No Religion Is an Island: Following the Trail Blazer

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Through a rereading of Heschel's essay "No Religion Is an Island" I will highlight his conceptual and methodological contribution, as well as address the issue of Heschel's legacy and how it continues to challenge us. As one who follows in Heschel's footsteps I shall move between a description of Heschel and his theoretical contribution and the realities, challenges, and work that lies ahead of us, now and in the future.[1]

> This may be compared to a thicket of reeds which no man could enter, for whoever entered therein lost his way. What did a certain clever man do? He cut down [some reeds] and entered, then cut down more and penetrated further; thus he entered through the clearing and went out; then all began to enter through his clearing.[2]

Introduction

The midrashic parable quoted above, applied in some traditions to the figure of Solomon, whose parables break a path of understanding in the Torah,[3] provides an apt description for the accomplishments of Abraham Joshua Heschel

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[1]I am presently involved in a project of developing a contemporary Jewish theology of world religions, a project that is very close in spirit to Heschel's work. The theoretical foundations of this research and education project, carried out under the auspices of the Elijah Interfaith Institute, are spelled out in the Hebrew article, "Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: An Initial Mapping," *Akdamot* (2006) and in the English article, "Towards a Jewish Theology of World Religions: Meeting the Challenges of Interreligious Pluralism," to be published in a volume prepared at Georgetown University.

[2]Genesis Rabba 12:1, *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman and M. Simon (CITY: Soncino Press, 1951), p. 87.

[3]See Song of Songs Rabba 1:8.

in the field of interreligious dialogue. Heschel was a path breaker. While Jews and Christians have been in some form of exchange ever since the younger religion grew out of the older, something novel characterizes the historical situation in which Heschel operated, the relationships he enjoyed, and the theological and spiritual challenges he faced. I believe it is fair to say that Heschel was the first Jewish thinker to have consciously grappled with the question of the meaning of interfaith (or interreligious) dialogue and to have suggested some of the psychological, intellectual, and spiritual moves it requires.[4] In other words, he was Judaism's first theoretician of interreligious relations.[5]

Heschel was a trail blazer. Many of the important voices that have been sounded over the forty years are in some way indebted to Heschel, or at least cognizant of his significance for interfaith relations.[6] Trail blazers create new paths in the thicket of the wood. Broadening the path, paving it, and tidying it is left to those who follow the path breaking clever man. My own reflections

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[4]On Heschel's originality, see Harold Kasimow, "Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1981): 423–434.

[5]A comparison with Buber is helpful. Buber was a philosophical theoretician of dialogue, as well as an important exponent of Judaism to Christians, who engaged issues of Jewish-Christian interest seriously. Yet, the relational paradigm that governed Buber's relations with Christian thinkers and with Christianity represents an earlier era in Jewish-Christian relations. Buber was engaged in the fight for the legitimacy of Judaism as a religious form in the face of Christianity. Accordingly, his efforts were devoted to distinguishing Judaism from Christianity and to legitimating the former. See Samuel Rodin, "Two Types of Faith: Martin Buber on Judaism and Christianity," in D. Pratt and D. Bing, eds., *Judaism and Christianity: Toward Dialogue* (CITY: University of Waikato, 1987), pp. 131–169 and Ekkehard Stegemann, Introduction (to Martin Buber), in Fritz Rothschild, ed., *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp. 111–121. The general climate under which Buber operated is well described, in relation to Franz Rosenzweig, by Rivka Horowitz. See Rivka Horowitz, "David Hartman, Paul Van Buren and Franz Rosenzweig on Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in J. Malino, ed., *Judaism and Modernity: The Religious Philosophy of David Hartman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 241–269. Both Buber and Rosenzweig are contrasted with the present climate. The reigning paradigm of mission and polemic has given way to an alternative paradigm of dialogue. Heschel's contribution to the Second Vatican Council took place when Buber was dying. Heschel operated at a crucial moment in time and played a crucial role in ushering in the new relational paradigm.

[6]One thinker, in particular, who is aware of Heschel's importance and who draws heavily upon his premises is David Hartman. See David Hartman, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Heroic Witness," in *A Heart of Many Rooms* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 1999), pp. 169–192. See further Ephraim Meir, "David Hartman on the Attitudes of Soloveitchik and Heschel Towards Christianity," in *Judaism and Modernity*, pp. 262–273.

are of this nature. I seek to follow Heschel by clarifying the moves and positions taken by him, by considering their application today, and by suggesting ways in which we might either broaden the path or take it deeper into the forest. I shall attempt these tasks through a rereading of Heschel's most significant writing in the field of interreligious dialogue, his 1966 essay "No Religion Is an Island."[7] The essay itself is fairly short, compact and dense. It does many things within the scope of one short essay. The moves it makes are often rapid and at times take place through leaps in the argument and presentation. I think it is fair to say that many of its readers were impressed by the depth and pathos of the argument, without following the intricacies of Heschel's arguments and the multiple moves he makes.[8] It would have taken a book-length presentation, in which each of the arguments is carefully unpacked, to drive home the full wealth of Heschel's contribution. Such a fuller and more systematic presentation does, in fact, remain a desideratum. Moreover, it may well be that only a reader who is equipped with sensibilities similar to those that informed Heschel's work and who can appreciate Heschel's contribution against the background of earlier Jewish sources can offer a fuller appreciation of the originality and depth of Heschel's essay.

No Religion Is an Island: Preliminary Observations

"No Religion Is an Island" is a powerful essay. It is full of passion, inspiration, and deep conviction. It is hard to remain neutral in the face of the powerful message that Heschel delivers. The essay, like most of Heschel's writing, operates on the emotional, no less than the cognitive level. The emotional component is an important one in effecting the kind of attitudinal change for which the essay calls. The area of interreligious relations is fraught with centuries- and millennia-old emotional baggage. It is therefore both fitting and necessary that new conceptual developments be accompanied by their own emotional weight.

Heschel as a person, theologian, and theoretician of interreligious relations is a figure that touches. This touch has a healing and transformative

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[7]Published originally in *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. 21 (1966). The essay will be quoted from its reprint in Harold Kasimow and Byron Sherwin, eds., *No Religion Is An Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), pp. 3–22.

[8]A reader-response perspective to Heschel's essay is offered by the essays collected in the Kasimow-Sherwin volume. All readers relate to only a portion of Heschel's argument, often citing the same few passages as representative of his thought. No one I know has undertaken an analysis of Heschel's presentation in its entirety.

effect. It is this very "Heschel-touch" that provides the essay with its depth and power. As already suggested, many of the essay's readers were touched by Heschel, at times at the expense of engagement with his ideas.[9] I too am in deep sympathy with Heschel's tone and spirit and identify myself very much with the existential and experiential basis that informs his own reflections. The pioneering inspiration of Heschel has remained a guiding light that few have been able to follow fully. I consider the coming together of heart, mind, and spirit in the process of engagement with other religions, as exemplified by Heschel, to be a paradigm worth following. I therefore express the hope that my own focus on the ideas, maneuvers, and strategies that Heschel employs will enhance our view of Heschel the trail blazer and make us more fully aware of the road he invites us to walk.

A key question that must inform the reading of "No Religion Is an Island" is that of the audience for which it was composed. Most readers of the essay assume that it was written for both a Jewish and a Christian audience. Indeed, this is borne out by the fact that Heschel speaks both of the attitudes that Jews must adopt and the attitudes that Christians must adopt.[10] Nevertheless, it seems to me that the essay is more directed at a Christian audience than it is at a Jewish audience; perhaps it is even primarily addressed to Christians.[11] The context would, of course, account for this. This essay was Heschel's inaugural lecture as a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary. Heschel also

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[9]The voices collected by Kasimow and Sherwin seem to resonate with Heschel and his interreligious experience. Opposition to Heschel is itself ultimately based on experiential grounds. Thus, the great alternative to Heschel's views are those posed by Rabbi Soloveitchik. Underlying Soloveitchik's views is the recognition of the singularity of Jewish religious experience and of the impossibility of communicating religious experience. See Ephraim Meir, "David Hartman on the Attitudes of Soloveitchik and Heschel Towards Christianity," pp. 262–273. For a systematic exposition of the views of the two thinkers, in the context of their actual contacts with Church hierarchs and the interreligious politics of the time, see Reuven Kimelman, "Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish-Christian Relations," *The Edah Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2004) electronic version. Hardcopy published in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 24 (2004): 251–271. While not explicitly stated, Kimelman's essay attempts to narrow the commonly perceived divide between the two figures by pointing out their commonalities, the involvement of Soloveitchik in dialogue, alongside and independently of Heschel, and by suggesting conditions for dialogue to which Soloveitchik would probably not, in the author's view, be opposed.

[10]See p. 12.

[11]Hartman, "Heschel: A Heroic Witness," p. 184, seems to be of the same opinion, even though later in his article he refers to Heschel's message to a Jewish audience (pp. 186–7).

published it in the seminary's review and not in a Jewish publication or in a scientific publication regularly read by both Jews and Christians. Recognition of the context in which Heschel is addressing Christians will go a long way towards clarifying some of the questions the essay poses. The choice of sources, the structure of the argument, what is included and what is omitted from his discussion—all cohere with the primarily Christian context of the essay's delivery. The emphasis placed on giving up missionary work in relation to the Jews and even the lengthy review of Jewish attitudes towards Christianity[12] all make sense in the context in which Christians are the primary audience and Jews are secondary.

That "No Religion Is an Island" was framed particularly with a Christian audience in mind finds confirmation from a comparison of this essay to one printed a year later, based on Heschel's address to the Rabbinical Assembly. The essay entitled "From Mission to Dialogue?"[13] cannibalizes large parts of "No Religion Is an Island," while adding some passages that are particular to the present essay. The comparison is illuminating. What Heschel presents to his Jewish audience amounts to a primer in recent ecumenical developments and a call to arise to the challenges of the present moment, when Jews are expected to share their treasures with Christians. It highlights changes in the Catholic Church and offers Heschel's' reading of the significance of the moment. However, as the closing passage suggests: "We may not be ready for a dialogue in depth, so few are qualified. Yet the time has come for studying together on the highest academic level in an honest search for mutual understanding and for ways to lead us out of the moral and spiritual predicament

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[12]On the face of it, the disproportionately lengthy presentation on pp. 18–22 should be read as addressing a Jewish audience, encouraging them to be accepting of Christians, in a reciprocal movement to the earlier affirmation of the importance of the continuing survival of the Jewish people as Jews (pp. 16–18). However, upon close reading one realizes that the message that Christians ought to be accepted, based on historical precedent, is never really drawn from the sources. In context, the argument reads more like offering Jewish acceptance of Christianity, as legitimate in and of itself without need of conversion to Judaism, as a model for Christians to adopt in relation to Judaism. See the opening paragraph on p. 19. It should be noted that these final pages of the essay are its weakest part. Heschel the historian has cobbled historical precedents together. We no longer hear the prophetic or inspired Heschel, but rather the scholarly and erudite sage. The entire section is almost an addendum to the powerful essay, and may have indeed been composed later, or at least under the pressure of time. The multiple possibilities of intended audiences may thus be the outcome of weak writing, rather than of express intention.

