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## The One and the Other: Reflections on the Ontological Roots of Politics

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The term «other,» one of the foci of contemporary intellectual discussion, stands really for a cluster of different concepts: someone else, the different, the exceptional, etc. This rhetorical exchange seems to be motivated by ethical considerations. The term «other» is meant to displace and replace other terms, such as «deviant,» that imply a negative value judgment. There is another, concealed, aspect to that rhetoric: a struggle for liberation from normativity, law, and duty. Normativity, however, is associated with normality, and the term «other» is meant to replace not only the term «deviant,» but also «imbecile» and «insane,» with the negative connotation they carry. The rhetoric of «the other» means denial of the possibility of disapproval.

Although the «other» rhetoric occupy one of the foci of post-modernistic culture, they draw, in fact, on various older conceptual and philosophical ideas. In the present article I intend to discuss some of the ties between ideology and philosophy. This discussion will hopefully make it possible to recognize both the horizons that the term «other» opens up, as well as the limitations and pitfalls it entails. The pitfalls result from the diverse use to which the term is put, and, primarily, from the interests it serves. The discussion will compare and contrast the «other» concept as seen in classic and modern Jewish thought with the way it developed in Western philosophies.

Classic Jewish thought is inseparable from the Hebrew language, and even from the Hebrew alphabet<sup>1</sup> as is exemplified in the way it deals with the various forms of the «other» concept. The term «other» (*aher* in Hebrew) may carry with it a negative connotation: the Talmud refers to the first century

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portance. We shall focus, instead, on the fundamental philosophical question. Defining the one on the basis of the other has its roots in structuralistic thought and, through it, in linguistic phenomena. This is an extension of the phenomenon that a word does not have an intrinsic meaning, not only because it is arbitrary and consensual, but also because its meaning is determined in contrast to other words. The meaning or, using a loaded word, essence is determined only through contrast with another meaning. Jewish sages have taught that *Havdalah* (lit. distinction in Hebrew), the prayer ushering out the Sabbath, should be included in *Honen Hada'ath*, the prayer for wisdom, perception, and knowledge. They reasoned that without knowledge distinction [between Sabbath and weekdays] would be impossible. The above position, however, turns the Sages' statement around — the distinction creates knowledge.

I should not be far off in stating that the root of that position may be found in Hegelian philosophy. I like to describe this aspect of Hegelian philosophy through the model of a jigsaw puzzle. We should distinguish between various types of puzzles, which I shall not describe here in detail. Let me just say that we have two basic types. In the first one, the kind intended for children, each piece contains a picture or part of a picture. In the second one there is no picture at all. A simple example of the second type may be found in a simple clay tablet or jar that have broken. Although assembling the pieces of a puzzle of the first kind results in integration into a larger picture, each piece does possess a quality and «personality» of its own even before that integration. Not so in the second kind: although we similarly have to assemble the pieces, those pieces possess no identity whatsoever. The identity of each piece is determined by the whole, by the boundaries of the piece and its relationship to adjacent parts, or, in other words, in relation to the other.

In Hegel's philosophy, humanity, even total reality, is a puzzle of the second kind. The parts are defined by the whole. Herein lies the secret of personal identity. The Hassidic school of Jewish thought states: «If I am I because I am I and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you....» For our purpose we have to turn this thesis around: «I am I precisely because you are you, and you are you exactly because I am I.»

I believe that the puzzle model describes the basic ontology of Hegelian philosophy, the meaning of identity and existence. True reality is found in the

sage-turned-apostate Elisha the son of Avuya as *aher*. On the other hand, the «other» closest to us is, of course, our spouse. In the latter situation the «other» becomes «you.»<sup>1</sup> (This transformation is achieved in the Hebrew equivalents through minor modification of two letters). Beyond all that the term «other» bears theological significance, as seen in the following treatment of a famous biblical verse:

«Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, The Lord is One (Deut. 6, 4) — if you change the letter D in the word «one» (*ehad* in Hebrew) into R, changing it into «other» (*aher* in Hebrew) you may bring destruction upon the whole world. Similarly — Thou shall not bow down to another god (Exod. 34, 14) — if you turn R into D in the latter verse you may bring destruction upon the whole world» (*Vayikra Rabba* 19, 2). (The letters D and R are quite similar in appearance in the Hebrew alphabet, and are written in larger script, respectively, in the words «one» and «another» in the above verses in the Torah scroll.)

This passage expresses the theological attitude towards the «other» as opposed to the «One.» In the following discussion the term «one» will similarly be used as contrary to «other.» Hopefully, this use will be justified further on in the present article. For now may it suffice to state that the «one» signifies to me the first person, the self, and the cluster of concepts associated with it. Indeed, in my opinion this term describes quite well some of the attributes of those concepts.<sup>2</sup>

### *The One, the Other, and the Totality*

This discussion will start with a study of the origin of the «other.» As will be shown further on, this term is associated with various, and even opposing, philosophies. The contrast between them will, hopefully, make it easier to understand the issue as a whole.

