Heschel's view, "in need of man's share in redemption"
22 (GSM 413).
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39 With this position as the backdrop, the root of Heschel's entire critique of Heidegger can be articulated in
40 the following assumption: that any framework that denies the essential link between man and a personal,
41 compassionate and demanding God, viz. the biblical God of pathos, is ultimately nihilistic and tied to
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49 ¹³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
50 1955) p. 372.
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53 ¹⁴ Cf., for example, Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Farrar,
54 Straus and Giroux 1951) p. 143 (henceforth, MNA). See also: Fritz A. Rothschild, 'Introduction', in: Abraham
55 Joshua Heschel, *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks 1959) p.
56 23 (henceforth BGM).
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4 paganism. As will be demonstrated below, many of the deficiencies Heschel identifies in Heidegger's
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6 philosophy stem from this fundamental assumption.
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10 *Being and Time*, Heidegger's *magnum opus*, offers a phenomenological analysis of the being of Dasein -
11 the being that we are - in order to revive the question of Being as such.¹⁵ In this work Heidegger offers a
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13 plentitude of existential conditions of Dasein's being in the world. Famously, a distinction is made
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15 between authenticity and inauthenticity, Dasein's two possible modes of being. Dasein in its
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17 everydayness exists unauthentically through *das Man*, the default, impersonal aspect of the social world
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19 through which unauthentic Dasein learns to conform to how 'One' is and does things. Heidegger
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21 poignantly describes this existential mode as "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself" (BT 128). To
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23 exist authentically, on the other hand, is to have a resolute and individualizing acknowledgment of one's
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25 indispensable existence in light of one's finitude and to act in the wake of this awareness. As many
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27 theologians have pointed out, in his explication of the conditions of possibility of human existence,
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29 Heidegger makes no recourse to God; his philosophical framework is confined to Being. Moreover,
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31 among the many existential conditions outlined in *Being and Time*, Dasein's being-toward-God goes
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33 conspicuously unmentioned. Heidegger, to be sure, expressly states that "the ontological interpretation of
34
35 Dasein as Being-in-the-world does not determine against or in favor of a possible Being-towards-God
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37 [Sein zu Gott]".¹⁶ For him, ascribing to him a position regarding man's stance in front of God would be to
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39 treat his fundamental ontology as an ontic philosophical anthropology or existentialism *à la* Sartre. Yet
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41 such a reading of his work constitutes a widely common misconception, one which Heidegger himself has
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53 ¹⁵ All quotations of *Being and Time* are taken from: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie
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55 and E. Robinson, (New York, Harper & Row Publishers 2008) (Henceforth BT).
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57 ¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, translated by T. Malik (Evanston: Northwestern University 1969) p.
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4 rebuked already in 1929 in his book on Kant and most famously in his *Letter on Humanism* (1946).¹⁷ In
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6 the latter work Heidegger argues that those who see his philosophy as involving the negation of God,
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8 ethics, values or humanism have completely misunderstood his philosophical objective.¹⁸ These, as we
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10 shall see, are however precisely the allegation that rest in the heart of Heschel's assessment, which is
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12 indeed restricted to an ontic reading of Heidegger, since it itself is occupied with the ontic sphere.
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16 Thus a major blunder Heschel identifies in *Being and Time* pertains to its account of authenticity.
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18 Heidegger describes Dasein's existence as groundless, and authenticity consists of heroically taking
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20 ownership on one's existence in the face of death.¹⁹ However for Heschel, that "the self is in need of a
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22 meaning which it cannot furnish itself" constitutes the "existential paradox" of human life (WM 56).
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24 Heschel's basic assumption is that *ens finitum* is unable to provide the sufficient stability and substance
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26 for a meaningful, fulfilled life.²⁰ The implicit privation of human existence denies it of the possibility of
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28 self-redemption. By ignoring the existential ground that God is as he does, Heidegger substantiates a
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30 dangerous circularity by which the groundless Dasein, granted quasi-divine attributes, grounds its own
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37 ¹⁷ See: Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, translated by Richard Taft (Bloomington and
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39 Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1990); Idem, "Letter on Humanism" in: *Basic Writings* edited by David
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41 Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row 1977).

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43 ¹⁸ Goldstein correctly calls Buber's ontic and anthropological reading of Heidegger a 'misunderstanding', and
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45 briefly comments that "a similar kind of misunderstanding occurs in the criticism of 'ontological thinking' found in
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47 a follower of Buber, Abraham Heschel". See: Jeffery Goldstein, "Buber's Misunderstanding of Heidegger",
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49 *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 22 No. 2 (summer 1978); pp. 156-167, 166.

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51 ¹⁹ See: Michael Zimmerman, *The Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity*
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53 (Athens: Ohio University Press 1981).

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55 ²⁰ Heschel lists Kierkegaard and the Kotzker Rebbe as two religious thinkers who considered this delusional self-
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57 reliance as the greatest fault of modern man. See Abraham Joshua Heschel, *A Passion for Truth*, (New York: Farrar,
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59 Straus and Giroux 1973) pp. 90-94.
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4 being.²¹ Denying a transcendent God, Heschel avers, Heidegger presents a pagan ideal whereby “man
5 becomes his own idol” (WM 36). Furthermore, as stated above, the fact that human beings are created by
6 God implies an inherent normative stamp on their existence. Values and normativity can be sustained
7 only with recourse to God, and inasmuch as such recourse is non-existent in *Being and Time*, all that
8 remains is neutral being, or being neutral. Decisions are made, actions are played out, but not in the name
9 of a higher vocation or value:²² Dasein simply is. Heidegger inevitably adheres to neutrality, and
10 “neutrality”, Heschel clarifies, “is an illusion” (GSM 382). This leads him to distinguish between two
11 accounts of existence: ‘living’ and ‘being’. In a clear allusion to Heidegger, he states “the term ‘human
12 being’ is apt to suggest that the human is but a mode of being in general, with the emphasis placed on
13 being”, however, contra to this understanding of Heidegger's position, “man’s most important problem is
14 not being but living” (WM 68), that is, not leading an ethically void existence but engaging in the
15 constant challenge of a life directed towards the good. Heidegger’s ontological existential of ‘being-in-
16 the-world’, interpreted here as ‘being-neutral-in-the-world’ is converted in *Who is Man?* to the ontic and
17 ethically-charged category of “living-in-the-world” (WM 95), or “being-challenged-in-the-world” (WM
18 105).