[13]*Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1967): 1–11.

affecting all of humanity."[14] Students familiar with the lecture offered by Rabbi Soloveitchik to the parallel Orthodox rabbinic convention will be struck by the similarity of some of the warnings and concerns.[15] Concern for successful dialogue and care for the quality of exchange seem to push both leaders to positions that fall short of their own high points of contact with members of other traditions. In Heschel's case, the comparison with "No Religion Is an Island" is important precisely for what is omitted from his rabbinical address. Gone are much of the pathos and the spiritual highs. Gone are the daring commentaries and the theological breakthroughs. Gone is the personal encounter. In short, the great highlights of the essay did not make it into the "Jewish" presentation. Practical collaboration—yes. Openness to self-transformation through the encounter with the other, the mutual spiritual help of two religions—of that we no longer hear. Based on our later presentation of the impulses that underlie "No Religion Is an Island," we may safely claim that Heschel only brought a part of himself and a part of his insight to his Jewish listeners. Those who are sufficiently attuned to Heschel's spiritual message would have to hear it in a context where Heschel could be more fully himself, in front of a Christian audience.

What this means is that Heschel may have never intended, and could therefore never achieve, an adequate treatment of the theme of interreligious relations from a purely Jewish perspective within this essay. While much of what Heschel has to say on the subject may be relevant to a Jewish, no less than a Christian audience, it still leaves important gaps in relation to the needs of a Jewish audience. If its primary readership is Christian, we should not expect Heschel to be doing all the work of developing a Jewish attitude, or as it is known today, a Jewish theology of world religions. Some of the questions, procedures and methods that would be required by the Jewish reader will be found lacking in Heschel's essay. This does not detract from the significance of the essay for a Jewish audience. That so many Jewish readers could have been influenced by it is testimony to the universality of Heschel's religious understanding. Having couched his ideas within his own native idioms and ways of thinking, Heschel's work would certainly be of interest to a Jewish audience. And we cannot exclude Jewish listeners from Heschel's intended audience completely, if only because it is obvious that some of his Jewish colleagues from across the street at the Jewish Theological Seminary were in the audience, along with the primarily Christian public. But we should not be surprised if

[14]P. 11.

[15]See above note 9.

Heschel's treatment leaves gaps, from the Jewish perspective. A contemporary inquiry that sets to construct a Jewish theology of other religions will find in Heschel a foundation and an inspiration, but also many gaps that have not been addressed. Those who follow the trail blazer are called to fill these gaps.

Heschel's Authority

As a trail blazer, Heschel had to articulate what he saw as the appropriate response to the new situation presented by contemporary interreligious relations and to the possibilities it contains. The ability to articulate such a response draws upon and raises the question of the authority by which Heschel was able to state his particular position. The question of authority is particularly relevant when we consider Heschel's reception as well as the challenges that Heschel places before present-day readers. On the whole, Heschel has had little impact within Jewish Orthodox circles.[16] He has had huge impact within non-Orthodox circles, and perhaps even more so within non-Jewish circles.[17] These facts touch directly upon the question of the sources of Heschel's authority.

Heschel was a scholar of Judaism. His historical and philosophical knowledge thus provide the foundation for any statement made by him. We can identify in "No Religion Is an Island" traces of Heschel's scholarly and theological work.[18] However, Heschel's authority draws on much more than his erudition and theological acumen. There are two factors that I would regard as sources of authority.

The first is the personal friendships and the shared spiritual experience that Heschel enjoyed with leading Christian theologians and men of religion, both Catholic and Protestant. Heschel offers testimony to those relationships in our essay, and they are presented as a model that the reader is implicitly in-

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[16]Those who engage in dialogue are informed in part by Rabbi Soloveitchik's position and in part by the social and political forces that afford interreligious dialogue an increasingly prominent role.

[17]The essays in the Kasimow-Sherwin volume bear witness to the extent and quality of reception, even if they express the conceptual design of the editors, who invited the particular essays.

[18]For example, the reference on p. 15 to Rabbi Ishmael's statement, "The Torah speaks in the language of man," draws heavily on Heschel's reflection on the themes of language and revelation, as expressed in his *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations* (New York: Continuum, 2005). His reflections on revelation also echo his work in *The Prophets*. Obviously, his unique theological voice, expressed in his classical works, finds expression also in this article.

vited to emulate.[19] I believe the particular sensibilities that Heschel expresses could not be developed outside the matrix of strong friendships and powerful relationships and the sharing they make possible. It is thus not an accident that Heschel begins his reflections on the meaning of encountering a person of a different faith by reflecting upon the meaning of the very meeting of another human being. Interreligious relations are thus a particular expression of interpersonal relations, and their success and depth are a function of the depth of the latter.

It seems to me that one of the essay's main insights also grows in the hotbed of trusting and profound relations between people of different religions. Heschel makes the striking statement that God is greater than religion and that religion is a means, not an end.[20] While such a statement can grow from abstract reflection, it seems to me that it is strongly indebted to the perspective which is discovered when God's reality is shared or mutually recognized through friendship and communion between members of different religions. It is then that God, not the particular form of a religion, is discovered as the deeper common ground and ultimate end. Heschel thus assumes that people of different religions may share religious experience in recognizing the common God and his effects upon the human person in ways that transcend the details and particulars of their religions. Because God precedes religion, people of different religions can share in meaningful ways their relationship with God.

Heschel's personal experiences and attitudes also help account for various details that one would have a difficult time accounting for in traditional terms. Thus, he describes the appropriate attitude between members of different religions as reverence.[21] The demand for reverence far exceeds the conventional demand for respect or tolerance. Heschel does not provide a basis for making that demand. The history of relations between Judaism and other religions would not equip him to make such a demand. One can only assume that this demand is itself a carryover from his personal relations and a fruit of the lessons he himself learned as a pioneer of interrreligious relations.

The second component that informs Heschel's essay and that must be recognized as a source of authority is what might be called a prophetic perspective or prophetic vision. It obviously draws upon Heschel's work on the

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[19]See pp. 10, 17. I believe his personal experience also informs statements such as those found at the top of p. 9.

[20]P. 13. See further *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Schocken, 1972), p. 181.

[21]See p. 11.

subject. While formally prophecy has been out of reach for Jews for close to 2,500 years, it seems Heschel's self-awareness was nevertheless heavily infused with prophetic self-consciousness.[22] While never claiming prophetic status, there is clearly something prophetic in Heschel's stance. It is significant that the essay opens with a quote from Isaiah's vision of his dedication as a prophet.[23] It is also noteworthy that many of writers who speak of Heschel's work, refer to it by use of the adjective "prophetic."[24] I understand that this adjective denotes the ability to read the times and their signs and to recognize God's will, word, and mandate for the particular moment in time. The prophet is thus the interpreter of history who can carry forth God's will for the particular time and place. In this sense, Heschel found himself challenged by the historical moment, seeking to articulate the broader vision and the particular spirit appropriate for it. A statement such as: "In this aeon diversity of religions is the will of God" is nothing short of a prophetic statement.[25]

Heschel recognizes that humanity is moving towards new models in its communication and organization.[26] His reading of reality leads him to issue the call to extend collaboration to relations between religions. Recognition of the failures of the past is closely related to the call for new models of collaboration.[27] Heschel's reading of contemporary reality goes beyond the recognition

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[22]See Eliezer Schweid, *Prophets for their People and Humanity: Prophecy and Prophets in 20th Century Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999), pp. 239–254 [Hebrew]; Arnold Eisen, "Prophecy as Vocation: New Light on the Thought and Practice of Abraham Joshua Heschel," in *The Path of the Spirit: The Eliezer Schweid Jubilee Volume, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Vol. 19 (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 835–850 [Hebrew]. Heschel's interest in the enduring presence of the holy spirit throughout the ages offers further support to Schweid's and Eisen's analyses. See his Hebrew study on the holy spirit in the Jewish middle ages in Alexander Marx, *Jubilee Volume* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1959), Hebrew Section, pp. 175–142.

[23]P. 4. While the quote may be limited to an illustration of Heschel's fear that we may be deprived of the means of understanding God's word, it would seem from the full quote that he himself is receiving a calling to serve the people, in this connection.

[24]Note the title of Kasimow's essay in *No Religion Is An Island*: "Heschel's Prophetic Vision of Religious Pluralism." It is telling that so many of the quotes, brought by Kasimow and by other writers (non-Jewish) in the volume, in which "prophetic" is used, are mouthed by non-Jews. Outside the Jewish tradition that shuns, or minimizes, prophetic expression, it is easier to refer to "prophetic" as a religious quality.

[25]P. 14.

[26]P. 11.

[27]P. 14.

of common challenges and regrouping to address them. His reading touches upon the heart of religion, its success and efficacy. It leads him to pass a verdict upon the failures of all religions. Heschel's reading of reality includes awareness of failure and crisis, as well as the recognition that the only way out of common crisis is through collaboration.[28] He recognizes that we are at a particular point in time and in the evolution of our religious traditions, and that this time affords us new possibilities, including the relinquishing of former models. Thus, he assumes that we can transcend both mission and polemic.[29]

In the coming together of historical knowledge, personal experience and prophetic analysis of the moment we have the ingredients that make up Heschel the person, the source of the vision expressed in "No Religion Is an Island." It seems to me that ultimately the appeal to authority cannot be external. The vision Heschel points to can neither be validated by means of historical precedent nor based upon pure halachic reasoning. Precedent and halachic ruling are second-order activities that ground a primary understanding and that translate it to the community at large. There is something self-validating in the perspective that Heschel offers. Heschel's vision draws upon his own view of reality and the particular vantage point, formed by knowledge, experience, and understanding, from which it is expressed. Heschel speaks as someone who recognizes a dimension of religion—we would today say spirituality—that transcends the particular forms of religion. A dual perspective of being human beyond, or before, being religious and of being religious before, or beyond, being religious in a particular sense, informs his spiritual horizon. This is the meaning of Heschel's important distinction between theology and depth-theology. Heschel's authority ultimately draws upon his ability to be situated within this horizon and to report to others how reality is viewed from there.

There is thus full justification in citing Heschel as an authority. The various components—knowledge, experience and more—that have brought him to see spiritual reality and interreligious relations in the way he does have situated him within certain horizons of vision. Ultimately, his authority draws from his ability to see, and later translate, from that high vantage point. The rest is commentary, or more correctly, translation.