To understand the meaning of the first philosophical anchor we should mention one of the major themes pervading the contemporary rhetoric of the «other.» Again and again we hear the claim that we need the other to be able to define ourselves through him. The one is defined on the basis of the other. This claim is repeated in many discussions and finds its way into significant political and social debates. For the present purpose, those debates are of marginal im-

totality, not in the pieces of the puzzle but in the integral whole. According to the second principle, the various parts are not defined individually, but only in relation to the other parts. The total is not a symphony of independent parts, but rather a jigsaw puzzle of shards. As Spinoza has taught, every determination is exclusion, the entity is a result of narrowing down; the one is created only through exclusion of the other. This exclusion is the root of the definition. The beginning of human tragedy lies in philosophy, in the most abstract existence theory. This is the essence of ontological tragedy. War is not a political, economic, or social phenomenon; its roots lie in existence theory.

#### *Recognition and the Stranger*

One of the characteristics of modern thought is its reference to language as expression of philosophical ideas. A classical example may undoubtedly be found in the philosophical commentary of Heidegger, who was convinced that Greek and, subsequently, German expresses the pure and true philosophical view. Such exercises may be viewed as mere puns, but a different view is also possible. As Franz Rosenzweig (1985) has expressed this, language is the dowry granted Man by God, a formulation that Emmanuel Lévinas was fond of repeating. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1956, 1988), on the basis of biblical Hebrew,<sup>3</sup> developed a somewhat similar approach. Biblical Hebrew expresses the moral demands placed upon man, and its characteristics are in confrontation with the philosophies embedded in other languages, including German. I intend to take the liberty of using Rabbi Hirsch's philological speculation to express the ideas brought forth above.

According to Rabbi Hirsch, the Hebrew word «*nochrî*,» one of the words expressing «alterity,» is closely related to the «*tiakara*» (recognition). Similarly, the phrase «lest their adversaries should misdeem (*yenakeru*)» (Deut. 32, 27) is interpreted by him to mean «their enemies will not recognize the truth.»<sup>4</sup> At any rate, the Torah (Pentateuch) itself plays with the connection between the two concepts: «and Joseph saw his brethren, and he recognized (*vayakirem*) them, but made himself strange (*vayithnaker*) unto them» (Gen. 42, 7).<sup>5</sup> On the face of it this connection is but another instance of an occurrence quite common in Hebrew, in which a stem assumes contrary meanings, but Rabbi Hirsch

offers a different explanation:

To recognize (*tiakir*) is actually to turn one into a stranger (*nochrî*). Every recognition alienates. Recognizing an object separates it from other objects. The more distinct features we recognize in an object, the more we tend to realize its uniqueness. Each additional feature reaching our consciousness will lift out that object from among all other classes, all other genera, all other species, and, ultimately, from among all other individuals of that species. In this way we shall make a «stranger» out of it.

I have quoted Rabbi Hirsch because his observations represent a concept precisely opposite to the one brought forth above: Alienation does not define, the definition alienates. When we turn entity into essence, when we chose a particular way, we create the stranger. Such an act may have positive aspects and not necessarily just negative ones, not only in reference to an individual but also to a public, a collective.

#### *Two Identities*

The two options brought above may not necessarily be mutually exclusive. With such an approach we may conclude that we are dealing with two, perhaps more, possible identities. The contrast between the two identities is reflected in the distinction made by Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik (1992a) between a covenant of fate and a covenant of destiny. The covenant of fate was made in Egypt following the confrontation with the other. A covenant of destiny was made in Sinai, centered on a common goal, aspiration, and destiny. This historical retrospective teaches us about the distant past, but is just as valid for modern Jewish history. Regarding the dual significance of Zionism, the covenant of fate has been formed in the struggle against anti-Semitism. This is a utilitarian covenant, which, most probably, will not survive the demise of the reason for its making. The struggle does indeed create an identity, but, unless fate develops into destiny, that covenant remains temporary and false.

At least in the modern world, the Jew has been a prominent instance of the status of the other. Psychoanalysts, with partial justification, see the Jew as a projection screen, a sort of Rorschach stain upon which the anti-Semite projects his fears and subconscious feelings. Sartre has expanded this view in his

classical essay analyzing the attitude of the anti-Semite towards the Jew. It should be realized that Sartre's approach draws a picture of an identity which, as the *Zohar*, the fundamental book of Kabbalah, describes the sphere of *Malchut* (Kingdom), represented by the moon: «it has nothing of its own.» This is an identity that projects nothing of its own, but only reflects the light it receives from others.

One of the most amazing phenomena in philosophy is expressed in what I would like to call the tragedy of the remnants of imperialism. Nations gain independence but continue to speak the language of the former colonial power. Such a phenomenon occurs in philosophy when the greatest opponents of Hegel use Hegelian language or intuitions. That has happened to existentialistic philosophy, and has been recurring ever since. The rhetoric according to which negating the other creates self-identity is to me but another vestige of Hegelian philosophical imperialism. Thus, in his essay on anti-Semitism, Sartre sees all Jews in the image of the assimilated ones, who, indeed, have nothing of their own, and are similar, or even identical, to any other Frenchmen. The only thing different in the assimilated Jew is whatever the foe projects upon him. We have here a wondrous demonstration of the Hegelian model: the other is whoever that his existence is «being for others.» Hegel was convinced that such an identity could turn into «being for oneself.» Modern thinkers have not accepted such a possibility. In any rate, this was the way of the Zionism founded upon a covenant of fate. In both Sartre's model and that dictated only by common fate, the Jew is part of a collective with no identity of his own, a piece of a puzzle bearing no picture at all. According to this being a Jew means being a one of the pieces of the puzzle, but for the purpose of being different. His essence is being different from everybody, but not in a way of «being for his own sake.» To them he is an odd sort of a mirror that gets distorted according to the distortions existing in whomever is looking at it. Perhaps it is the silver that myth alleged Jews to possess that turn the transparent glass of the pieces of the puzzle into a mirror. It is true that the mechanics of the reflection and distortion is totally unimportant. They may assume various forms and serve various functions. In contemporary talk the Jew has a different role — to be a negative object for identification, creating social cohesion.