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39 Now it should be noted that in *Being and Time* Heidegger embarks on a transcendental project of
40 delineating the a-priori ontological preconditions of Dasein's existence in the world. Ontological
41 conditions [*Existentials*] deal with Being which enable – and are manifested in - their ontic instances
42 [*Existentiells*] in beings. *Being and Time* is a descriptive project, and as such, few, if any, actual
43 normative imperatives are to be found in it. In other words, *that* existential possibilities constitute

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51 ²¹ Cf. for instance the features, traditionally belonging to God, attributed to Dasein in BT section 42: “The whatness
52 (*essentia*) of this being must be understood in terms of its being (*existentia*) insofar as one can speak of it at all”.

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55 ²² In his memoir Karl Löwith records a ‘pertinent joke’ construed by one of Heidegger’s students in Freiburg: “I am
56 resolved, only towards what I don’t know’. See: Karl Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933: A Report*,
57 translated by Elizabeth King (London: The Athlone Press 1994) p. 30.
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4 Dasein's being is of dramatically greater interest to Heidegger than their *actual* ontic manifestations. The
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6 internal logic here is simple: any encouragement or discouragement to take on one ontic possibility over
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8 another inherently undermines the declared descriptive aim. This does not mean Heidegger's
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10 philosophical scheme is not normative. But what Heidegger attempts to do is to expose and remove the
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12 presumed objective ground of the value systems so often taken for granted; to reveal the nothingness at
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14 their very core. Heidegger articulates what Dasein *could* be, yet in accordance to Heschel's ontic
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16 misreading, he argues that a genuine portrayal of human being must include both what one *could* and
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18 *should* be. And this Heidegger's immanent and neutral framework cannot do, because "the central
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20 problem", Heschel asserts, "is not: 'What is it 'to be'?' but rather: 'How to be and not to be'?" (WM 47).
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22 This charge will be picked up below.
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27 Critique of Heidegger's inability to substantiate moral obligation permeates *Who is Man?*. For instance,
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29 Heschel agrees with Heidegger that a key element of human existence is a fundamental distress of
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31 existential alienation and misplacement. Yet unlike Heidegger's authentic Dasein who opens itself up for
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33 *Angst* after the reevaluation of its being in light of its finitude, existential anguish in Heschel's account is
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35 generated less "by the mystery of being, by the absence of being, or by the fear of non-being", as
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37 advanced by Heidegger, but by the prospect of "meaningless being" (WM 52). Anxiety does not emerge
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39 from Dasein's general uncanniness or portending nothingness but from the troubling awareness of an
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41 unfulfilled ethical demand: "The problem of man is occasioned by our coming upon a conflict or
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43 contradiction between existence and expectation, between what man is and what is expected of him"
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45 (WM 3). Heschel's insinuated castigation of Heidegger's notion of 'boredom' draws on a similar view. In
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47 the lecture *What is Metaphysics?* Heidegger states that boredom as an existential mood is a porthole into
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49 the truth of Being, a gateway to awareness of the nothingness lurking behind Being. For his part,
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51 Heidegger does not judge boredom positively or negatively, but only seeks to uncover through it
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53 ontological insights. In Heschel's opinion, this reflects the absence of a compassionate God in
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55 Heidegger's framework, a God who instils vocation and meaning in human existence. "Boredom is a
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4 sickness of the self-consciousness, the result of one's inability to sense the vital vocation" (WM 104) in
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6 life. Our very existence is marked by vocation because 'to be' implies the normative demand to 'live'. A
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8 related point can be detected in Heschel's intimation to the notion of 'mineness' [*Jemeinigkeit*] in *Being*
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10 *and Time*. Heidegger holds that Dasein is in each case 'mine'. This 'mineness' is my relation to my own
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12 existence, which is authentically attained only by relating to it in its totality, i.e., by acknowledging and
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14 embracing my finitude. In an earlier work Heschel polemicizes against this position: "the essence of what
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16 I am", he writes, "is not mine. *I am what is not mine*" (BGM 62). Heidegger's account of authenticity
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18 attempts to comprehend man from within himself, which explains his claim that each person is his own.
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20 Yet in truth, Heschel maintains, we belong to God, whose demands make ethical conduct the linchpin of
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22 authentic existence.
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27 The lack of normativity in Heidegger's version of authenticity, the sheer being he promotes, is tied to his
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29 imperative to 'let being be', which is understood by Heschel as a call for passivity and withdrawal from
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31 the world, an expression of "despair" and mistrust in humanity. This grim view arises from a perverse
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33 account of human being, for "it is self-deception to assume that man can ever be an innocent spectator. To
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35 be human is to be involved" (WM 68). In one of the two explicit mentions of Heidegger in *Who is Man?*
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37 Heschel emphasizes that "man is not only being, he is also living, and if he were simply to 'surrender to
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39 being', as Heidegger calls upon us to do, he would abdicate his power to decide and reduce his living to
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41 being. To be is both passive and intransitive. In living, man relates himself actively to the world" (WM
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43 94-95). Yet Heschel's charge notwithstanding, the charge that Heidegger a position advocating passivity
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45 is difficult to defend. The act of thinking, which, according to Heidegger, lets being be, "is neither
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47 theoretical nor practical. It takes place before that differentiation".²³ To speak of 'passivity' in opposition
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49 of 'activity' as Heschel does is to implicitly participate in the discourse of effectivity and productivity
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51 which Heidegger seeks to circumvent. 'To let being be' means for Heidegger not the absence of action
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53 but a certain comportment towards Being, one which is attentive to the world and which does not
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59 ²³ See: Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* p. 263.
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4 aggressively seek to exploit or transform it.²⁴ In other words, one who lets being be is indeed involved
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6 and is certainly not (at least necessarily) an ‘innocent spectator’.
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10 A major corollary of Heidegger’s advancement of ‘being’ over ‘living’, according to Heschel, is his
11 inability to appropriately differentiate between human and thing. For without the fundamental ethical
12 imperative in human being, Heidegger’s system cannot account for the intrinsic quality and value of man.
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14 Heschel connects this fault to the way Heidegger carries out his phenomenology. “There are two ways of
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16 facing and inspecting human being”, observes Heschel: “from within or from without” (WM 34). The
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18 first way, ‘from within’, is when “I face my own being, here and now”. ‘From without’ is when “I
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20 encounter my fellow man’s being-there” (Heschel evokes here the term *Da-sein* in English; *da* - there or