This has several consequences. The first is that not all will recognize Heschel as an authority or accept the horizons from which he speaks as providing a superior vantage point. A self-validating spiritual authority is delicately balanced between the subjective perspective of the authority and the objective

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[28] P. 5.

[29] P. 17 ff.

canons by means of which a community recognizes and endows with authority. Hence, Heschel may be recognized as an authority by some, while for others he may represent little beyond the objective knowledge he possesses.

The second is that a reading of Heschel and a critique of his work must maintain awareness of the dual levels of proof, justification, and validation. If Heschel's insights do not grow out of the proofs he brings, but from the vision gained from within his own spiritual and existential horizons, they cannot be undermined through alternative readings. Even if Heschel's proofs and the translation of his insights into the traditional language of sources and their interpretation are judged weak, this does not undermine the basic insights he conveys. Also, the type of translation work needed in the transition from personal spiritual insight to communal policy, education, and ruling may need to be developed significantly beyond the work done by Heschel. Heschel would not claim to have exhausted the translation work in this short essay. However, all future translation work would ultimately amount to quantitative improvement upon Heschel's work. It would still remain ancillary to the fundamental spiritual insights that transcend the realms of law and hermeneutics.

Finally, this analysis places before us the greatest of all challenges. Heschel recognizes that dialogue with other religions is an activity for the elite.[30] It calls for the same kind of profound engagement that Heschel brought to it. It cannot be justified simply by appeal to the precedent or the insight of one individual. Therefore, must not everyone who seeks genuine interreligious understanding undergo a process similar to the one Heschel underwent? Can one rely on Heschel's experiences and on his own reading of the historical moment or must these be continually rediscovered by every serious practitioner of dialogue? Surely, to some extent one may be able to rely on others, Heschel included. However, Heschel challenges us not only to follow him, but to become like him. The horizons of vision we will discover may be the same as his, or different in various ways. The important point, however, is that one cannot simply engage other religions without the full emotional and spiritual engagement that Heschel brought with him, through study, friendship and shared experience. Heschel would have discouraged his epigones. He would have sought first-hand answers, drawn from first-hand spiritual experiences. In this he continues to challenge us.[31]

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[30]P. 11.

[31]I am sure Heschel would have approved of the broader coexistence-driven dialogue that is common nowadays, provided basic conditions of clarity and security of identity were maintained. However, this type of broader dialogue should be recognized as distinct from and derivative of the theological and spiritual dialogue that Heschel himself practiced.

The Levels of Dialogue

A starting point for Heschel's discussion is that there are things concerning which different religions cannot and will not agree. Faith includes reference to tenets of faith and dogmas concerning which religions must agree to disagree and consequently to leave beyond the pale of discussion.[32] Heschel's entire argument is based upon the premise that certain areas must be excluded from dialogue and upon the need to search for the common ground regardless of these exclusions. Throughout the essay, Heschel appeals to different types, or different levels, of dialogue. Because of how the essay is written, the distinction between the different types is not always clear enough. Nevertheless, one notes a transition within the essay. The earlier part discusses one type of dialogue, the latter another. The first emphasizes collaboration in the face of common challenges. Collaboration itself has varying shades—some more practical, some more religious. Heschel reads the times as indicating that religions must collaborate today. We can no longer afford the luxury of remaining divided, because we are challenged and threatened in similar ways. The legacy of nazism and nihilism forces us to unite against common threats in the face of common dangers and crises.[33]

This first dimension of dialogue is quite similar to that accepted by Orthodox Jewish participants in interreligious dialogue in light of the views, or rulings, of Rabbi Soloveitchik.[34] Theological dialogue is avoided, while practical cooperation is encouraged.[35] It is noteworthy that the catchy phrase that gave the article its title appears in this part of the essay.[36] That no religion is an island thus means that no religion is isolated from the problems we all face, and therefore religions must collaborate in addressing those problems.

But Heschel goes beyond this initial sense of dialogue. He assumes that beyond having common enemies, people of different religions can meet in a common religious domain. That domain is where religion, or God, touch or influence the human being. The distinction between God Himself and his ef-

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[32]Pp. 8–9.

[33]P. 4 ff.

[34]Rabbi Soloveitchik's views were initially published in an article entitled "Confrontation" in *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*, Vol. 6 (1964). It is available electronically, along with a panel discussion on the continuing relevance of Soloveitchik's position, at http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik.

[35]Heschel himself never uses the term "theological dialogue."

[36]P. 6.

fects upon human consciousness opens for Heschel a broad arena for contact with other religions. All that concerns the human encounter with God, listening to God's word, and the Divine impression upon the soul falls within the purview of encounter with other religions.

This distinction draws upon the centrality of the human person to Heschel's interreligious understanding and upon the centrality of the spiritual dimension to Heschel's understanding of the human person. To be religious is part of the human experience and the human condition. Heschel would resist any distinction between being human, as being limited to the moral domain, and being religious.

Heschel does not limit himself to the recognition of similar responses in the human psyche to the religious phenomenon as a basis for human commonality. The common human basis and the similar response to the divine allow him to conclude that it is in fact the same divine reality that is touching believers in different religions.[37] Consequently, while ignoring the rituals and dogmas of the religions,[38] all religions are validated as vehicles through which the same divine reality is contacted and through which it makes its impression upon humanity.[39]

It is interesting to compare a classical statement regarding Christianity that Heschel brings towards the end of the essay with his own way of describing Christians. Heschel Cites Rabbi Israel of Danzig (1782–1860) who refers to the Christians as "our brethren, the gentiles, who acknowledge the one God and revere His Torah which they deem divine and observe, as is required of them, the seven commandments of Noah."[40] This reference highlights creed and observance, the objective expressions of the Christian faith, on account of which it is recognized as legitimate by this Jewish writer. Contrast Heschel's

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[37]P. 9.

[38]The question of religions and religious practices that are beyond the pale of legitimacy does not arise in Heschel's discussion, which is primarily aimed at Christians. One might conjecture that invalid (impure, satanic, etc.) religious experiences would leave different traces in the soul than would the genuine encounter with the God of Israel, common to Jews and Christians.

[39]Ritual and dogma are ignored, and the processes of the human psyche and the experiences of the human person are privileged. This could be a strategy for upholding dialogue in face of profound differences. It could, however, also express Heschel's own evaluation of the priority of elements within religion. The view that privileges the psychological and spiritual processes of the human soul over outward rituals and objective creeds may itself have been formed through Heschel's encounter with religious phenomena outside Judaism.

[40]Pp. 21–22.

own description: "What unites us? A commitment to the Hebrew Bible as Holy Scripture. Faith in the Creator, the God of Abraham, commitment to many of His commandments, to justice and mercy, a sense of contrition, sensitivity to the sanctity of life and to the involvement of God in history, the conviction that without the holy the good will be defeated, prayer that history may not end before the end of days, and so much more."[41] Some of the classical objective yardsticks are echoed. However, reference to the one God has been nuanced by reference to the common God of creation and of Abraham, while the field of common commandment too has been broadened. But more significantly, an entire subjective domain has been opened up. It contains reference to contrition, sensitivity, sanctity of life, and a common historical conviction. These are complemented by a common vision of social action and of contemporary concern that Jews and Christians share. The earlier statement is concerned with recognition and legitimation. Heschel's statement is concerned with common ground and with sharing. It is therefore broader and more penetrating. It also tells us what about religion is really important and how Jews and Christians share what is truly important.

While one may recognize two distinct levels of dialogue, there is a unifying factor, in the form of the purpose of dialogue. Unlike the purely practical dialogue, which seeks to help each other through addressing external problems common to both religions, Heschel suggests the purpose of dialogue is to actually help each other achieve our spiritual goals. Such help is needed in part in the face of common external challenges. But it seems to also be immanent to religious reality. Sharing and mutual support are thus fundamental to the identities of religious people. The essay's concluding paragraph is thoughtfully located to deliver this message as the summary of the entire essay.[42]

What, then is the purpose of interreligious cooperation?

> It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another; to share insight and learning, to cooperate in academic ventures on the highest scholarly level, and what is even more important to search in the wilderness for wellsprings of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love and care for man. What is urgently needed are ways of helping one another in the terrible predicament of here and now by the courage to believe that the word of the Lord

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[41]P. 9.

[42]One notes this paragraph is disjointed from the argument of the previous pages. I have already commented that those pages are of a lesser quality than the bulk of the essay. This further highlights the importance of the concluding paragraph as the final chord of the entire essay, rather than as a conclusion of the immediately preceding argument.

> endures for ever as well as here and now; to cooperate in trying to bring about a resurrection of sensitivity, a revival of conscience; to keep alive the divine sparks in our souls, to nurture openness to the spirit of the Psalms, reverence for the words of the prophets, and faithfulness to the Living God.[43]

Help is needed because we face similar challenges. We traverse the same desert. However, the depth of collaboration and mutual help far exceeds the social and public collaboration in projects of a practical nature. Jews and Christians share the same scriptures and they can help each other reach into the depths of those scriptures as resources for today. Faith, sensitivity, conscience, and ultimately the divine in our soul are common to Christians and Jews. We are called to help each other in growing and maintaining them.

One may characterize the two levels of dialogue as corresponding to the two sources of Heschel's interreligious vision. The prophetic drive calls for an assessment of what must be done here and now and corresponds to the call for practical collaboration. Collaboration is, as Heschel points out, a sign of the times and must be extended to the field of religion. The second dimension of dialogue highlights the influence of God upon the human psyche and the ways in which religious people of different traditions are called to help each other. Is this not a precise image of the kind of relations Heschel himself enjoyed with prominent Christian religious figures?

Between Common Ground and Common Language

Heschel assumes that Jews, Christians, and others can recognize traces of the same God in their lives and souls. This assumes a range of common responses to encounter with the divine as well as communicability of those responses.[44] Thus mutual recognition of experience points to mutual recognition of the religions.

However, experience cannot be communicated directly. It relies upon language as a means of communication. A sense of commonality in experience, and consequently in the ultimate source and referent of religious experience, is thus founded upon shared religious language. An examination of Heschel's language reveals that in communicating the very notion of the communicability of experience, the language employed is not traditional Jewish language. At times the language is neutral, at times it has particular affinities with the

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[43]P. 22. See further p. 12, where Heschel speaks of help in overcoming hardness of heart, in cultivating a sense of wonder and of unlocking doors to holiness in time.

[44]Incommunicability constitutes the basis for Soloveitchik's rejection of dialogue.

thought of Christian thinkers. This may be simply a consequence of the essay being addressed primarily to Christians. Or it may suggest that there is no absolutely neutral common ground and that Heschel was able to share with Christians because he was able or willing, to a certain degree, to frame his religious experiences in terms that echo Christian conceptualization of religion.[45] Some examples follow.