Surprisingly, another issue, the survival of the Jews during two-millen-

nia-long exile, may be seen as the symmetrically opposite facet of the identity question discussed above. Various explanations have been offered, some mystical, some mysterious, and others rational, but one persistent view attempts to turn the issue inside out. According to the latter view, Jewry has not survived despite the persecutions, but because of them. Again, identity is erased, only the situation determines the course of history. This was Spinoza's position. Spinoza's model may have been the Maranno who wished to assimilate, but encountered rejection of the «new Christians». In any rate, this model cannot at all describe those Jews who suffered torment and deportation in order to remain Jews. Combining Sartre's view with Spinoza's results in a distorted image that destroys the very idea of identity as an authentic creation of an individual or collective. This is a «prejudice» that even precedes my identity. As we shall see, this prejudice is tied to racism, a concept with which will be dealt with further on.

### *The Other Beyond*

Until now we have been dealing with one philosophical root of the relationship between the one and the other, but there exists an additional root, originating in phenomenology and drawing from the Cartesian approach. According to this view we take off on our mental and existential voyage from our internal world, which I like to describe using the dream as a model. The figures populating my dream belong to my immanent world. If we apply the dream model to the world of reality, we shall find our selves assuming a solipsistic position, «I, and naught but me»: only I exist, everything else is but a part of my inner world — just figures in a dream.

How do we break through these walls? We are groping in the dark, wearying ourselves to find the doors to external reality, or, as in Descartes' thought, to God. That breakthrough, however, is inevitable in relation to the other. The search for the other is transcendental — the discovery of a being beyond our universe. This is the starting point of Emmanuel Lévinas' philosophy (1993). I believe that, surprisingly, the gate to transcendentality may be found in morality. Moral selfishness is a reflection of a deeper reality. Man lives in an «analog» world, a kind of a dream world. He has to wake up from that dream in order to

break out into the actual reality that the other inhabits.

Lévinas meets here the essence of Franz Rosenzweig's ideas. The Hegelian model is built around the principle of totality: a part has no meaning other than within the total. In contrast, the key term in meeting someone else is infinity.<sup>6</sup> Infinite is that balks at being included in any collective, within a perception or in my data base. Infinity is perceived here as the inability to contain someone else in any system, nor in my perception. Infinity testifies to transcendental, to the other being external.

Knowing an object means absorbing it into our conscious world, but the one could never absorb the other. The other will always remain other without me being able to contain him within me. The most significant expression of this is the fact that I am unable to enter somebody else's private premises, his inner world. The existence of such an inner world may be the only thing that makes man different from other living beings and the cosmos surrounding him. This is the meaning of the transcendental of the other, bearing God's image, the image of God's transcendental. The other is, thus, God's image.

As Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik has noted, such an idea has been raised by Maimonides (1963) in his interpretation of the term «image» (*The Guide for the Perplexed*, part I, chapter 1). It would appear that Maimonides sees God's image in the mind, but he himself rejects that interpretation, emphasizing that God's image represents something in which «man is made unique by something that is very extraordinary, which may not be said of anything else existing under the moon.» The very essence of man is being a stranger in the cosmos. This strangeness is the transcendental of the other, in the image of the transcendental of the absolute other, the Lord.

As Lévinas has taught us, man's inner world is reflected on his face. The face is closely associated in Hebrew with man's inner world. On the other hand, the face expresses man's turning to someone else, as in the cry of the other: «turn to me and grant me your grace» (Ps. 25, 16). This is the origin of ethics.

The expression «face to face» describes the dialog between the one and the other. Of Cain it was said: «and his countenance (*panaw*, literally — his face) fell» (Gen. 4, 5). According to Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, «falling of the countenance» refers to depression and despair. The most tragic expression of the face is the tear. His facial expression obligates me to respond with my own.

It is my impression that the Hebrew language contrasts the face with the hand. In his commentary (to Gen. 20, 5), Rabbi Hirsch (1989) has already noticed this metaphor. He called attention to the two dimensions of the metaphorical hand. The term «hand» refers to «open, outstretched, and active hand, in contrast to «palm» — folded and closed.» The hand represents human action, the palm — possession of property. This distinction is reflected precisely in the combinations «pure hands and clean palms.»<sup>7</sup>

Lévinas has played with the term *inter esse*, which determines relations between entities. Classical Hebrew uses various terms to express this situation, but most of all by the wondrous idea of «*regi'ah*» (touch, and, by extension, personal involvement or interest). That term is used with a connotation recalling the words of the philosopher Heidegger to the effect that when I touch something I mean to use it. The very touching is the use. The cognitive consequence is immediate: once more I am not objective — the lie can easily ensnare me. The touch bribes my whole being. The hand clashes with the face.