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22 here, and *sein* – being, being-there). It is important for Heschel to make a clear distinction between the
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24 two. While it is “possible and legitimate to ponder being in general or the being of all beings” as
25
26 Heidegger does, it is nevertheless “futile and impossible to ponder human being in general, the being of
27
28 human species” (WM 34). Since the irreplaceably unique relation one has with oneself “always intrudes
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30 into any reflection about the being of the human species, there is only one way of comprehending man’s
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32 being-there, and that is by way of inspecting my own being”. Heidegger’s mistake is rooted in the ‘from
33
34 without’ perspective he takes. By so doing, the elements of human existence that are attained by means of
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36 our self-relation are overlooked. Any methodology that ignores this crucial feature, Heschel argues, is
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38 guilty of applying the method of investigating objects onto human beings and will therefore inevitably
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40 yield an objectivized and distorted portrayal of human existence. The title ‘*Who is Man?*’ deliberately
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42 conveys this point: *who* applies to humans alone. In Heidegger’s depiction, however, *Dasein* is
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44 objectivized: it is a *what*, not a *who*. That this is the case is evident from the portrayal of inauthentic
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46 *Dasein* as impersonal, generalized, dispensable and plainly ordinary being. Against Heidegger’s
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55 ²⁴ See: Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”, translated by William Lovitt, in: *Philosophical*
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57 *and Political Writings*, edited by Manfred Stassen (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group
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59 2006) pp.279-304.
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4 somewhat patronizing depiction of average everyday Dasein, Heschel argues that “my own being, placed
5 as it is in the midst of many beings, is not simply being here, being around, being part of the environment.
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8 It is at the very center of my consciousness that I am distinct” (WM 34-35). Parenthetically it is should be
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10 noted that the phrasing “being here, being around, being part of” is an unmistakable nod to the plethora of
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12 terms to describe Dasein’s various ontological conditions in *Being and Time*. But more to the point, what
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14 is implied here is that since the internal experience of other human beings is inaccessible to Heidegger,
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16 his only resort is to blunt generalizations which obscure uniqueness: “Generalization [...] fails in trying to
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18 understand man”(WM 37). Had he taken the ‘from within’ perspective, Heschel maintains, he would have
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20 known that “it is through the awareness that I am not only an everybody that I evolve as a self, as
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22 somebody, as a person, as something that cannot be repeated, something for which there is no duplicate,
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24 no substitute” (WM 35). Admittedly, “in the eyes of the world [...] I am an average man, but to my heart
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26 I am not an average person. To my heart I am of great moment” (WM 35). Heidegger’s descriptions of
27
28 *das Man*, such as those quoted above, are unacceptable: “my existence as an event is an original, not a
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30 copy. No two human beings are alike. A major mode of being human is uniqueness [...] every person is a
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32 disclosure, an example of exclusiveness” (WM 37). These derogatory assessments of everyday Dasein
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34 reflect, according to Heschel, a fundamental disdain towards human beings which is fastened to an even
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36 more fundamental disdain towards Being: “it is a result of extreme abuse and desecration of being that
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38 man brings upon himself the punishment of disgust with being”. Heidegger, it is claimed, suffers from a
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40 “disgust of being, a sense of being trapped in the world” (WM 35-36).²⁵ For Heschel it is clear that “in the
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47 ²⁵ This assessment echoes the criticism of Hans Jonas, who found parallels between Heidegger’s existential
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49 philosophy and ancient Gnosticism. Jonas wrote his dissertation, later published as *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*
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51 (1934), under Heidegger’s supervision, where he presents an analysis of Gnosis deeply indebted to Heidegger’s
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53 work, particularly to his notion of ‘*Geworfenheit*. As Jonas later attested, “when, many years ago I turned to the
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55 study of Gnosticism, I found that the viewpoints, the optics as it were, which I had acquired in the school of
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57 Heidegger, enabled me to see aspects of gnostic thought that had been missed before”. From: Hans Jonas, *The*
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59 *Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press 1963), p. 320. While Heidegger’s rectoral address of 1933 confounded
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4 actual lives of actual men, life even when felt to be a burden is cherished deeply, valued supremely,
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6 accepted in its reality” (WM 35).
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10 The fault of generalizing human beings and treating them as ‘average’ is linked to Heidegger’s notorious
11 political affiliation: “The opposite of humanity is brutality, the failure to acknowledge the humanity of
12 one’s fellow man [...] brutality is often due to the failure of imagination as well as to the tendency to treat
13 a person as a generality, to regard a person as an average man” (WM 47). Anyone who is even slightly
14 familiar with Heidegger’s biography can rightfully understand the indirect connection made here between
15 Heidegger and the brutality of the Nazi regime he supported. Also the accusation of Heidegger’s
16 philosophical objectification and contempt of human beings is associated to his Nazism. After quoting a
17 passage written in pre-Nazi Germany describing the industrial resourcefulness of the human physique,
18 Heschel suggests that “perhaps there was a connection between this statement and what the Nazis actually
19 did in the extermination camps: make soap of human flesh” (WM 24). According to Heschel, Nazism
20 sought to exonerate the world of its biblical heritage and bring about a “revival of Teutonic paganism”.²⁶
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37 Jonas, it was only in a 1952 article, *Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism*, that Jonas finally presented an articulation of
38 his response to Heidegger. “The ‘existentialist’ reading of Gnosticism, so well vindicated by its hermeneutic
39 success”, he wrote, “invites as its natural complement the trial of a ‘Gnostic’ reading of Existentialism”. Jonas’s
40 critique of Heidegger is nevertheless still marked by his Heideggerian reading of Gnosticism. See: Hans Jonas,
41 “Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism”, *Social Research* Vol. 19, No. 4 (December 1952), p. 321; Idem, “Gnosticism,
42 Existentialism, and Nihilism” in: Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*,
43 (Northwestern University Press, US 1966) pp. 211-234.
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51 ²⁶ From: Abraham J. Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”, in: *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel*
52 *and Interreligious Dialogue*, edited by Harold Kasimow and Bryon L. Sherwin, Orbis Books: Maryknoll (1991) pp.
53 2- 4. Heschel’s position bears striking resemblance to Hans Jonas’s 1939 ‘Unsere Teilnahme an diesem Kriege. Ein
54 Wort an jüdische Männer’, only recently published in *Jüdischer Almanach 2001/5751 des Leo Baeck Instituts*,
55 edited by Anne Birkenhauer (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag 2000) pp. 79-91. See also: Arnold Eisen,
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4 And the direct result of this “moral annihilation” is “physical extermination”.²⁷ Heidegger’s imminence
5 goes hand in hand with the pagan monstrosity of the Nazis: “existence without transcendence is a way of
6 living where things become idols and idols become monsters” (WM 86).²⁸
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11 A similar reproach was made earlier by Heschel in his *Antwort an Einstein* (1940), a response to Albert
12 Einstein’s call in an address entitled *Science and Religion* (1940) to jettison the belief in a personal God
13 and embrace the ‘religiosity’ embedded in the cultivation of “the Good, the True, and the Beautiful” as
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18 “Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Challenge of Religion Pluralism”, *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 29 No. 1 (Feb., 2009) p.