In distinguishing between the religious path and its effects upon the human person, Heschel writes: "We may disagree about the ways of achieving fear and trembling, but the fear and trembling are the same."[46] The Jewish reader will, of course, recognize that certain rabbinic passages do refer to fear and trembling as appropriate attitudes that should accompany the study of Torah, following the precedent at Sinai.[47] Nevertheless, conceptualizing the primary religious experience as fear and trembling is almost alien to Jewish thought. The classical experiential articulation refers to "love and fear," rather than to fear and trembling.[48] "Fear and Trembling" is, of course, the title of Soren Kierkegaard's classical work. By framing religious experience in these terms, Heschel is, in fact, operating within his Christian host community's linguistic and conceptual realm.

Similarly, in addressing the thorny issue of Jewish rejection of Jesus, in the framework of the call for mutual acceptance between Christians and Jews,

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[45]S.Daniel Breslauer, "Theology and Depth-Theology: A Heschel Distinction," *CCAR Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1974): 81–86, has pointed to the problematics of drawing a firm distinction between religious psychology, the common religious experience that Heschel also terms depth-theology, and religious sociology, which governs the social institutions and creeds into which the assumed primary religious experience is translated. Breslauer's critique would be strengthened if we realize that the language by means of which Heschel conceptualizes the assumed common religious experience is itself derived from one particular tradition. Kimelman, n. 60, quotes Dr. Twersky as accounting for Rabbi Soloveitchik's fear of engagement in interreligious dialogue due also to the concern that Judaism and Christianity share theological terms without sharing their meanings. The dialogue is therefore prone to misunderstanding. While the domain of experience could have provided shelter from these concerns, it may itself be subject to these very misunderstandings, inasmuch as its communication depends on language, and hence on the conceptual and cultural baggage that each tradition attaches to a particular term. For a response to Breslauer's concerns, see John Merkle, "Heschel's Attitude toward Religious Pluralism," in *No Religion Is an Island*, pp. 102–104.

[46]P. 9.

[47]See, for example, Bavli Berachot 22a and Yoma 4b.

[48]Reference to love and fear (or awe) is ubiquitous since the rabbinic period. A classical halachic articulation is found in Maimonides' *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, Chapter 2.

Heschel states: "None of us pretends to be God's accountant, and His design for history and redemption remains a mystery before which we must stand in awe."[49] Heschel's intended Christian audience could relate well to the concept and the language. The use of mystery language is typically Christian and is almost completely lacking in Jewish sources.[50]

A third moment relevant to the choice of language employed by Heschel is found when making a key argument for God transcending religion and hence for the need to suspend, maybe transcend, any exclusive truth claims of a given religion. Heschel states: "Does not the all-inclusiveness of God contradict the exclusiveness of any particular religion?"[51] The argument itself is not obvious from a traditional Jewish point of view. Whatever "all-inclusiveness" may mean, it may express itself by means of religious exclusivity. Or we may distinguish between the caring aspects of God, by means of which he provides sustenance to all creatures, and issues of ultimate religious truth. The problem really arises from the lack of clarity in the key term underlying the present argument. I would not know how to say "all-inclusiveness of God" in Hebrew. It is not a natural Jewish idiom and cannot easily constitute the basis of a theological argument. Unlike the previous examples, I am also not sure that the argument was formulated using proper Christian concepts. It seems Heschel expresses here an intuitive understanding that God could not have excluded some of his creatures from his design for salvation or for religious fulfillment. The issue itself has a venerable history in the context of Christian reflection and the challenges posed to Christianity by other religions. Heschel seems to

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[49]P. 17.

[50]This is not to suggest that mystery language is absent from the history of Jewish thought. For discussions of "mystery" in the rabbinic period see Jakob Petuchowski, "Judaism as "Mystery"—The Hidden Agenda?," *HUCA*, Vol. 52 (1981): 141–152 and Marc Bregman, "Mishnah and LXX as Mystery: An Example of Jewish-Christian Polemic in the Byzantine Period," in Lee Levine, ed., *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine* (Hebrew Title: *Rezef Utemura*) (Jerusalem, 2004), pp. 333–342. More significantly, we should note the heavy reliance upon "mystery" language in Heschel's own philosophical work. The index of *God in Search of Man* suggests "mystery" is the most heavily used term in Heschel's religious vocabulary. There are more references under this term than under any other single term in the index! Most of these, however, use mystery as synonymous with wonder. The above quote is more in keeping with classical Christian usage. Thus, while mystery language is very much Heschelian language, it still seems to me that "mystery," in this context, will evoke a more familiar response from a Christian audience than from a traditional Jewish one.

[51]Pp. 11–12.

be carrying forth this philosophical concern into a broader statement of the relativity, or at least lack of legitimate exclusivity, of all religions.[52]

Language itself cannot, so it seems, provide an adequate common denominator. It is too closely implicated in the conflicted history of Christians and Jews. For the Jewish audience further work would be needed to ascertain that it is indeed the same God whose touch is recognized in the souls of Jews and Christians. Translating Heschel's experientially based religious intuition would require historical and theological work, beyond that provided by Heschel himself. Heschel shares with us his experience and the view gained from his particular experiential and existential vantage point. In what way does he also suggest how to gain such a perspective? How can a Jewish audience identify with his intuitions without adequate grounding in the historical and theological resources of Judaism? How does the trail blazer lead people to follow in his steps?

Heschel seems to also suggest a pedagogy by means of which his vision can be realized by others. "No honest religious person can fail to admire the outpouring of the love of man and the love of God, the marvels of worship, the magnificence of spiritual insight, the piety, charity and sanctity in the lives of countless men and women, manifested in the history of Christianity."[53] Heschel assumes that unbiased study and observation will lead to admiration. Open-mindedness and lack of prejudice thus emerge as preconditions for a genuine appreciation of Christianity (of any religion for that matter) on its own terms. The method employed relies in part on the neutral observations of the scientific study of religion. But Heschel seems to also call for a less neutral engagement with the spiritual lives of Christians and their potential testimony for Jews. His argument is made for the "honest religious person." Religious—having some sense of religious life and reality, that would make the person open to recognizing it in others. Honest—having removed preconceived notions that would impede recognition of the religious life of others. While the precondition of religiosity does, to a certain extent, already assume a certain

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[52]Hartman, "Heschel: A Heroic Witness," p. 188, sees this as a carryover of Maimonidean negative theology, even though Heschel himself does not make that association explicitly. Reliance on Maimonidean negative theology would lead to the kind of extreme pluralistic position that Hartman seeks to establish. That Heschel does not rely on Maimonides could be due to the type of sources that he does and does not use, as discussed below. But it is just as likely that Heschel would not ground his case in such a philosophical understanding, precisely because he would wish to avoid the radical conclusions that Hartman seeks to establish, based on Heschel's foundations, as will be discussed below.

[53]P. 12.

type of religious personality, the overall import of the passage amounts to an instruction: Observation, knowledge, and genuineness are components of a spiritual program that would allow one to be touched by the religious life of the other.[54]

Heschel's argument here also suggests how we might shift attention from theology and focus it upon the lives of human beings, particularly of saints, as bridge builders who provide a testimony that can extend beyond the boundaries of the individual religion. The lives of men and women are the ultimate indication of the educational and spiritual success of a religion and they also provide the means for others to recognize the value inherent in a given religion.

Heschel offers other helpful suggestions for how to enter the depth of experiential sharing with someone from another religion. Let us begin with his own testimony: "Gustave Weigel spent the last evening of his life in my study at the Jewish Theological Seminary. We opened our hearts to one another in prayer and contrition and spoke of our own deficiencies, failures, hopes."[55] The intense intimate moment that Heschel shares with us focuses upon confession, contrition, and awareness of imperfection. This gives a unique meaning to the term *inter-confessionalism*. By focusing upon our imperfection, we can highlight that which is human in us. Our humanity is our imperfection, and that imperfection is shared by all. As it is also part of our religious experience, it is our very weakness that provides a gateway to mutual understanding. As he states elsewhere in the essay: "I suggest that the most significant basis for meeting of men of different religious traditions is the level of fear and trembling, of humility and contrition, where our individual moments of faith are mere waves in the endless ocean of mankind's reaching out for God. . . .[56] While stripped of pretension and conceit we sense the tragic insufficiency of human faith."[57] Heschel takes us beyond the previously problematized expression of "fear and trembling." He speaks of humility and contrition. Recognition of our own imperfection provides the foundation for a genuine spiritual

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[54]See further p. 7 on the need to get beyond the abyss of ignorance.

[55]P. 17.

[56]Compare the use of the ocean metaphor amongst contemporary Hindu writers, with whom Heschel must have been familiar. Rather than express the plenitude of the divine, of which man's life is but a wave, the metaphor is harnessed to convey the huge distance across which humanity must strive in its reaching out for God. The ocean is what unites us not in the fullness of divine being, but in the infinity of distance and quest, born of human imperfection.

[57]P. 9.

self-awareness and hence of awareness of and communication with the other. Human faith is tragically insufficient. What room is there, then, for pride? What we share in the deepest sense is our own inadequacy.

Inadequacy leads to humility. This is as true for the individual believer reaching across the ocean of life to God as it is for the greater structures of religions. "We have all been defeated," claims Heschel.[58] There is no room for pride. "Humility and contrition seem to be absent where most required—in theology. But humility is the beginning and end of all religious thinking, the secret test of faith. There is no truth without humility, no certainty without contrition."[59] Humility thus provides the only sound epistemological foundation. The common experience based upon which members of different religions can truly share is thus not some mystical experience of the unity of all, but rather the common recognition of failure and the ensuing humility that opens the way to a proper perception of God and the other.[60]

What allows Heschel to be so open about the imperfection inherent in all religions, his own included? Several factors converge. First and foremost, intellectual honesty and integrity call for an honest assessment of the successes and failures of religions. His own recognition of other religious forms and of people of different religious paths must have surely conditioned him to greater self-awareness, including criticism of self and other. Finding a perfection in others that is lacking in oneself, and vice versa, enhances awareness of how imperfect we can all be. Heschel's own theological understanding, drawing as it does upon the Bible and rabbinic literature, does not shun imperfection as

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[58]P. 7.

[59]P. 15.