### *Confronting the Two Approaches*

I believe that the contrast between the two approaches described above, Hegel's and Lévinas', may be readily discerned. While the former takes struggle and war as the foundation of identity, the latter takes ethics as that foundation. However, Lévinas' ethical approach goes beyond that. It is not concerned with recognizing someone else, but with the asymmetry between him and me. This generates responsibility in me.<sup>8</sup> I am responsible for the other without expecting any reciprocity. The demand of the other is expressed on his face.<sup>9</sup>

This discussions returns me to a significant distinction which may be used to characterize various modern ethics systems, a distinction rooted in Hermann Cohen's later teachings. Three directions in ethics, represented in the charm found in the three innocent pronouns, I, you, and he, may be characterized. What all three approaches have in common is the rejection of the «that» option, that is, a struggle against the dehumanizing of the other and turning him into a mere object. However, beyond this common general platform, there are significant differences between the three fundamental ethical positions.

Kantian morality is the morality of the «he.» According to it, man's pri-

other to us. As we have seen, this is where the ethical relationship to the other originates. Is it possible, indeed, to break into ones inner world? Buber believed it was, Lévinas did not. According to the latter, the only possible connection between one person and the other is morality.

Those two concepts establish what may be called harmonious relations between the one and the other. The relationship to the other may, however, be expressed more dramatically. To me the other constitutes a boundary. I am not alone: the other constitutes hell or, at least, the possibility of my hell. Lévinas' approach, sketched above, focusing as it does on the infinity and transcendentality of the other, stands in conflict with the spirit of Sartre's viewpoint, which emphasizes precisely the fact that by recognizing someone we «swallow» him into our world.<sup>10</sup>

This cognitive fact is the model of the relationship with the other. These relationships are expressed in sexuality, in which the danger of turning the other person into «that» is clearly prominent. I find the use of the Hebrew verb «yada » (lit. «to know») in this connection particularly significant, implying, as it does, an emphatically different attitude. Knowing also means loving.

The two ontological approaches sketched above do, indeed, describe different options, or even different aspects of reality. Hegelian ontology is reflected in psychological situations within the family. The basic archetype, recurring throughout the biblical book of *Genesis*, from the murder of Abel to the selling of Joseph, from Cain's sin to Judah's repentance is brotherhood. Cain and Abel define themselves by their mutual conflict: «sin coucheth at the door» (Gen. 4, 7). The psychological conflict grows and turns into an economic and political conflict. However, there is no other: every war is a war between brothers.

On the other hand, the book of *Genesis* teaches us how to break out of a world centered on our ego, which may expand into a collective and total ego, or on ego that rejects the other. The political application of such a breakout is found in the expression «fear of God.» People living in a town or kingdom are protected by the law or, at least, by fear of revenge by the victim's kin. Now there arrives the stranger, the outsider. The stranger is found throughout the bible. The book of *Exodus* teaches us that we had to be born in the house of bondage. Hegel had understood that point when he taught that self-awareness

may commitment is to the law. My relationship to someone else is determined by the fact that «by coincidence» the law grants him certain rights. This is analogous to the dotted line in some form waiting to be filled up with a name. Thus, it is the law that defines morality, and my relationship with a concrete person is determined solely by the fact that his name happened to appear in the appropriate form.

The option radically opposite to Kantian morality may be found in Schopenhauer's ethics. His approach may be called the «you» approach. Morality is based upon emotion, and that emotion is born out of the possibly non-conscious awareness that both I and the next person are but a part of a greater reality, like members of a single body.

A third position counters both former ones. According to that third position morality is born out of standing before someone else, before the «you.» This position, formulated by Hermann Cohen in his later writings, is the religious position. This is also, somewhat modified, the focus of morality in Emmanuel Lévinas' philosophy, a morality that exists between me and the other.

So much for the moral demand originating in the «you.» Reality will change with the appearance of the third player. In a world in which there are three players there is a need not only for morality, but also for justice. If we translate those views into the parlance of Jewish tradition, we may, I believe, identify on those two levels the tension and confrontation between the extreme Hassidic doctrine and the views of mainstream Jewish religious leaders, who must weigh and balance those two goals. Interpersonal relations become a part of a system of more complex relationship, namely the social and political system.

### *The Other and Hell*

Lévinas' approach has, in my opinion, been built upon the phenomenological attempt to break out of our inner world. This attempt, however, is bound to another question, the possibility of breaking into someone else's inner world. Those two existential questions are symmetrically oppositely. Herein lies the difference between Emmanuel Lévinas' approach and that of Martin Buber.

It is the possibility of breaking out to beyond my world that reveals the

one in public, the ridicule cast upon him, the graphic and literary caricature is a terrible expression of a crime against that someone, nourishing what may develop later. This is the danger of ridicule, whether turned outwards or inwards, towards the other who is a wayward brother. The laughter and ridicule are most important thermometers measuring the attitude towards the other.