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23 ²⁷ It cannot go without mentioning that Heschel’s mother and sister were both murdered by the Nazis. Maurice
24 Freidman, a long-time friend of Heschel, shares a small anecdote: “Heschel confided in me that an American
25 professor told him that while he was visiting Heidegger, the latter expressed regret that so many Jewish professors
26 were able to emigrate to America. This can have only one meaning since the fate of German Jewish professors who
27 stayed in Germany was extermination!”. See: Maurice Friedman, “Buber, Heschel and Heidegger: Two Jewish
28 Existentialists Confront A Great German Existentialist”, in: *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 51, 1 (2011) p. 133.
29 While it is doubtful whether “this can have only one meaning”, this anecdote, assuming its credibility, does
30 nevertheless convey something of Heschel’s personal opinion of the German thinker. And yet also Harold Stern’s
31 sound counter-point is worth noting: “as a Jew, a brand plucked from the fire, [Heschel] had the right to relate
32 negatively to Martin Heidegger whose Nazis sympathies were well-attested [...] Yet in *Who is Man?* Heschel shows
33 a distinct respect to the author of *Being and Time*”. See: Rabbi Harold Stern, “A.J Heschel, Irenic Polemicist”, in:
34 *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, Eighty Third Annual Convention, Volume XLV, 1983 pp. 176-177.
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47 ²⁸ Cf. to Levinas’s claim that the Heideggerian sense of transcendence is in truth a subordination of the infinite to the
48 finite, a transcendent immanence, which too is the sign of paganism and the philosophical undergirding of Nazism.
49 See: Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus
50 Nijhoff 1987) pp. 52-53. On this point see: Elliot R. Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming*
51 *Theomania* (New York: Fordham University Press 2014) 106-112. On Heschel theological response to the
52 Holocaust see: Robert Eisen, “A.J Heschel’s Rabbinic Theology as a Response to the Holocaust”, *Modern Judaism*
53 Vol. 23 No. 3 (Oct., 2003) pp. 211-225.
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4 found in rational knowledge and natural science. Fulminating against this naturalist position, Heschel
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6 exhorts: “Hubris, the tragic sin of our time, is the conviction that there exists only laws of nature and
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8 technology, that man can accomplish everything by himself”.²⁹ Einstein’s immanent and self-contained
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10 framework denies a transcendent and relational God and is tantamount to the religiously and ethically
11
12 distorted paganism. Heschel was even undeterred to link Einstein –the pacifist - to the Nazis.³⁰ The harsh
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14 response to Einstein and the critique of Heidegger stem from one underlying conviction, that “man
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16 reflects either the image of [God’s] presence or that of a beast”.³¹ Inasmuch as the world and humanity are
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18 perceived from within the ‘immanent frame’, there is nothing to prevent the reduction of human beings to
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20 objects readily exploited, abused or exterminated in accordance to the desire of benefit or the
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22 whimsicality of will.
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27 Interestingly, Shai Held points to the striking resemblance between Heschel’s ongoing concern for the
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29 increasing exploitation, manipulation and objectification of the world and Heidegger’s warning from the
30
31 modern enframing. Admittedly, significant similarities do exist between Heidegger's bemoaning of the
32
33 modern day dominance of the essence of technology over our perception of Being and Heschel's
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35 castigations over the fact that “our age is one in which usefulness is thought to be the chief merit of nature
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37 [...] Man has [...] become primarily a tool-making animal, and the world is now a gigantic tool box for
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39 the satisfaction of his needs” (GSM 98). Yet Held also rightfully cautions against overstating these
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47 ²⁹ See: Abraham Heschel, ‘Antwort an Einstein’, *Aufbau*, 20 Sept., 3. An English translation by Susannah
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49 Bushmeyer can be found as ‘Answer to Einstein’, *Conservative Judaism* 35, 4 (Summer 2003) pp. 39-41.

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51 ³⁰ For a short discussion of this piece see: Martin Kavka, “The Meaning of This Hour: Prophecy, Phenomenology,
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53 and the Public Sphere in the Early Writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel”, in *Religion and Violence in a Secular*
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55 *World: Toward a New Political Theology*, edited by Clayton Crocket (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press,
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57 2006) pp. 108-136.

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59 ³¹ Abraham Heschel, ‘The Meaning of War’, *Hebrew Union College Bulletin* (March 1943) 1-2.
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4 similarities.³² Indeed, Heschel himself would probably reject such a comparison, since for him, far from
5 promoting an attentive and delicate comportment towards the world, the pagan world-view championed
6 by Heidegger cannot distil real value into the world and therefore, as we have seen, turns nature into “a
7 utensil, an object to be used. The world ceases to be that which is and becomes that which is available”
8 (WM 83).
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11 Yet contra to Heschel’s allegations, Heidegger holds a clear distinction between the being of things -
12 either ready-to-hand [*zuhanden*] or present-at-hand [*vorhanden*] - and the being of Dasein. For him,
13 Dasein is an entity like no other in that it lacks a fixed and determined essence: “if existence is definitive
14 for Dasein’s Being and if its essence is constituted in part by potentiality-for-Being, then, as long as
15 Dasein exists it must in each case, as such potentiality, *not yet be* something” (BT 233). Unlike objects
16 that are constituted by their facticity alone, Dasein is an open-ended being and as such its essence is
17 determined by the unfolding of its life - hence the central position role of death, the ultimate closure of
18 this formative unfolding, in Heidegger’s thought. Dasein’s actions and decisions, *how* it is, constitutes its
19 being. He also explicitly asserted that “the person is not a Thing, not a substance, not an object” (BT 73).
20 Heidegger in fact contrasts Dasein to all other entities which are constituted by their essence in a similar
21 language used by Heschel: “the being that we are ourselves, the Dasein, cannot at all be interrogated by
22 the question *What* is this? We gain access to this being only if we ask: *Who* is it? Dasein is not constituted
23 by whatness but –if we may coin the expression –by *whoness*. The answer does not give a thing but an I,
24 you, we”.³³ It should also be noted that although he himself repudiated it,³⁴ Heschel’s critique seems to
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53 ³² Held, p. 48. For an insightful comparison between the two thinkers on this issue see *ibid*, pp. 46-52.

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55 ³³ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana
56 University Press 1988) p. 120. Cf. the discussion on the 'who' and 'what' distinction in Augustine in Hannah Arendt,
57 *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1958) p.10-11.
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4 rests on the subject-object distinction so forcefully rejected by Heidegger, whose phenomenological
5 project sought to delineate an interpretive account of Dasein without resorting to it. That Dasein is in-the-
6 world and with-others [*Mitsein*], that is, always already attesting to and constituted by the existence of
7 others, illustrates the inappropriateness of the rigid inside-outside axis upon which Heschel bases his
8 chide. Tellingly, not only does Heschel attribute to Heidegger a stance he fervently rejects, he also argues
9 that this Heideggerian ‘subject’ is not even worthy of the term. Moreover, given that Heidegger seeks an
10 ontological and transcendental investigation of human existence and Being, there is no escaping general
11 and uniform preconditions. Understanding Dasein’s being as the being of one idiosyncratic person as
12 Heschel does is to misunderstand Heidegger’s ontological project entirely. Heidegger endeavors to
13 delineate the existential understanding of the structures of Dasein’s being in order to better understand
14 Being, not in order to answer the question ‘who is man?’.