[60]Heschel's emphasis upon contrition and confession lifts up one of the components of classical Jewish prayer and elevates it to a cognitive principle. Another component that is highlighted as part of the description of ideal relations and common spiritual experience is the praise of God. See p. 10. I wonder to what extent Heschel was consciously applying categories of Jewish prayer to his epistemology. If gratitude is seen as an expression of praise, and if petition is taken for granted, then in fact Heschel utilizes two of the primary structuring notions of Jewish prayer to suggest the common experiential ground between Christians and Jews. Noticeably lacking is any reference to the Credo. Indeed, Jewish liturgy features credal statements only in a very secondary and historically late level in its evolution. Classical Jewish prayer may thus provide Heschel with some of the categories and the direction through which religious experience may be shared across traditions. Classical prayer suggests what is key in our religious experience. That which is key, according to this reconstructed argument, is also what can be shared between people of different religions. That which is not key, i.e., creeds, should be left aside.

a quality of humans, as well as of the anthropomorphic God it represents. It may be that a theologian who grows out of this theological school may have an easier time recognizing the imperfection inherent in all our traditions. But it seems that ultimately what allows Heschel to be so open about imperfections in religion is his ability to distinguish between God and religion. God is perfect; religions are imperfect. We cannot know whether this distinction underlies his ability to openly recognize imperfection in religion, or whether it is a consequence of such recognition. One thing is clear: Perfection resides with God alone. We all share an imperfection that must lead us to humility and contrition and to a common search for crossing the ocean that separates our imperfection from the fullness of divine reality.

Seeds of a Jewish Theology of World Religions

An important indication for the progress that has been made in interreligious relations since Heschel's days is the growth of the field of "theology of religions," especially among Christian thinkers of various denominations. "Theology of religions" describes the conversation and the quest for accounting for the place of other religions within the broader economy of the divine. It is the field of theological reflection that is concerned with making space and accounting, usually in positive terms, for the other. Any serious call for understanding between religions assumes some degree of involvement in such a theological exercise. Heschel is no exception. Because his essay is first and foremost an appeal, an appeal for understanding and cooperation, the "theology of religions" dimension of his work is secondary to its immediate purpose. But it is, nevertheless, an important component of the essay. Throughout the essay Heschel makes numerous moves that can be seen as expressive of his own theology of other religions. The insights are stated in terse and rudimentary form. Heschel's broader knowledge and erudition underlie these statements, but it is usually not made explicit, nor is the treatment of issues of a "theology of religions" undertaken in a systematic way. Heschel's insights deserve to be unpacked more fully and supported by the kind of corroborative analysis that history and theology can provide. They need systematic exposition, and they could benefit from a careful presentation in light of the concerns of a "theology of religions." The following paragraphs seek to make a contribution towards these goals.

It may be fairly stated that Heschel, within the pages of this brief essay, tackled almost all the cardinal questions that are relevant to a Jewish consideration of other religions. Heschel is aware of the key issues and suggests his own strategies for dealing with them. This evaluation is made in light of my

own analysis of issues that a Jewish theology of world religions must grapple with.[61] I note that with one important exception, Heschel addresses all major issues that would be of concern to a Jewish audience.[62] In light of my own analysis, I would like to point to three, out of four, major issues addressed by Heschel. I will not enter here into a full presentation of the scope of the issues and the challenge they present, as this has been done elsewhere. I shall only concentrate on Heschel's contributions to dealing with these issues.

A. The legitimacy of other religions, or put differently, the recognition of other religions. Heschel devotes much attention to this issues. His attempt to legitimate other religions, in fact, all religions, is one of the main thrusts of the essay and an important contribution to his role as a path breaker in interfaith relations. While Heschel focuses primarily on Christianity, his own logic extends beyond Christianity. While the latter part of the essay, devoted to historical precedents, is taken almost exclusively from the history of Jewish reflection upon Christianity, his own personal contributions, earlier in the essay, are as relevant to other religions as they are to Christianity.

Heschel legitimates other religions by employing a classical twofold strategy: argument from reason and argument from scripture. The argument from reason is part of his own reading of history and the place of different religions within it. It thus comes under what we earlier termed his "prophetic" vision. This "prophetic" perspective allows Heschel to frame the discussion not simply in terms of human logic or the needs of human society, but in terms of God's vision and will for humanity. "How can we be cured of bigotry, presumption, and the foolishness of believing that we have been triumphant while we have all been defeated?"[63] Heschel's view of history in general and of the failure of all religions as its common denominator underlies this cry to go beyond triumphalism. Jews and Christians are called to recognize one another within a relationship that is framed in family terms. Heschel employs the metaphor of mother and daughter, suggesting that the full human, emotional, and legal weight of that relationship is relevant to Jewish-Christian relations.[64] But he

[61]See above, note 8.

[62]Most of these issues would be equally significant for a Christian audience. It seems to me that while speaking to a primarily Christian audience, Heschel, perhaps unconsciously, raises those issues that a Jew would be most concerned with in relation to other religions. As I will suggest below, speaking to a Christian audience would account for the great omission of *Avoda Zara* (idolatry) from the present discussion.

[63]P. 7.

[64]P. 12.

also goes further. Beyond recognition and acceptance, Heschel raises diversity of religions to the level of a divine ideal. "Does not the task of preparing the kingdom of God require a diversity of talents, a variety of rituals, soul-searching as well as opposition? Perhaps it is the will of God that in this aeon there should be diversity in our forms of devotion and commitment to Him. In this aeon diversity of religions is the will of God."[65]

As all good theologians would do, Heschel corroborates his theological understanding by a reading of traditional sources. Heschel offers a very straightforward, yet radical, reading of at least two biblical sources that are indeed some of the most important biblical resources for thinking about other religions. The one is his reading of the prophecy of Micah 4.[66] The other is his interpretation of the following prophecy of Malachi. It is no accident that this is probably the most quoted passage of his essay.[67]

> For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts (Mal. 1:11).
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> This statement refers undoubtedly to the contemporaries of the prophet. But who were these worshipers of One God? At the time of Malachi there was hardly a large number of proselytes. Yet the statement declares: All those who worship their gods do not know it, but they are really worshipping Me.
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> It seems that the prophet proclaims that men all over the world, though they confess different conceptions of God, are really worshipping One God, the Father of all men, though they may not be aware of it.[68]

This is a stunning passage. It sidesteps intention and the conscious awareness of believers and supplants them with a higher perspective that really belongs to God alone, through which they are recognized as worshipping God, even though they may not be aware of it.[69] No religion can be critiqued or dismissed, then.[70]

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[65] P. 14.

[66] P. 19.

[67] As witnessed in the Kasimow-Sherwin volume.

[68] P. 14.

[69] John Merkle, p. 99, claims that Heschel does not develop a Jewish notion, analogous to Rahner's "anonymous Christianity." Some such similar anonymity must be acknowledged, however, as a means of relating the worship of other gods to the one true God.

[70] An additional passage that Heschel evokes, from Malachi, is found on page 10, without reference to Malachi. The use of Malachi 2:10 is intuitive. I have heard it used in the same intuitive way by the present Sefardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Amar, in dialogue with a Spanish Cardinal.

B. The educational dangers of dialogue and the threat to identity. This is a major concern of the essay. On one level, it finds expression in Heschel's call for dialogue to remain an elite activity, founded upon sound knowledge and firm identity.[71] But there is a second, no less important, dimension. While Heschel makes huge personal and theological strides in his approach towards other religions, he remains aware of the continuing efforts at mission, at rejection, and at undermining Jewish identity. Depending on how the argument is read,[72] almost a third may be devoted to the attempt to uphold religious identity and in the case of Judaism to ward off mission and rejection of Judaism. Judging by the proportion of the essay devoted to this issue, one may conjecture that not only did Heschel not see his engagement in interreligious dialogue as undermining his Jewish commitment, but he may have actually considered it an arena by means of which to strengthen Jewish communal identity in relation to other religious identities that sought to undermine it. Without in any way detracting from the sincerity of his open and dialogical engagement, it may be conjectured that Heschel's call for mutual acceptance constitutes more than a call for fair play and openness between religions. It may suggest the importance Heschel attached to interreligious dialogue as a means of upholding Jewish identity.[73]

C. The problem of truth. From the philosophical perspective, the issue of truth presents the biggest challenge. Religion preaches truth, and truth claims seem mutually exclusive. How, then, can one accept the legitimacy of another faith in light of the inherent understanding of one's own tradition as possessing the truth? Heschel employs an entire battery of strategies in dealing with this issue. All of them are carried out through the application and interpretation of traditional Jewish sources. All of them contribute to some degree or another to relativizing the notion of religious truth.

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[71]P. 11.

[72]See above, note 12.

[73]The relations between genuine engagement with others and the pursuit of maintaining Jewish identity and validity may be considered the Jewish expression of the type of fundamental mixed motive that perhaps accompanies any involvement in interreligious dialogue. The mixed motive grows out of the dual impulses of upholding the community's needs and visions, while being open to and integrating the reality of the other. The complexity of Catholic upholding of the dual imperatives of dialogue and of mission is famous. Similar tensions can be pointed out in relation to the involvement of other religions in dialogue. My suggestion that the essay is intended primarily for a Christian audience lends further weight to the present point.

One of the main strategies is the analogy drawn between religion and language. Language provides a model in light of which religions are understood. Underlying this model is the understanding that in the same way that language enables communication, so too religion is a means of communication. It communicates absolute reality to the particular religious community. It can also, as Heschel's overall argument points out, enable communication between members of one religious community and another.

One interesting application of the analogy of religion and language is found in Heschel's appeal to the story of the tower of Babel.[74] It is found immediately following the recognition of religious diversity as the will of God and the proof from Malachi in favor of such an understanding. The move from religion to language is made as though the two domains were identical.[75] The suggestion that the use of one language only leads to rebellion is stretched to making a similar argument in favor of multiple religions. A further expression of the use of language to relativize religious truth is found further on:

> The ultimate truth is not capable of being fully and adequately expressed in concepts and words. The ultimate truth is about the situation that pertains between God and man. "The Torah speaks in the language of man." Revelation is always an accommodation to the capacity of man. . . . The voice of God reaches the spirit of man in a variety of ways, in a multiplicity of languages. One truth comes to expression in many ways of understanding.[76]

All religious truth is translation, accommodation. Because we cannot reach ultimate truth, every religion's approach is partial and hence never possesses the fullness of truth. All religions are alike in being impulses of translation by means of which God's voice reaches man's spirit. According to this formulation, there is nothing inherently more true about any religion, provided a genuine revelation is at its base. As Heschel the Jew is here addressing Christians who share the view of the Bible's sanctity, he need not be unduly concerned with the revelational validity of other religions. Nevertheless, Heschel's application of a linguistic model to understanding religion does suggest that ultimately all religions are ways of accommodating the one truth. It would seem that the philosophical challenge of truth has pushed Heschel farther than either his prophetic impulse or his personal religious experience

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[74]P. 14.

[75]On page 20 Heschel quotes a passage from Maimonides where the future recognition of God by all peoples is couched in terms of language. Heschel does not use this as proof for his argument, but it certainly corroborates his suggestion.