#### *The Theological Concept:*

#### *The One, the Other, and Mysticism*

Beyond the two concepts considered so far, reality and morality, there is, in my opinion, a third, existential, option, rooted in theology. This idea may be understood by comparing the view of the Deity in two different theological systems. The first one is the Aristotelian concept of god, blissful in his self-awareness, in his self-contemplation. This position was expressed by Philon of Alexandria (1981) in his commentary. He sees the reason for the biblical statement «it is not good that the man should be alone» (Gen. 2, 18), in solitude being exclusively a Divine attribute, the source of the Divine's unlimited bliss. This view of Philon is rooted in Greek thought. Against it stands the concept of the biblical God, self-originating, creator of the universe, loving His creatures and welcoming their love. Moreover, the *Kabbalah* speaks of a contraction that preceded all creation processes, and, indeed, perhaps we should regard this contraction in the sense of making room for the other, of contraction of Divine perfection, which needs nothing outside itself, to make room for finite being to be created. We see here an amazing phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> It seems to me that this is the basic intuition in Franz Rosenzweig's position regarding the centrality of the love of God. In his *Sefer Ha'Iqarim (Book of Dogmas)*, Rabbi Joseph Albo (1946) has already dwelled on the uniqueness of God's love of man, being different from man's love of God: God's love was not born out of any need. In any rate, we encounter here an astounding phenomenon that the absolute One creates the other *ab nihilo* so that love may be born. This is the deep meaning of the creation of the couple. According to the Bible, the primary other is the spouse — Adam to Eve, and Eve to Adam. Reaching out to the other is a model of moral activity. «Thou should love thy fellow as thy self» (Levit. 19, 18) means that it is possible to go outside ourselves and put ourselves in the place of some-

is born out of master-slave relationship, but before becoming slaves we had to be stranger wandering from nation to nation and from one kingdom to another, strangers in a strange land. The epitome of this situation occurs, of course, in Sodom. The depravity of Sodom is not in the nature of their deeds, but in the abuse of strangers. The town and its king defend their inhabitants, those possessing passports. Strangers have neither civil rights nor even human rights. The «fear of God» means that, beyond civil rights, there are human rights, the rights of the image of God. A town lacking that must be regarded as a «drawn away town» (Deut. 13, 14), having no right to exist, and be sentenced to brimstone and fire.

Sodom may be an extreme case, but it should be realized that moral obligations towards the other begin earlier, in a much more basic way. In «A Tale of a Fly and a Spider,» the seventh tale in his canonical collection of tales [see Buber (1988), Mantel (1977)], the prominent Hassidic thinker, Rabbi Nachman of Braslav tells us about a king in whose court victories were celebrated in great balls. All ministers of the court gathered there, «and were performing there laughing matters known as comedies, and were playing and making fun of all nations, of Ishmael as well as of all other nations, and were imitating in a mocking way the manners and behavior of every nation.» In that kingdom's archives there was an enormous book containing «the behavior and customs of [every] nation.» That book, however, makes possible only the comedy, the mockery of the other. Already in «A Tale of a Meek King,» the sixth tale in the collection, we have learned that «by what means [the scholar] get to know the nature of the state? By the 'katowies' of that state, i.e. the laughing matters known as 'katowies'.» Humor teaches us about the nature of a people. Humor is dangerous, it enables some people to disguise their wickedness under the cover of humor, while others will be misled by the ridicule to not realizing the offense against the other. Laughter characterizes the attitude towards the other.

The third tale teaches that the activity of the demons is guided exclusively by laughter, by mockery. The seventh tale adds another dimension. I believe that the seventh tale teaches us that mockery of the stranger, of his characteristic accent («imitating in a mocking way») and his different manners is one of the primary moral challenges facing a person since childhood. Embarrassing

one else. We split ourselves in two, going, as it were, to somebody else's place, and looking out of his perspective.

At this point I wish to refer to a paradoxical reciprocity that, in my opinion, exists in the theological dimension with which we are dealing. God has created the other, and we are seeking Him as the absolute Other. I see here one of the foci of Lévinas' revolt against Heidegger. To Heidegger, in our search for the entity we have reached a most basic stratum, the most fundamental question of metaphysics. Lévinas is seeking what is beyond that entity.

Those positions require interpretation and expansion, but I shall not do so now. I just wish to point to a remarkable phenomenon. The above debate is a new version of the medieval dispute that separated Jewish philosophy from Christian scholasticism. According to Christian thought, particularly that influenced by Thomas Aquinas, existence is a title of the Deity, perhaps even His essence. In contrast, according to Maimonides existence is a noun with dual meaning: God's existence is fundamentally different from that of anything else, spiritual or material. The most significant expression of this difference may be found in Maimonides' original interpretation of the term «One» to mean being «other,» radically different from anything else in the universe.<sup>12</sup> The One and the other are united by a semantic identity.

We may now turn our attention to another issue, one that should significantly complement the above discussion. It may be stated that, among other of its foci, the philosophy of religion contains a fundamental debate between the one and the other. Mysticism sees its ultimate experience in the elimination of the boundaries between man and the universe, and even between man and God. The latter position finds a prominent expression in the claim of a great Moslem mystic to the effect that God may be found in his own cloths. At the other extreme may be placed the nomimosic experience, in which man encounters the absolute Other, utterly different from any other existence.