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30 As stated above, there is no mention of being-toward-God in Heidegger’s approach. Rather, authenticity
31 is attained in Dasein’s being-toward-death (*Vorlaufen-zum-Tode*). To recall, authentic comprehension of
32 the inevitable possibility of not-being exposes the groundlessness of Dasein’s existence. Because
33 consciousness of finitude demonstrates that death is not the great equalizer but the ultimate individualizer,
34 it is a crucial element of authenticity. Generally for Heschel, the preoccupation with death is the mark of
35 paganism: “to the pagan eye mystery of life is *Ruh*”.³⁵ This preoccupation can appear as an intense
36 anxiety over death or as an excessive concern over the afterlife. Heschel, somewhat paradoxically,
37 attributes both features to Heidegger. The idea of living anxiously in light of a portended death as found
38 in *Being and Time* is interpreted by Heschel as an expression of an unrealistic fantasy: “is not the
39 exaggerated anxiety about death due to presumption: the unspoken claim to go on living without dying?”
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53 ³⁴ See: Dror Bondi, *Where Art Thou? God’s Question and the Translation of Tradition in the Thought of Abraham*
54 *Joshua Heschel* (Jerusalem: Shalem Press 2008) pp. 6-54 (Hebrew). See also: Robert A. Erlewine, “Rediscovering
55 Heschel: Theocentrism, Secularism, and Porous Thinking”, *Modern Judaism* 32 no. 2 (2012) p. 190 n9.
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59 ³⁵ Quoted in: *Prophetic Witness* p. 159. Cf. also: Heschel, *The Concept of Man* p. 128.
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4 (WM 36).³⁶ In the essay *Death as Homecoming* (1969), a more detailed discussion of death where
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6 Heidegger seems to be in the background too, Heschel also maintains that “anxiety about death is really
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8 an anxiety about the ultimate confrontation that follows death. In other words, it is an anxiety about the
9
10 afterlife rather than dying itself”.³⁷ Directing his reproach against Heidegger’s account of death, the
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12 Jewish thinker states that “it is a distortion to characterize the life of man as moving toward death [...]”
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14 Death is the end of the road, but not its meaning, not a refutation of living. That every moment of life is a
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16 step toward death is a mechanical view” (DH 375). To consider death as the final and ultimate end of
17
18 human existence as Heidegger does is to ignore its connection to God. “Death then is not simply man’s
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20 coming to an end. It is also entering a beginning” (DH 367); not the beginning of nothingness as it is for
21
22 Heidegger, but rather, inasmuch as human being is grounded in the divine, “the beginning of exaltation,
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24 an ultimate celebration, a reunion of the divine image with the divine source of being” (DH 371). As
25
26 opposed to ancient forms of paganism, “the Hebrew Bible calls for a concern for the problem of living
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28 rather than the problem of dying. Its central concern is not, as in the Gilgamesh epic, how to escape death
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30 but, rather, how to sanctify life” (DH 369). The normative task instilled into human existence is signaled
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32 also in one’s relation to finitude. “The thought of death is a necessary component for human existence”,
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34 Heschel proclaims, for “it enables us to be open to ultimate demands regardless of personal needs” (DH
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36 376). The centrality granted to death in Heidegger’s scheme is then another indicator of its pagan nature
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38 and its negation to Judaism. In opposition, when approached through the Jewish perspective, whereby life
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40 is a “gift” granted by God, “then death ceases to be a radical, absolute negation of what life stands for.
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42 For life and death are aspects of a greater mystery, the mystery of being” (DH 366).
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51 ³⁶ This position, no doubt a misinterpretation, could perhaps be traced to Langan’s book where it is stated that “the
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53 Dasein’s ultimate possibility is death, i.e., the radical impossibility that a finite being should continue to exist
54
55 forever” (p. 36).
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57 ³⁷ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Death as Homecoming”, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, edited by
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59 Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1996) pp. 366-378 (Henceforth DH).
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4 Now Heschel is clearly correct in pointing to the importance of death in Heidegger's scheme, yet he
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6 nevertheless provides a woefully inadequate representation of Heidegger, for whom resolute anticipatory
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8 anxiety in the face of death does not spring from the fear of the event of death or from the desire for
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10 eternal life. Nor, moreover, is it in any way an "absolute negation of what life stands for". Heschel
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12 attributes to Heidegger the view whereby death is an event which occurs in some moment and which
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14 renders every moment a mechanical "step toward" it. This, however, is precisely the inauthentic account
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16 of death characterizing *das Man*, according to which the reaction to death is that of awaiting [*Erwartung*],
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18 not anticipation [*Vorlaufen*]. Rather, death is the ultimate closure of the futural projection of Dasein's *ex-*
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20 *tasis*, the marking of Dasein's historicity. Being-towards-death is an ontological character of Dasein's
21
22 being-in-the-world, what designates its being as being-ahead-of-itself [*Sich-vorweg-sein*], what marks its
23
24 ecstatic temporality, the *da* of its *sein*. "The ending meant by death is not the being-at-an-end of Dasein",
25
26 Heidegger makes clear, "but the being-towards-the-end of this being" (§48, 245). Heschel's superficial
27
28 perception of Heidegger's notion of death entirely ignores the discussion on 'possibility' and the structure
29
30 of 'care' in *Being and Time* without which the philosophical and existential force of 'death', as well as the
31
32 difference between Dasein and a Cartesian 'subject', cannot be properly comprehended. Inasmuch as
33
34 one's own death is not, to quote Wittgenstein, 'an event in life', and is thus always "the possibility of the
35
36 pure and simple impossibility of Dasein" (BT 250), then "death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over
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38 as soon as it is" (BT 245), or as one commentator put it, "being-towards-death is essentially a matter of
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40 being-towards-life".³⁸
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48 As stated in the outset, for Heschel Heidegger's scheme "seeks to relate the human being to a
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50 transcendence called being as such", while his own biblical thought "seeks to relate man to divine living,
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53 ³⁸ Stephen Mulhall, *The Routledge Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time* (Oxon: Routledge 2013) p. 123. For a
54
55 different approach regarding Heidegger's account of death and its ties to Jewish traditions, see: Elliot R. Wolfson,
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57 'Not Yet Now: Speaking of the End and the End of Speaking', in: *Elliot R. Wolfson: Poetic Thinking*, edited by
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59 Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes (Brill 2015) pp. 127-193.
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4 to a transcendence called the living God” (WM 69). In accordance to a dominant and erroneous
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6 understanding of the time, Heschel reads Heidegger’s notion of Being as a proxy for God. Heidegger’s
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8 thought is understood here as an immanent framework competing with biblical religion. Heschel would
9
10 probably agree with Heidegger’s later oft-quoted statement that “only a God could save us”,³⁹ but he
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12 would similarly insist that this Heideggerian god has nothing to do with God and is in fact an idol.
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14 Heidegger seeks transcendence from within, an imminent radiance emerging from the overflowing
15
16 richness and mystery of Being. For Heschel, that is paganism; transcendence must arrive from without
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18 and is to be implemented within. This may explain the motivation behind Heschel’s confrontation with
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20 Heidegger’s ontology in the first place. In *God in Search of Man* Heschel announces that one of the tasks
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22 of philosophy of religion is “to refute the claim of philosophy when it presumes to become a substitute for
23
24 religion” (GSM 11-12).
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29 The main problem in positing Being as the ultimate, in Heschel’s view, is its lack of pathos, that is, its
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31 lack of care and compassion towards humanity: “Man is in need of meaning, but if ultimate meaning is
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33 not in need of man, and he cannot relate himself to it, then ultimate meaning is meaningless to him” (WM