[76]P. 15.

would have taken him. These were focused primarily on the Jewish-Christian relationship based upon the common revelation, to which Heschel makes repeated appeal throughout the essay. Considerations of religious truth and the analogy to language seem to stretch the notion of revelation and the validity of religion beyond biblical revelation and potentially remove any barrier in the recognition of the validity, perhaps even equal value, of all religions.[77] It may well be that the statement that "no religion is an island," which initially referred to the inability to seal oneself off from the common challenges of the world, may take on a deeper meaning now that religions are examined in relation to ultimate truth. No religion is beyond the dynamics of translating the divine impulse into human categories. No religion can transcend the limits inherent in human language and in human categories. No religion is apart, and all religions share in the same predicament, approaching the divine through human language and understanding.

The historical view and the philosophical perspective merge in the next statement:

> Human faith is never final, never an arrival, but rather an endless pilgrimage, a being on the way. We have no answers to all problems. Even some of our sacred answers are both emphatic and qualified, final and tentative; final within our own position in history, tentative because we can only speak in the tentative language of man.[78]

The historical argument becomes a metaphysical one when Heschel introduces the epistemology of humility, born of failure, into his argument:

> Is the failure, the impotence of all religions, due exclusively to human transgression? Or perhaps to the mystery of God's withholding His grace, of His conceal-

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[77] At this point Heschel comes close to certain Hindu theories of religion, as suggested by Arvind Sharma, "Hindu-Jewish Dialogue and the Thought of Abraham Heschel: At Grassroots and Mountaintop," in *No Religion is an Island*, pp. 163–174. I would disagree, however, with Sharma's description of Heschel as presenting all religions as meeting at the top. This is a distinctly Hindu reading of Heschel and is not born out by Heschel's writing. Heschel's continued emphasis upon the human condition, failure, and humility do not allow us to recognize an experiential, mystical, or even philosophical high ground in which all religions meet and where all differences vanish. Rather, as part of his humility-based epistemology, Heschel recognizes the fundamental limitations of our understanding and the unbridgeable abyss that lies between our own religious understanding and the ultimate truth as God knows it. All our religions stand on the other side of the abyss, and must therefore learn to accept each other. It is a commonality of impoverishment, in the face of divine perfection, not a commonality born of partaking of that divine perfection, as the Hindu model suggests.

[78] P. 16.

> ing even while revealing? Disclosing the fullness of His glory would be an impact that would surpass the power of human endurance.
>
> His thoughts are not our thoughts. Whatever is revealed is abundance compared with our soul and a pittance compared with His treasures. No word is God's last word, no word is God's ultimate word.[79]

We have encountered these arguments earlier in the call for collaboration. Now failure and impotence are seen as part of a higher divine plan whose meaning can only be fathomed within the fundamental tension of divine reality and its human expression. By alluding to Isa. 55:8, Heschel lumps all expressions of religion under the category of human thought, as distinct from divine reality. The theological and interpretative audacity of extending the verse from reference to sinners to reference to all religions, Judaism included, may be justified through Heschel's appeal to a rabbinic passage. The midrash states that the Torah is but an unripened fruit of divine wisdom.[80] An internal mechanism of relativizing tradition in relation to the divine is thus extended to all expressions of religion. If divine wisdom and divine thoughts transcend human understanding, then not only the Torah but all forms of religion are but the human attempt to capture the divine impulse within their understanding.

But just how relative is the truth captured by a given religious tradition? Has Heschel here adopted a completely relativistic position? On what grounds would he then continue affirming his preference to have died at Auschwitz rather than convert to Christianity?[81] Harold Kasimow has struggled with this problem.[82] According to Kasimow, Heschel considers paradox an important component of his theological worldview. How all religions can be affirmed while upholding the truth claims of Judaism would be one further instance of paradoxical belief.[83] David Hartman too notes this tension in

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[79]P. 16.

[80]See Genesis Rabba 44:17, paraphrased by Heschel on p. 16.

[81]See Kimelman, *Edah Journal*, p. 6.

[82]See his *Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 430 ff.

[83]We may be able to further flesh out the recognition of paradoxical thinking by considering the nature of Heschel's thought processes. The following questions may be considered: How situational, as opposed to systematic, was Heschel's thinking? To what extent did he function based on key intuitions, that in turn served the need of the context and the moment, rather than upon consistent positions? This is a typically hassidic way of functioning, and Heschel would be in keeping with his native tradition. The ability to uphold multiple complementary intuitions and perspectives is less of a philosophical paradox, and

Heschel's thought.[84] On the one hand Heschel's thought tends to an epistemology of revelation that completely precludes absolutist truth claims. On the other hand, Heschel stops short of complete relativism by restricting complete diversity as God's will to the present aeon only. As a thinker concerned with undermining absolute truth claims and developing genuine pluralistic views of other religions, Hartman considers himself as one of those who, because they take Heschel's thought seriously, must be prepared to take his ideas further. Hartman would concentrate not only on what Heschel said, but also on what he suggested and intimated. For Hartman, Heschel's true agenda, to be followed by others, is arriving at a point where religious pluralism becomes a permanent feature of revelatory faith systems. Hartman sees his own role, therefore, not only in taking Heschel's thought to the next level, but in bringing to their fulfillment Heschel's own assumptions. Hartman must account for why Heschel himself was not explicit about his understanding of revelation in the terms in which Hartman himself considers proper. Hartman's answer is both political and pedagogical. Had Heschel suggested a radical relativization of all religious truth claims, he would have found himself outside traditional theological modes of discourse.[85] Heschel's method of speaking to religious communities was to speak to them in their own language. Without changing the vocabulary of their basic beliefs, Heschel tried to "work within" to justify a form of radical religious pluralism. Heschel therefore did not go the whole way, leaving it to others to do.

My own reading of Heschel is less extreme than Hartman's. It seems to me that his attitude on issues of absolute truth and conflicting truth claims is best understood in light of the two drives that shape the essay—a prophetic

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more of an expression of spiritual agility that prefers appropriate spiritual response to the consistent and well-thought-out philosophical position. Thought should also be given to whether the distinction between theological truths in and of themselves and the effects of the encounter with the divine within the human realm might be helpful to resolving the tension. If, as suggested above, all religions are parallel responses to the encounter with the divine, one may uphold the validity of all responses qua responses, while privileging the actual content of one particular revelation. The complexity of the divine-human relationship may be such that it can accommodate both the validity of a given truth claim and the recognition that on another level all formulations share the nature of a response to a primordial recognition of the divine.

[84]Pp. 188–191.

[85]There is thus an esoteric and an exoteric Heschel. This twofold presentation of Heschel fits well with the Maimonidean theological roots that Hartman sees as underlying Heschel's views. Negative theology is summoned to buttress Heschel's views, and Heschel is cast in light of Maimonides. See p. 188.

assessment of history and the impact of personal experience. The historical assessment leads to the realization that the tensions between conflicting truth claims have not yet, nor will they, be resolved. It is futile to come together at the level of dogmas and creeds. Focusing upon irreconcilable truth statements takes away from what religions could do for each other, were they to address each other through appropriate parameters. These parameters are known to Heschel through his own personal experience, and he seeks to shape continuing relations between religions in light of personal transformation that he experienced within his own relations. The combination of these two drives leads to a split between different levels of the religious life: "In facing the claim and the dogma of the Church, Jews and Christians are strangers and stand in disagreement with one another. Yet there are levels of existence where Jews and Christians meet as sons and brothers."[86] One may argue that the distinction between these different levels of religion is more problematic than Heschel acknowledges and that the religious life cannot be so neatly divided.[87] Heschel, however, seems to have been able in his own personal life to discover a formula for interreligious exchange that he recommends to others. The meaning of this formula is not the relinquishing of absolute truth claims. They are, rather, bracketed as beyond the pale of meaningful exchange between believers and ultimately beyond the pale of history itself. Heschel, it seems to me, would continue to uphold in the privacy of his faith the classical beliefs of Judaism, and would expect his interlocutors to do the same.[88] The private faith zone may enrich religious experience, which itself may be shared. It can be shared because it no longer concerns the understanding of God proper but the effect of God's touch in the human soul.

The meaningful distinction thus seems to me not between the esoteric and the exoteric Heschel, but between those dimensions of faith that belong to the private world of the religious community and those that can be success-

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[86]P. 10. The distinction is echoed in several other places in the essay.

[87]This point has been made in relation to the distinction between theological dialogue and socially oriented cooperation associated with Rabbi Soloveitchik's position. See David Rosen's comments, http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/sol_rosen.htm. Heschel's position is slightly more nuanced. It is not theology that is excluded, but the realm of dogma proper, where Jews and Christians cannot meet, that is bracketed from conversation.

[88]I suspect that Heschel would consider a faith that opts for a completely relativistic epistemology a watered-down faith, having lost much intensity and zeal along with the loss of belief in absolute truth. Heschel would probably prefer to share in the experiential and human fruits of the full faith experience, even if its content contains errors.

fully shared with others. Heschel is therefore neither paradoxical, nor is he telling us only part of the truth. His is a pragmatic pluralism. He shares with us a working formula that he recommends to our attention, based on his own experience. Our challenge is both a theoretical and an experiential one. On the theoretical level, we must consider whether it is really possible to exclude parts of another's faith from the encounter.[89] On the experiential level, we must explore whether we can realize his experiential strategy in broader ways by identifying a broader range of experiential zones in which Jews and members of other religions can meet. For Heschel, success would not be the arrival at some successful resolution of the philosophical tension of conflicting truth claims or the successful articulation of a theory of religious pluralism. Success would be measured in terms of personal transformation and the ability of religious communities to help each other grow spiritually. It is up to us to demonstrate whether and how this can indeed be accomplished.

The Question of Sources

There is one important issue that defines Jewish attitudes to other religions, and to Christianity in particular, that is almost completely missing from Heschel's discussion. Anyone familiar with Jewish sources will know how central the issue of idolatry is to a Jewish view of other religions. The Hebrew term is *Avoda Zara*. Its literal translation is "foreign worship," and it encompasses a range of issues from compromising the strict unity of God to the worship of idols and other expressions of worship foreign to Jewish practice. The critique and the application of the halachic category of *Avoda Zara* is relevant to Judaism's appreciation of all religions; and even Islam, which is conventionally considered a pure monotheism and therefore not subject to the laws of *Avoda Zara*, has been considered by various halachic authorities over the generations as a form of *Avoda Zara*. Heschel's discussion completely ignores the issue of *Avoda Zara*. In other words, he sidesteps the hottest and most problematic issue from the perspective of a Jewish consideration of other religions.[90]

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[89]Heschel's exclusion of dogma from the realm of dialogue may be seen as part of his broader campaign against Christian missionary attitudes and for upholding the continuing validity and legitimacy of Judaism. Exclusion functions here as a strategy for protection. Soloveitchik's avoidance of theological dialogue is framed in precisely these terms. One may consider whether forty years of advances in Jewish-Christian relations may make this strategy less urgent and whether areas of the dialogue that needed to be excluded could be opened.