The attempt to create a synthesis between the two positions is found in modern Jewish thought, both *Hassidic* and *Misnagdish* (rationalist): both attempted to bridge the two views by distinguishing between «on our part» and «on His part.» There are two possible perspectives, one human, finite, in which the distance, the chasm exists, and the other, the Divine, in which all is one.<sup>13</sup> The Hassidic approach speaks of the possibility of erasing the gap and alterity

through devotion, eliminating the self — turning me (*ani* in Hebrew) into naught (*ain* in Hebrew). Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik (1979) represents the opposite position, that the only possible devotion is the joining of wills, and not an actual ontological union. We see here a striking similarity between those models and the Hegelian philosophy. In the latter, as in Hassidism, the union is possible.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Other and Different: the Collective Other*

Up to this point we have considered one facet of the attitude towards the other. That facet is the source of the danger of racism, of turning against the other because he is other. However, besides «alterity,» which we have come to know so far, there is another term — «difference.» The term «difference,» of course, also implies the existence of two, but there is a most significant difference between the two terms. Medieval Aristotelian philosophy spoke of various kinds of difference. Central among them is the numerical difference, that is the individual difference. Before us stand two individuals, two human beings, for example, who are substantially similar, yet not identical: they are two. These two are the one and the other. Beyond it lies the essential difference, that between genera and species. On this level the one encounters the other who is the different one. To a certain extent these are two complementary problems of man: hatred of the person who is different and envy of the one who is similar. Sometimes these emotions fuse to create a demonic force.

This aspect of the alterity, of the difference, enables us to move from the individual to the collective domain, but the struggle of the other to maintain his identity also meaningful. One of the secrets of the world lies in the possibility of creating a difference, a collective difference. Already Empedocles has noted that death means absolute love being expressed in uniformity and total assimilation, that is, in the nonexistence of difference. A simple model describing classical physical concepts may illustrate this idea. Consider a collection of variously colored balls. We may look at the groups with the different colors as separately, or as forming different pictures, but we may also mix all the balls into a homogeneous mixture. This latter situation may be described as total «assimilation.» In such a situation no picture and no variety is possible. Such a situation may be described as total love among the balls, but, as may be concluded

from Empedocles' statement, life, and reality in general, are not the product of total love. Rather, they require the tension of «help against him» (the literary translation of the Hebrew *ezer kenegdo* — help meet, Gen. 2, 18). Only the rift between the different elements may create the variegated embroidery that forms a meaningful picture. The existence of the other and the different, the emphasis of this alterity, even the awareness of the difference, are necessary conditions for the world's existence. «Love» — erasure of all differences — is equivalent to maximal entropy, meaning cosmic death.

In light of the above we should turn back and reconsider issues brought up at the beginning of the present work. I wish at this point to return to the «other» rhetoric as defining identity, because to me it constitutes a stumbling block. Whoever exaggerates its centrality does injustice to the one being hated, as well as, curiously, to the one who hates, if there is any justification for worrying about the latter. Sartre's essay only describes a partial equation — the confrontation with the other, but, in reality, the confrontation with the other is not identical with the confrontation with the different. Let me use the example of the Jew once more to clarify this point. We may learn quite a bit about general human issues by looking at ourselves and our history. As we have seen, Sartre's model was the assimilated Jew, one whose identity had been completely erased. The struggle for Jewish emancipation did, in fact, concentrate initially upon gaining the right to be similar, but Judaism with its various hues also fought for the right to be different, at times even radically different. The prominent Israeli author A. B. Yehoshua's writing (1981) «on the merits of normality» should be read precisely from this aspect. Yehoshua sees Zionism as an attempt to bring about normality and put an end to a pathological situation. That pathological situation sets the Jewish people apart from the rest of the world. According to Yehoshua, if some otherworldly being would have looked at our planet, it would have seen uniformity, incidental differences, but a basic similarity — with one exception! It would see a strange creature that does not conform to ordinary geopolitical rules. That is the Jewish people in exile. This is a pathological situation that must be cured. This may sum up the general sense of seeing Zionism as a return to normality. I am a Zionist, but for different reasons: why being different is pathological? The world may not understand this, or even accept this, but whence the inverse pathology of laying the blame upon the differ-

ent and demanding just from him to correct the fault?

The roots of the perception of difference in Jewish essence can be found in the teachings of Rabbi Loew the son of Bezael of Prague (Maharal).<sup>15</sup> Rosenzweig has observed the same reality, rightfully seeing it as preceding the End of Days, a world beyond politics. Rosenzweig was the great theologian of the Exile, and the Holocaust has proven the tragedy of his position. The error of Rosenzweig may possibly not have laid in his statements themselves, but rather in the fact that he was ahead of his time. Perhaps that era has not yet arrived, and may never do, but, in any rate, it is astonishing to see the contrast between the approaches of Rosenzweig and A.B. Yehoshua. The contrast is not only in the form image of Judaism, but in its very essence. Yehoshua sees the focus of Judaism in being different, returning us to the puzzle situation, but this time in reverse. The cognition of one the pieces of the puzzle is determined neither by confrontation with the others, nor by being turned into a distorted mirror, but, paradoxically, by of the wish rising within it to be different and by the search for a way to realize that wish. The crux of A.B. Yehoshua's claim lies in his astounding discovery that the Jews themselves have chosen the situation in which they found themselves, namely being in exile. Every thing is taking place as if the special situation of the Jew, the role in which it casts him as well as the fruit it has borne — anti-Semitism — are but a consequence of the Jew's own choice. True, there is a major difference between this view and Sartre's, according to which such a choice was denied the Jew altogether. In Sartre's view the «other» is but a mean for defining the identity of the others, whereas in Yehoshua's view he is at fault because he wants to be different.