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35 73). This argument is identical to Heschel’s recurring reproach of the ‘philosopher’s god’, his
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37 paradigmatic specimen of a lifeless religious concept and the embodiment of the intrusion of Athens into
38
39 the shrine of Jerusalem. “There is only one way to define Jewish religion”, announces Heschel in *Man is*
40
41 *not Alone*, “it is the *awareness of God’s interest in man*, the awareness of a *covenant*, of a responsibility
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43 that lies on Him as well as on us” (MNA 241). Heidegger’s notion of Being is portrayed as Aristotle’s
44
45 unmoved mover: distant, detached and aloof, and as such necessarily incapable of furnishing significant
46
47 religious and existential meaning. From the vantage point of Heschel’s theology, the most decisive
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49 character of the biblical God, viz. the compassionate care for human beings, is absent in Heidegger’s
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51 Being.
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57 ³⁹ In his interview from 23 September, 1966, published after his death, as: Martin Heidegger, “Nur noch ein Gott
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59 kann uns retten,” *Der Spiegel* 30 May 31, 1976.
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4 An additional difficulty with positing Being as the ultimate is the nihilism it endorses. In continuation to
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6 his earlier argument against the lack of normative value in Heidegger's account, Heschel declares against
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8 Heidegger's ontocentric fixation and the aloofness of Being: "the ultimate problem is not being, but the
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10 concern for being. What precedes being is not nothingness, but rather concern for beings; logos as well as
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12 *pathos*" (WM 92). Heschel is alluding here to *What is Metaphysics?* (1935) where Heidegger speaks of
13
14 the dependency and commingleness of Being with Nothing. The religious ramifications of conferring
15
16 ultimacy to that which is entangled with nothingness, insists Heschel, are dire: "If the ultimate is sheer
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18 being, the human living has nothing to relate himself to as living. He can only relate himself to nothing"
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20 (WM 69). In contrast to the nihilism of an ontology entwined with nothingness, Heschel's theology of
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22 *pathos* is focused on God's transitive concern. "There is a care that hovers over beings. Being is surpassed
23
24 by concern for being. Being would cease to be were it not for God's care for Being" (WM 92).
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30 Overall, Heschel laments, Heidegger suffers from 'the ontocentric predicament', i.e. the prioritization of
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32 ontology over anthropology, by which Heschel means not an anthropocentric worldview but rather one
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34 which focuses on a God whose *pathos* towards humans grants value and significance to their lives.⁴⁰ The
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36 definitive focus in the German philosopher's work is on Being, and Dasein's analysis is directed towards
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38 addressing the oft neglected question of the meaning of Being [*Seinsfrage*]. Heidegger's ontocentric
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40 predicament implies, Heschel conjures, that Dasein's value corresponds to the manner in which it
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42 contributes to the inquiry into Being, which means it is indirect, derivative and ultimately diminished.
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44 And more still; inasmuch as Being is inherently valueless, the integrity and value of human beings cannot
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46 be derived from it: "[human] existence does not receive its meaning from the realm of being" (WM 67).⁴¹
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50 In Heschel's view, the essential tie between Dasein and *Sein* is mistaken and once again bespeaks pagan
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52 tendencies. "The decision to give priority to the question what is human about a human being is based on
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55 ⁴⁰ See the chapter "The Ontocentric Predicament" in *The Prophets* pp. 263-267. See also Held, p. 77.
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57 ⁴¹ See also: Gianluca Giannini, "Abraham Joshua Heschel's Philosophy of Judaism and its Interrelations with New
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59 'Thinking'", *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 29 No. 1 (Feb., 2009) p. 122.
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4 the assumption that the category of human is not simply derived from the category of being” (WM 29),
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6 but rather from God. Heschel shares the fundamental wonder from the very fact of Being that animates
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8 Heidegger’s thought as a whole. This astonishment was poignantly articulated by Leibniz in the question
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10 “why is there something rather than nothing?”. Yet in Heschel’s view, Being generates radical amazement
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12 and invites questioning, and although evasive, it ultimately steers the inquirer toward a further
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14 investigation after its origin. “The mind dares to go beyond being in asking about the source of being [...]”
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16 a Being that calls a reality into being is endowed with the kind of being that transcends mysteriously all
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18 conceivable being”. Heschel here targets Heidegger’s position, according to which attending to the
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20 mystery of Being is the zenith of thinking. To accept that “the Supreme Being is total mystery” as
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22 Heidegger does and to subsequently reject that “there is meaning beyond the mystery” (WM 77) is for
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24 Heschel a manifestation of “pagan heritage” (GSM 126). The mystery of Being cannot be the final point
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26 of investigation, Heschel affirms, for both Being and nothing (non-being) are “transcended”.⁴²
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32 Heschel’s allegation of Heidegger’s ‘ontocentric predicament’ as well as his general treatment of Being
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34 reveal a profoundly flawed understanding of Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, one which lays in the
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36 heart of Heschel’s critique. Shaul Magid observes that for Heschel “[Heidegger’s] ontology serves as a
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38 modern correlate of the paganism the prophets contested”.⁴³ This, as we have recurrently seen, is a precise
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40 report of Heschel’s perspective. Like his biblical heroes of past, he too felt obligated to confront and
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42 repudiate the modern manifestation of paganism he saw Heidegger’s ontology to be.⁴⁴ An attentive
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46 ⁴² Cf. n. 29.
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48 ⁴³ Saul Magid, “The Role of the Secular in the Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Theology: (Re)Reading
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50 Heschel after 9/11”, *Modern Judaism* Vol. 29 No. 1 (Feb. 2009) p. 151.
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53 ⁴⁴ This could be attested from a comparison of Heschel’s published dissertation *Die Prophetie* (1936) with its
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55 expanded English version *The Prophets* (1962). After the section ‘Die ontologische Voraussetzung’ in the original
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57 edition, Heschel added to the English edition a section entitled ‘The Ontocentric Predicament’, parts of which
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59 appear *verbatim* in *Who is Man?* as a polemic against Heidegger. Here a pagan experience, characterized as
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4 examination, however, discloses that the ontology ascribed to Heidegger is precisely the outlook which he
5 dedicated extended philosophical efforts to overcome, or at least ‘get over’. Heschel perceives Being as
6 an ‘ultimate’, a thing Dasein is in need of, an ‘object’ to which Dasein strives for but which cannot grant
7 affection in return.⁴⁵ Heidegger is regarded here as a traditional ontologist, adhering to what he himself
8 called ‘the metaphysics of presence’ against which he contested. A point made by Elliot Wolfson in his
9 discussion on Rosenzweig and Heidegger is pertinent here:⁴⁶ Heidegger adduces from Heraclitus’s
10 opaque fragment *phusis kruptesthai philei* (‘nature loves to hide’), which Heidegger reproduces as “to
11 self-revealing there belongs a self-concealing” - “the essence of being is such that, as a self-revealing,
12 being reveals itself in a way such that a self-concealing – that means, a withdrawal – belongs to this
13 revealing”.⁴⁷ Being is described as the paradoxical ‘self-concealing revealing’, which is why Heidegger
14 repeatedly stresses the co-belonging of truth and un-truth, the fundamental feature of his conception of
15 truth as *alētheia*. This position, so important in Heidegger’s overall scheme, is developed in depth in his
16 later writings, yet it is found already in *Being and Time* §7 and §44. The very identification of Being and
17 God, which is only understandable from within Heschel’s ill-conceived conception of Being, was