[90]There is only one passing reference to idolatry. When presenting the view of Halevi, according to which Christianity and Islam have a role in the divine plan, Heschel acknowl-

Moreover, in one place in the essay Heschel himself applies the category, in ways that are completely new to the Jewish tradition. "Religion is a means, not the end. It becomes idolatrous when regarded as an end in itself."[91] Thus, any religion can become idolatrous, Judaism included, when sight is lost of its ultimate purpose and when it becomes an end unto itself.

This reflection is a profound reflection. It suggests a completely new approach to idolatry that is qualitative and spiritual, rather than halachic and formal. It cuts across different traditions, making all traditions susceptible to the inherent critique of idolatry, rather than allowing idolatry to function as the instrument by means of which one religion criticizes another. Here too Heschel has made a significant theological foray, one that requires much further consideration and development.

However, important as this contribution may be, we must also acknowledge that Heschel's presentation, as well as his application of the notion of idolatry, situates him outside conventional Jewish categories and methods, by means of which religions are appreciated. This may not be inappropriate for a trail blazer, whose task is also to redefine earlier categories and to establish new paradigms. However, this redefinition cannot be glossed over and it cannot find an echo in the traditional Jewish community in its present form. The reason is that Heschel completely ignores the constitutive language within which traditional discourse regarding other religions takes place—the Halacha, Jewish law. Even the catalogue of sources on Christianity that forms the final part of the essay relies completely on non-legal materials. Heschel almost consciously rejects the relevance of Halacha to his enterprise: "The supreme issue today is not the *halacha* for the Jew or the Church for the Christian—but the premise underlying both religions, namely, whether there is a *pathos*, a divine reality concerned with the destiny of man which mysteriously impinges upon history."[92]

Ignoring halacha may be understood as a function of context. Halacha may not prove helpful or appropriate in an address to a Christian public. Perhaps had the essay been addressed primarily to a Jewish audience, halacha would have played a more prominent role. But perhaps lack of acknowledgment of halacha is also a function of Heschel's own religious personality and

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edges, in passing, that Halevi's recognition comes in spite of retaining relics of ancient idolatry. See p. 18. That the issue of idolatry emerges in the context of a philosophical discussion of history and its purpose, rather than in the context of a halachic consideration is telling.

[91]P. 13.

[92]P. 5.

reflects his deeper theological preferences.[93] Either way, a serious Jewish consideration of other religions must take into account a range of sources and a methodology entirely ignored by Heschel. While this is true to some extent for all streams of Judaism, it is obviously and powerfully the case with reference to Orthodox Judaism. Heschel's position cannot begin to be heard until it is complemented by careful attention to halachic sources and to how they could be addressed, contextualized, and adapted to the broader spiritual view that informs Heschel's presentation.

To drive the point home: The distinction that Heschel makes between God and religion allows him to state: "[W]hile dogmas and forms of worship are divergent, God is the same."[94] The claim that "God is the same" is less obvious than one might think. It presumes having settled the problem of the status of Christianity as *Avoda Zara*.[95] It is likely that Heschel did not need to go through the appropriate halachic machinations. His prophetic, spiritual and personal experience taught him something that precedes halachic discussion and that should inform and direct the halachic discussion, rather than

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[93]The stronger the prophetic component, by means of which a moment in time is appreciated as a transition point, the weaker the reliance upon halachic categories formed under the "old order." If Heschel's reading of the meaning of the present moment in time is informed by a sense of failure of religion, this would further vitiate the relevance of halacha and its ability to guide the present moment in time. On the halakha's importance for Heschel, see Samuel Dresner, *Heschel, Hasidism, and Halakha* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). On Heschel and halakha, conceptualized in terms of the dichotomy of halakha and aggadah, see Hartman, "Heschel: A Heroic Witness," p. 174 ff. Hartman, p. 183, suggests that Heschel's ability to discover common experiential ground with members of other faith communities stems precisely from his conceiving of Judaism in terms of Aggada (i.e., non halacha), while Rabbi Soloveitchik's emphasis upon halakha highlights the insurmountable differences to mutual understanding (p. 180).

[94]P. 9, followed by reference to the God of Abraham. The notion of the God of Abraham as common ground gained currency around the time of the Second Vatican Council, in whose preparation Heschel participated, through the work of Louis Massignon. This statement seems to draw on Massignon's work, rather than on traditional Jewish conceptualization of the one God as the common God of Abraham. See Sidney Harrison Griffith, "Sharing the Faith of Abraham: The 'Credo' of Louis Massignon," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1997): 193–210.

[95]A similar issue arose recently with the publication of "Dabru Emet," a statement on Christianity by Jewish scholars and religious leaders. The first article in the statement affirmed that Jews and Christians worship the same God. This point was one of the issues to have come under critique. See Jon Levenson, "How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *Commentary*, Vol. 112, No. 5 (2001): 36–7.

be informed by it.[96] But such a possible privileging of personal intuition over traditional halachic discourse itself requires discussion, certainly if Heschel's testimony is to have any consequence for halachically oriented Jews.

A second halachic component that is virtually absent from his discussion is the halachic category by means of which Judaism has traditionally framed its consideration of non-Jews and in light of which it has often assessed other religions. I refer to the seven noachide commandments.[97] The essay only includes a passing reference to them. It is not Heschel's voice we hear, but that of Rabbi Lifschutz, quoted above, whom Heschel quotes as being favorable and accepting of Christianity. That Rabbi Lifschutz includes observance of the seven noachide commandments as a basis for his positive view of Christianity, while Heschel himself remains mum on this subject, suggests that Heschel ignores this halachic consideration as well. Again, it may be a function of the audience to whom the address is delivered, or it may reflect Heschel's appropriate sense of the inadequacy of the category as a means of addressing other religions. It is likely that Heschel felt that religions ought to be addressed on their own terms, rather than through the lens of an internal Jewish category such as the noachide commandments. Regardless of how Heschel viewed the matter, it cannot go undiscussed if it is to form the basis of a serious Jewish view of other religions.

That Heschel completely sidesteps halachic considerations raises a broader issue regarding the type of sources upon which he relies in making his presentation. If we bracket the final pages of the essay, which I have already suggested form an essay within an essay, and which constitute a historical catalogue of Jewish attitudes to Christianity, one notes that most of the sources crucial to Heschel's argument are biblical. Certainly of all the textually grounded moments in the essay, those that engage biblical sources are the most inspiring ones. Reliance upon rabbinic sources is second to reliance on biblical sources, and sources from later Jewish writings are infrequent. This observation is interesting not only because it points to the sources that Heschel employs, but even more so because it brings to our awareness what sources were excluded from his purview. We lack any reference to the philosophical tradition, common to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, that could have provided bridges of understanding between the traditions. We lack any appeal to kabbalistic

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[96]One imagines that Heschel would have gravitated towards the appropriate halachic authorities in light of his intuitive and experiential understanding.

[97]Their halachic status is explicated in Maimonides' *Laws of Kings*, Chapter 8:10–Chapter 10:6.

doctrine and to the riches of Jewish mysticism. Even the hassidic tradition, from which Heschel emerges, plays absolutely no role in "No Religion Is an Island." Perhaps these sources represent a Judaism that is less open to the outside world, and therefore Heschel could not identify in them principles that would be helpful to an emerging theory of interreligious relations. Still, his own creative interpretive abilities could have been brought to bear upon these sources, just as they were upon earlier materials. Perhaps herein lies the key. It is possible that the earlier sources are indeed more open to creative interpretation and recasting, given the literary and theological nature of biblical and Rabbinic materials, than the more structured articulations of Jewish identity found in later Jewish writings. In the same way that the halacha leaves, so it would seem, less room for creativity and new constructions, so certain kinds of writings provide more interpretative leverage than others. Heschel may therefore be operating with those Jewish sources that are more supple and pliant, from the creative interpreter's viewpoint.

Context may play here as decisive a role as does the question of hermeneutical flexibility. The essay is an address of a Jewish theologian to a primarily Christian audience. As stated explicitly several times in the essay, the Bible provides a common ground for Christians and Jews. It would therefore stand to reason that the primary scripture that Heschel would cite would be the Bible. Rabbinic traditions are recognized as the early stratum of Jewish interpretation and have as such also captured the attention of non-Jewish scholars. A Christian audience would therefore still be comfortable with theological work done in light of rabbinic sources. Later sources are less familiar and in that sense less appropriate for presentation to a Christian audience.[98]

Finally, the question of sources should be considered in the broader framework of Heschel's use of sources throughout his oeuvre. Eliezer Schweid has noted that in his philosophical works, Heschel relies upon biblical prophecy as the almost exclusive source. Whatever is brought from the works of rabbis, philosophers, and kabbalists is only brought in order to shed light on the

[98]This statement reflects my sense of what the shared knowledge base between Christians and Jews would have permitted forty years ago. I suspect Heschel would have had a much harder time developing his ideas from a hassidic platform because that literature was less well known and less accessible to audiences beyond those committed to the study and practice of that literature, even within Jewish circles. I believe much has changed in this respect in forty years, and we therefore have to imagine a different intellectual climate when we reflect upon the choice of sources Heschel could have comfortably used in such a context.

nature of prophecy and upon the words of the prophets.[99] This astute observation highlights the place of prophecy in his view of Judaism and in his own experience of it. It may well be the case that Heschel's reliance on biblical, and in particular prophetic, materials is a broader phenomenon.[100]

Whether we account for the choice of sources by reference to Heschel's audience or by appeal to Heschel's personal spiritual disposition, it is clear that a translation process, similar to the one that Heschel envisions as underlying any major revelation, is called for. Heschel's fundamental insights have to be translated into other media and other traditional languages beyond the translations already offered by Heschel himself. These translations include the halacha, the mystical tradition, and more generally a reading of Heschel against the background of problematic, yet authoritative, Jewish texts. For those readers for whom authority encompasses the halacha, as well as the various masters, traditions and disciplines that emerged in later Judaism, one cannot simply cite Heschel as an authority, while sidestepping a rich and complicated tradition of reference to other religions. Heschel cannot supplant that tradition. He can challenge it with alternative insight and pose fundamental questions regarding its perspective, breadth of vision, accuracy of description of the other, and ultimate spiritual effectiveness. But this is already a dialogue. Such a dialogue between Heschel's perspective and that of traditional Judaism, in light of which sources are read, positions examined, and details negotiated, is a must if more people are to follow the trail opened up by Heschel's pioneering intuitions.