It is amazing to discover the effect of structures. Theoretical contents, philosophy, ideas — all are determined by the structures. Once those were economic structures, but now, very strangely, they are ontological. Jewish existence has no contents, every thing is determined by choosing the place of the part in the system. This also occurs in Yehoshua's concept. If we may borrow terms from the exact sciences, we might say that according to Yehoshua, taken here to represent a whole school of thought, first order difference is tolerable, but not second order. Zionism offers the Jew a way to be different, but normally different, that is different in an identical way, in the way that other people differ from each other. If, however, a certain entity, such as exile Jewry, is dif-

ferent in a different way, it would be termed pathological, all the open-mindedness not withstanding. No doubt the unease that many Israelis feel towards the Diaspora and, especially, towards what constitutes the epitome of the difference, namely religious Jewry, stems from the inability to face radical difference.

All that is true not only regarding the Diaspora, but also regarding of the state of Israel. The conflict over the character of the State parallels Diaspora Jewish communities' struggle for emancipation. Equality for the Jew stipulated, whether explicitly or implicitly, upon assimilation, that is ending his existence as other. This structure has reappeared, in a different version, in Israel's life as an independent state. Perhaps the inability to see the uniqueness of the State of Israel, the impossibility of defining it in the way that some liberal Western states (certainly not all of them) are defined, is a result of the inability to live with the different, especially when the different is I myself. Thus, perhaps those who had pointed out the fault of the enlightenment project, the one that tries to erase variety, were right after all. This is a project that predated our post-modern world, but survived into it. The paradox in our situation is that, in the name of the attitude toward the other, some are trying to erase the uniqueness and difference of Jewish political existence.

#### *The Self, the Other, and Alienation*

Maharal sees the Exile as having three dimensions: alienation, dispersion and subjugation. These dimensions are political and economic, but in terms of philosophical significance the first one, alienation, stands out most prominently. The crux of the Exile is found in the alienation, but alienation itself has numerous dimensions. On the simplest level alienation means being in an alien location, whether geographical or sociological, but alienation is much more than that.

Alienation is one of the central concepts of modern philosophy. To me it expresses the opposite pole to alterity. Until now we have considered the roots of negating the other, but we must understand that there also exists an opposite phenomenon: obliteration of the self. Again we have to turn to the philosophy of Hegel, who described those roots quite well.<sup>16</sup>

Self-awareness is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable phenomena in

the cosmos: it is a reflection without a mirror or, more precisely, from a mirror identical with the observer. This phenomenon is fraught with paradoxes from its inception and onwards. To try to understand it we have to imagine man split into two, one part looking at the other. At the end both parts must reunite into a single entity. For self-awareness to exist I have first to look at myself from the outside. This stepping outside oneself is the ontological seed from which sprouts alienation.<sup>17</sup> A person may step outside himself, but he cannot return to himself. This is the insane situation in which we become strangers to ourselves, and do not recognize ourselves anymore.

An additional dimension of alienation may have to be considered, a dimension that is also structural. It has to do with the status of the self. We have pointed out above to the status of the individual in Hegel's teachings as a part of a whole, a part defined by the totality. This is one of the attempts to eliminate the significance and independence of the individual. What astonishes in the post-modern culture being shaped before our eyes is the way it, for all the emphasis it places upon the other, obliterates the one and destroys the subject, being in a different manner. This destruction, carried out under the banner of a holy war against Cartesian dualism, is hard to understand. The other within me is obliterated:

«Subject» is not given, but some fictional addition, an *ex post facto* implant — is it still necessary at the end to assume the existence of a commentator behind the commentary?<sup>18</sup>

Self-awareness seems to deceive us: there are only larger or smaller structures, whether social or economic — the non-conscious forces in man. Those structures have become the focus of the self: «Our needs interpret the world to us, our drives with all the «for» and «against»<sup>19</sup> they entail. Another expression of what influences contemporary thought is the reduction of the self to mere language. The search for the literal meaning was but an attempt to find the presence of the author in the text. The author is missing in the hermeneutics because the self has earlier left the ontology. This appears to me to be a new kind of alienation. Philosophical analysis has stolen the self from me. The sight reflected from my philosophic mirror is not a real image, not even a distorted one, but only an illusion.

The same terrible phenomenon, threatening self-cognizance, has occurred in philosophy. Philosophy has gone out towards the other, and on its way has lost the one, self-identity. This ontological fact also has serious political implications. We see a clear parallel between collective and individual identity.

In the process of self-awareness man is split into one and other, but in self-awareness they also reunite. In the moral situation we also have to leave our place in order to reach the other person's place. This is the secret of «thou should love thy fellow as thyself» (Levit. 19, 18): we leave the «thy» of «thyself» to reach «thy fellow.» We acknowledge the uniqueness of our fellow, but at the same time we have to acknowledge my right to maintain my own uniqueness. Speaking of the other is often concurrent with oblivion of the self, and, indeed, here, too, we have to fight alienation. Are we able to return to ourselves and see our own perspective? Using a spatial metaphor, reaching the other means leaving the «here» to reach «there,» but the «there» of the «there» is still «here,» and oblivion of the «here» is also a transgression, one in which man forgets to return, the transgression of alienation.

#### *Essence and Difference*

Not just the subject has disappeared from our world, but also the essence. I am not going to try to define the latter term, but only state that it is something that exceeds the structure. That is precisely the essence that was missing in the Sartre's depicting of the Jew. Assimilation is a sort of alienation, alienation from the essence in man, or philosophic alienation from the very concept of essence.