18 “experiencing being”, is contrasted to prophetic experience in which “experiencing concern” is the center of
19 existence. While, as I argue, Heschel’s reading of Heidegger’s ontology is impoverished and misjudged, this
20 nevertheless bolsters the aforementioned claim that only in the 1960s a more concentrated confrontation with
21 Heidegger’s philosophy had taken place. See: Abraham Heschel, *Die Prophetie* (Krakow: Polish Academy of
22 Sciences 1936) pp. 153-160; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of
23 America 1962) p. 260-267.

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45 A comparable misreading can be detected in Hans Jonas’s famous *Heidegger and Theology* address (mentioned above in note 8). See: Charles E. Scott, “Heidegger Reconsidered: A Response to Professor Jonas” in: *The Harvard Theological Review* vol. 59 no. 2 (April 1966) pp. 175-185.

46 See: Wolfson 2014 p. 51.

47 Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, translated by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010) p. 25.

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4 explicitly denied by Heidegger, who said “Being and God are not identical, and I would never attempt to
5 think the essence of God via being”.⁴⁸ Heidegger’s own assault on the Aristotelian god and what he terms
6 ‘ontotheology’ makes apparent why Heschel’s rendering of Heidegger’s notion Being as an unmoved
7 mover is so misguided. While appropriately a philosophical critique, Heidegger was well aware that it can
8 amount to a theological critique as well. His oft-quoted words speak for themselves: “man can neither
9 pray nor sacrifice to this God. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he
10 play music and dance before God”.⁴⁹ Tellingly, this reflects Heschel’s own protest against the
11 philosopher’s god. Shai Held rightly finds “Heschel’s suspicion of attempts to make God serve human
12 needs” to be mirrored in Heidegger’s critique of onto-theology.⁵⁰ According to Heidegger, conceiving of
13 Being as the philosopher’s god is precisely what generates the forgetting of Being: “Theologians”, he
14 postulates, “discuss the being-est of all beings [*das Seiendste alles Seienden*], so that it never occurs to
15 them to think about Being itself”.⁵¹ Heidegger perceives Being as an ‘event’ [*Ereignis*] – in
16 contradistinction to the static features accredited to Being by Heschel - sometimes rendered as the
17 ‘Mystery’ [*Geheimnis*] to which Heschel insinuates. Yet as noted, the desire to seek a meaning beyond
18 the mystery of Being is only intelligible if Being is understood as presence. In a similar token, that

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38 ⁴⁸ Cf. Heidegger’s announcement, “if I were yet to write a theology, something that appeals to me at times, then the
39 word *Being* would not appear in it. Faith does not need the thought of Being. When faith has recourse to this
40 thought, it is no longer faith”. Martin Heidegger, *Auszug aus der Logikvorlesung*, GA 15 Zürcher Seminar 1986 pp.
41 436-437. See also: George Pattison, *God & Being: An Enquiry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

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46 ⁴⁹ See: Martin Heidegger, *The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics*, in: Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*
47 11.77 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1995).

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51 ⁵⁰ See: Held, p. 50. Berkowitz accuses Heschel of ignoring the philosophical conundrums that led Medieval Jewish
52 theologians to steer away from the ‘pathetic’ depiction of the biblical god and embrace a seemingly more ‘Greek’
53 account. See: Eliezer Berkovitz, “Dr. A.J Heschel’s Theology of Pathos”, *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox*
54 *Thought*, Vo. 6 No. 2 (Spring-Summer 1964) pp. 67-104.

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59 ⁵¹ See: Martin Heidegger, “*Nietzsches Wort “Gott ist Tot”* (1943), Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 7. 27.