Part of such a dialogue is also the scholarly dialogue of revisiting Heschel's presentation of classical texts. It is understandable that the context of presenting ideas to a Christian audience will inevitably lead to highlighting certain features of a text, while ignoring others. But if those same texts are to be incorporated as part of a new internal attitude to other religions, they must be read in their entirety, and one must struggle with their difficult parts alongside what one finds inspiring. When we speak among ourselves, we cannot tolerate selective and partial citations. And that is precisely what Heschel does when he addresses his Christian listeners. An example of such partial citation is found in the way Maimonides is cited as making room within the divine economy of history for Christianity,[101] while ignoring his unflattering

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[99]Schweid, *Prophets for Their People and Humanity*, p. 234.

[100]It is still worth noting, though, that the address to the Rabbinical Assembly lacked biblical prooftexts.

[101]P. 20.

remarks in that context, or more seriously: his view of Christianity as *Avoda Zara*. Closer reading of some of his rabbinic sources raises serious doubts regarding how some of the texts were manipulated and whether Heschel was completely unaware of the radically new content he introduced into them.[102] The meaning of other sources is stretched, and this stretching requires further clarification and justification.[103]

Following the trail blazer is a rich process. We must follow his vision and his inspiration. We must also follow the track of his thoughts and scrutinize it. The outcome of such scrutiny will be the process of engaging the prophetic insight in relation to the rich history of interpretation, law, and philosophy. A rereading and reconsideration of these is the order of the day if the flash of prophetic inspiration is to become a steady light illuminating the path, a path to be followed by a broad section of Heschel's own brothers and sisters in faith.

The Challenge of Dialogue Today: Applying Heschel's Legacy

Much has changed since the pioneering work of Heschel was given expression in "No Religion Is an Island." Dialogue is no longer a matter for the elite. It has become widespread. It has become popular, almost a social necessity, in a way one could not have imagined in Heschel's time. But it is precisely the spread of interfaith dialogue that poses the challenge of how it ought to be carried out

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[102]See p. 8, for his reading of the Mekhilta to Exodus 17:6 (See Jacob Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933], Vol. 2, p. 133). The midrashic passage, in context, does not make a statement regarding the universal relationship of the human and the divine. Rather, it seeks to clarify how Moses would recognize God standing before him on the rock, as described in Ex. 17:6.

[103]When Heschel, p. 18, quotes from Seder Eliyahu Rabba that the Holy Spirit can also rest upon a gentile, in consonance with his deeds, he is stretching the text from reference to the person and his deeds to acceptance of different religious forms. The original statement envisioned a good gentile acting in morally, or even spiritually, valiant ways, but not necessarily within the framework of alternative religious systems. To arrive at Heschel's reading requires exposing the hidden dialogue between Heschel and the text that led to the particular reading. I note that Heschel's discussion on pp. 7–8 does not make a similar leap. His discussion of the image of God as the foundation upon which a meeting between members of different religions takes place does not slide into a legitimation of other religions, as manifestations of the image of God. The image of God is contained in the individual person, not in all fruits of humanity's spirit. I also note that I occasionally encounter accounts of how other religions ought to be accepted by appeal to the notion of the image of God. Heschel himself was not so radical in his application of the notion of the image of God.

and what Heschel's legacy is in this context. Can Heschel's vision be adapted to the various changes that have taken place since?

In addition to the spread in quantity, there have been significant qualitative advances. The players have changed. Interreligious dialogue is no longer a strictly, or primarily, Jewish-Christian affair. Everyone is in, with special place allotted to the dialogue with Islam, which is of concern to all who are engaged in dialogue. Dialogue with eastern religions is on the rise as well. Heschel probably never envisioned such a rise in interreligious dialogue.[104] It requires other foundations than the assumed commonality of scripture and God that underlies Heschel's engagement with Christianity.

That interfaith dialogue today is so much broader than anything Heschel could have imagined is further reason for paying careful attention to the range of issues pointed out above as insufficient on the legal, historical, and hermeneutical levels. Contact with multiple world religions in a changing world, in which the self-understanding and practice of religious communities and their attitudes to Judaism are in flux, requires constant and detailed work that exceeds by far the testimony of a forty-year-old inaugural lecture. Beyond the need to incorporate halacha and to pay closer attention to the meanings of texts and the history of their interpretation, especially problematic texts that are easily ignored but continue to inform the community of believers, there are other methodological advances that impact how dialogue may be carried out. In Heschel's day the study of "theology of religions" had not come into being as a form of self-standing theological discourse. Nor had the work in the area that has gained great prominence over the past decade which is referred to as "comparative theology."[105] Both disciplines allow us to deepen our view of other religions and to frame them in ways that go beyond the fundamental acceptance of otherness espoused by Heschel. Heschel excluded theological discussion from his encounter with other religions, emphasizing instead the human reaction, primarily human imperfection, in the face of the divine. The two newer disciplines challenge us to conduct meaningful conversations between believers of different faiths on those very fundamental issues excluded by Heschel. The dogma, the world of faith, that which is particular and unique

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[104]Kasimow and Sherwin already tackled this issue fifteen years ago by asking members of other religions to respond to Heschel, thereby creating a dialogue with him. It remains, however, a one-sided dialogue and cannot address the issue of the theoretical foundations for a Jewish engagement of those other religious traditions.

[105]Francis Clooney, S.J., is a pioneering figure whose work in this area is gaining increasing recognition and providing a model for others.

to each religion, need not remain beyond our ability to explore it. We may not agree, but we may also try to understand what it is that the other is stating in their own theological language and what, if any, resonance this might have in our own theological worldview.[106] We may therefore dare think of carrying dialogue into zones explicitly excluded by Heschel.

Much of Heschel's work relies on the distinction between people and religions. He highlights the image of God as central to the encounter. He utilizes Jewish sources on gentiles and extrapolates from them regarding other religious traditions. He explicitly makes the distinction between Christians and Christianity.[107] Dialogue is only possible, according to this formulation, between the members of the religions, not between the religions themselves.[108] It is at this very juncture that we are called to consider whether forty years later the tools we have and the trust we have built could not allow us to go beyond that distinction, and whether meaningful dialogue between the religions, *qua* religions, is not indeed possible.

There are thus a variety of ways in which we can go beyond Heschel. In scope—in addressing multiple religions, as well as in extending the scope of the dialogue to broader strata of society. In depth—allowing ourselves to engage the faith of the other, and their vision of God and the spiritual life. In rigor—in filling in the blanks left open by Heschel, in all that concerns the translation of his insights into the language of the historical sources of tradition. In methodology—by adopting new methodologies that have developed in the academy, as well as by giving more serious attention to the classical methodology of halacha.

But in all this Heschel can remain a guiding force. His basic insights, and they are many, continue to inspire us, regardless of the translation work they still require. But more important than substance is the legacy of method. Heschel offers us an approach to interreligious relations, and it runs through the heart of the human experience. Heschel has taught us how to encounter the common human experience that underlies our religious experience. Heschel illustrated for us a small section of what such common experience might con-

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[106]For an example of such an attempt in relation to Christian dogma, see my own reflections on the incarnation, in "Judaisms and Incarnational Theologies: Mapping Out the Parameters of Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3–4 (2002): 219–247.

[107]P. 10.

[108]Of course, dialogue is always only possible between people. The point is that dialogue is only possible about the "peopleness" of the believers, rather than their proper faith.

sist of. But we can identify much more by way of common human experience, and it can be extended beyond the experience common to Christians and Jews. Heschel's legacy mandates encounter with all expressions of the human religious experience and its religious significance. This includes those experiences already recognized by Heschel as similar to our own as well as a range of other experiences we may have in common with members of different religions that await further sharing, experiencing, and reflection. The range of religiously significant experience may even transcend what for Heschel was the basis of commonality: the traces of God in our lives and souls. We also share suffering and the broader human condition. These too condition our religious life in significant ways. They can therefore provide further points of commonality and solidarity between religions.[109] They allow us to encounter members of traditions such as Buddhism, who share little of the theological and historical premises common to Christians and Jews. If the foundation for interreligious understanding is being human, then let all that is truly human condition our understanding of the religious other.[110]

If Heschel's work grows out of a "prophetic" reading of the moment and its challenges, one cannot rely on the forty-year-old reading. By its very nature, a "prophetic" approach cannot become stale. It must be restated time and again, with the changes in circumstances. Following Heschel, therefore, means much more than engaging in interreligious dialogue on the basis of his ideas. It means developing the "prophetic" sense, in light of which a broader spiritual vision is formed, that encompasses other religions and that is appropriate for the moment. It must be as informed by personal transformative experiences as Heschel's views were. Personal experiences may differ, given the broad range of emotions and interior realities that comprise the spiritual life. Others may have encounters at different spiritual band-widths than those developed by Heschel in his own encounters. These experiences in turn may generate different perspectives through which the broader philosophical, theological, and historical issues are dealt with. But underlying the variety in approaches and attitudes is the possibility of following a method fundamentally similar to that used by Heschel. Creating bases, multiple bases, of experience and prophetic,

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[109]See Antony Fernando, "An Asian Perspective," in *No Religion Is an Island*, pp. 175–184.

[110]This is the great benefit of not grounding understanding between religions upon mystical commonality. Even though Heschel comes out of a mystical tradition, he grounds our commonality in our humanity, thereby opening the door to the discovery of greater and greater commonalities, as our mutual knowledge deepens.

intuitive understanding of the reality between religions is Heschel's greatest legacy. If we seek to uphold the continuing relevance of his vision, we are called to discover these qualities at the basis of our interreligious activities.

"No Religion Is an Island" assumes we can help each other. It begins with helping each other face the challenges of the world. It concludes with helping each other in our spiritual lives. The former help grows out of a reading of the needs of the time. It has become widely practiced. The latter grows out of the personal experience of Heschel and his ability to find ways of sharing religious experience with religious people outside Judaism. That Heschel closes his essay with the call to help each other in our spiritual life suggests the importance of this calling. It also points the way forward. To follow Heschel is to be able to cultivate the space of heart and mind and those particular relationships by means of which we can really help each other address and fulfill our deepest spiritual yearnings. The range of religions in dialogue may now be broader and the range of experiences may be conceived as larger.[111] But the fundamental call remains the same. Not all will be able to answer this call. The dialogue of the masses, in service of society, will surely grow. But only those who are able to cultivate the depth of personal relations and of personal experience can explore new dimensions of what it means to share religious experience, of what it means to be truly human. Only those who can enter the thicket and create new paths within it deserve to be considered true followers of the trail blazer.

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[111]While Heschel engaged mainly in dialogue with Christianity, he may have already been aware of the potential help that may come to Judaism from engagement with eastern traditions. See Kasimow's (*Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 430) paraphrase of Heschel's *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1955), p. 15. Kasimow, however, has taken Heschel's words a step beyond their original intention. See also Hartman, "Heschel: A Heroic Witness," p. 191, n. 1.