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4 Heschel insinuates that Dasein's value is derivative from Being and hence diminished exhibits the erred
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6 perception according to which Being is a thing from which value can be derived, as the ultimate entity in
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8 the chain of Being, and ignores Heidegger's fundamental point that Being [*Sein*] is always and only
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10 manifested in beings [*Seiendes*], and that Dasein occupies a privileged status in this respect. Heschel, in
11
12 other words, ignores the entire modification, so essential to Heidegger, of situating the 'ontological
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14 difference' in the center of his philosophical deliberation. To this we must add that Heschel's
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16 understanding of Nothing in Heidegger as an absence or negation of something overlooks Heidegger's
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18 explicit statement that "the nothing [*das Nicht*] is more original than the 'not' and negation"⁵², which
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20 demonstrates once more the ontic misreading of Heidegger and the disregard of the ontological
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22 difference. Such a rendering misses the sense of Nothing as the force, so to speak, which draws Being out
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24 to the openness of disclosure.
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30 This erroneous conception of Being is tied to Heschel's contention that Heidegger's view suffers from a
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32 logical fallacy - "the acceptance of the ultimacy of being is a *petitio principii*; it mistakes the problem for
33
34 the solution" (WM 70). The intrigue of the question of Being guides us, according to Heschel, directly to
35
36 the question of the coming into being of Being: "Being points to the question of how being is possible.
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38 The act of bringing being into being, creation, stands higher in the ladder of problems than being" (WM
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40 71). Thus only perceiving Being as creation can correctly reflect its true nature. Being is not the ultimate,
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42 as Heidegger allegedly holds, but rather the result of the concern that animates God, the creator and Lord
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44 of Being. And understanding Being as creation, Heschel establishes, has ethical ramifications:
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46 "Philosophically the primacy of creation over being means that the 'ought' precedes the 'is'" (WM 97).⁵³
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50 ⁵² Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?' in: *Pathmarks* edited by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge
51
52 University Press 1998) p. 97.
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55 ⁵³ This view resembles the general thrust of Emmanuel Levinas's critique of Heidegger. Consider also the following
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57 Levinasean outburst: "a human being is not only a body but also a face. A face cannot be grafted or interchangeable.
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59 A face is a message, a face speaks, often unbeknown to the person. Is not the human face a living mixture of
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4 Deriving from the view of Being as creation, Heschel offers a theological corrective for Heidegger's
5
6 notion of thrownness. In *Being and Time* Dasein is depicted as 'thrown' into the world. By thrownness
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8 Heidegger points to the basic ontological insight that much in our life is not determined or controlled by
9
10 us, that our very being is always conditioned by the world outside ourselves, that Dasein is born into its
11
12 finite facticity. Yet Heschel, like other theologians at the time, understands this notion as a description of
13
14 arbitrary existence bereft of any overarching intention or plan, the abandonment of man by God. "[God]
15
16 has not thrown us out into the world and abandoned us" (MNA 269), he exclaims. Heschel himself quotes
17
18 (Langan's translation of) *Being and Time* division II section 53 where it is stated that through the idea of
19
20 death Dasein "discovers himself confronted by Nothingness, the possible impossibility of his existence".
21
22 He then paraphrases Heidegger's depiction of Dasein as an extended existence from its thrown birth to its
23
24 extinction in death by alluding to Genesis 3:19: "Man may see himself between 'thrownness' at one end
25
26 and death at the other and so maintain: Out of Nothingness I came and into Nothingness I shall return"
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28 (WM 69-70).⁵⁴ In the second explicit reference of Heidegger in the book, Heschel declares, "Heidegger's

33
34 mystery and meaning? [...] the most exposed part of the body, the best known, it is the least describable, a synonym
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36 for an incarnation of uniqueness. Can we look at a face as if it were a commonplace?" (WM 38). In an essay
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38 entitled 'Jewish Philosophies after Heidegger: Imagining a Dialogue between Jonas and Levinas' (*Graduate Faculty*
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40 *Philosophy Journal* 23.1 (2001) pp. 119-146) Lawrence Vogel constructs a dialogue between these two Jewish
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42 thinkers who propounded thorough critiques of Heidegger. It would be interesting to add Heschel's unique
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44 theological voice to this imagined 'conversation' and compare the many similarities as well as some important
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46 differences he holds with these thinkers. Any attempt at construing a 'conversation' of the sort must take into
47
48 account Wolfson's illuminating discussions on Heschel and on Heidegger and Levinas, in: Wolfson 2014, pp. 5-8,
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50 58-59, 90-153.

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53 ⁵⁴ This too can be traced back to Langan's book, where the discussion on this issue is formulated in a way that for a
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55 biblically inclined reader such as Heschel, these verses from Genesis would automatically come to mind. Langan
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57 writes: "'Thrownness' at one end and dead at the other – these are the signs that Dasein draws its reality from
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59 Nothing and is destined to return it to the same indefinite night". See: Langan, *The Meaning of Heidegger* p. 36.

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4 rhetorical question, ‘Has the Dasein, as such, ever freely decided and will it ever be able to decide as to
5 whether to come into existence or not?’ has been answered long ago: ‘It is against your will that you are
6 born, it is against your will that you live, and it is against your will that you are bound to give account...’
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9 (WM 97). Now the quote from Mishna *Avot* 4:22 ostensibly reiterates the idea that Dasein is thrown into
10 a world with little control over the most momentous events of life. But inasmuch as Being is creation, the
11 implied idea of a caring creator indicates concern and intention behind it all. Heschel could therefore
12 affirm,
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21 “I have not brought my being into being. Nor was I thrown into being. My being is obeying the
22 saying ‘Let there be! [...] against the conception of the world as something just here, the bible
23 insists that the world is creation. Over all being stand the words: Let there be! And there was, and
24 there is. To be is to obey the commandment of creation’” (WM 97).
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31 In addition to the concerns raised above regarding Heschel’s problematic understanding of the status and
32 feature of Being in Heidegger’s scheme, it is noteworthy that the issue of Being as creation is addressed
33 by Heidegger in the 1935 lecture series *Introduction to Metaphysics*. There he proclaims that the belief in
34 the Bible as divine revelation denies the possibility of a genuine *philosophical* inquiry into the
35 fundamental ontological question - ‘why is there Being rather than nothing?’. It would be foolish (cf. 1
36 Corinthians 1:20), even dishonest, to re-raise the question from within a Christian (or Jewish) framework,
37 for doing so genuinely would necessitate “giving oneself up as a believer”. The postulation of creation as
38 extended in the bible solves, as it were, the ontological question without actually attending to it. Above
39 all, the proposition of Being as creation is guilty of perpetuating the negligence of Being – the ‘original
40 sin’ of western thought in Heidegger’s judgment.
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4 religiously attuned but also essential for human flourishing and promoting the good. Heschel's rejoinder
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6 highlights the quintessential elements of his biblical thought with which he hoped to address the spiritual
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8 void of his generation. The main problem with the German philosopher's ontology and the reason
9
10 Heschel renders it a modern form of paganism is that it brackets the biblical God outside its purview and
11
12 is therefore unable to reflect the holiness and value existing in every human being, nor can it account for
13
14 the religious and moral obligation this demands. Heschel's engagement with Heidegger, however, is
15
16 marked by profound misrepresentations and an overall flattening of the complexity of Heidegger's
17
18 position, often resulting in ascribing to him the precise positions he seeks to overcome. Heschel
19
20 polemically presents Heidegger's philosophy as antithetical to Judaism, yet as we have seen, the
21
22 exploration undergirding this assessment is deeply insufficient and all too often Heidegger's actual
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24 positions are not engaged with in the discussion. The question regarding the relation and possible ties
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26 between Heidegger and Judaism is therefore one still worth asking.
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