If this, indeed, is the way things are, then the collective is more than just a structure. From this starting point I shall try to reach the thesis that, precisely because of the importance of being different, there is room for creating collective units with a special essence, for creating political structures that protect those very essences. There is a moral implication to the existence of a place where a certain culture belongs to the majority, where this particular collective unit will fulfill its principles and wishes, chose its own way through the many dilemmas it faces, and even discriminate in its own favor. The tower of Babel was a punishment, but, as Rabbi S. R. Hirsch has taught us, it was a didactic punishment. Until the utopian End of Days there is a place for the multiplicity of peo-

ples, so that the various components of human identity will be realized. This, of course, finds expression also in the conflicts between various opinions and cultures. In the realm of culture, this is a conflict of the various human experiments, which expresses our humanity. This is the place for the distinction made after gaining knowledge, and first of all the distinction between good and evil.

The confrontation with the different is wrong only if it comes about solely because he is different, but not when it concerns the nature of the difference. When the conflict rises out of very fact of the difference, this is racism. However, not every conflict with the different is racism, not every conflict stems solely from prejudice. In contemporary thinking pluralism and multiculturalism is presented as the alternative to racism, but does this post-modern position truly offer the sole and proper alternative to racism? Should every conflict, including a conflict of opinions, be prohibited?

The answer to the above questions should, in my opinion, be negative. A conflict of opinions is important. The difference between pluralism and tolerance stems from the belief in truth, as well as from the Beruriah's marvelous tenet in a well-known Talmudic tale: «may sins, not the sinners, perish.» Due respect for the sinners does not preclude the struggle against what I perceive as sins. Despite all that has been said, there are occasions when the «other» loses that honorable title. Lévinas alluded to this point in his commentary on the tale of the moral deed of the great Talmudic sage, Rav (Babil. tract. *Yoma*, p. 87). That tale relates how Rav nobly goes to the sinner to offer him a chance to repent. The sinner insults Rav, saying to him: «go away, I have nothing to do with you,» for which the sinner is punished by Heaven and dies. In Lévinas' words:

That expression [go, I have nothing to do with you] is remarkably precise... for humanity extends on various levels, it consists of different worlds, mutually inaccessible because of their different altitudes. Human beings still do not constitute a single humanity... We certainly are not dealing with a miracle, but with the death lurking within the systems inside which humanity shuts itself. We are dealing with that purity that has the power to kill within the bounds of humanity, whose development is still on different levels, as well as with the weight and greatness of Rav's responsibility, believing prematurely, as it turned out, in the humanness of the other.

which the sages have interpreted to mean: «get down from your lofty position» (Babil. tract. *Berachoth*, p.32/1). Their commentary should be seen as an allusion [to a deeper meaning], for both letters R and D, making up the word «*red*» (get thee down — written in Hebrew without the vowel), may be found in the Torah written oversized. The R in the word *aher* (other) in the verse «For thou shall bow down to no other god...» (Exod. 34, 14), as well as the D in the word *ehad* (one) in the verse «...the Lord is One,» are written oversized. This is done to prevent people from confusing *ehad* with *aher* (as noted previously, the Hebrew letters R and D are quite similar in appearance). Sometimes it may seem to man that he is fulfilling one of God's commandments when in reality he would be committing idolatry, that is if, for example, the good deed was done out of some ulterior motive. On other occasion the opposite may happen, for «a transgression committed for its own sake is greater [than a commandment observed not for its own sake]» (Babil. tract. *Nazir*, p. 23/2); try to understand this. One should, therefore, weigh his deeds very carefully on true scales, so as not to go wrong. That is why those two letters were written oversized in the Torah, lest man should be mistaken, for it is very easy to be mistaken. This follows from the sin of Adam, who fell in this way to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and good and evil became mixed in his mind, making him prone to error. Without that mix-up his mind would have been holy, straying neither to the right nor to the left. To that refer the Lord's words to Adam: «Thorns also thistles shall it bring forth to thee...» (Gen. 3, 18). For once you were drawn to the knowledge of good and evil you have become prone to easily mistake R for D and D for R (*dardar*, thistle, consists of that pair of letters repeated twice), the difference between them being *koz* (thorn). (See detailed discussion in the chapter of *Agra Dechalla* devoted to the beginning of the book of *Genesis*).

The solution may possibly lie in finding the equilibrium between the one and the other, or, more precisely, between the different rhetorics. The position from which we have to examine is not always simple. The «thistle» describes the possibility of mistaking the R for the D. In other words, the «thistle» (*drdr*) characterizes our post-modern culture, and represents the errors in the relationship between the one and the other. Such errors may occur in both directions, both due to lack of respect for the other and to not maintaining the one. Once we understand that, we may again rise from the philosophical roots of the

Lévinas calls our attention to the danger latent in the illusory belief in the «humanness of the other» when it is not justified. In that Lévinas is alluding to Nazism, while another figure hovers between the lines, ultimately breaking out into the text: «It is hard to forgive Heidegger...» and that precisely because of his genius. Although it seems to me that Nazism was guilty of such crimes, I shall not develop these ideas here, but return instead to the mundane, less dramatic confrontation with the other.

It seems to me that Karl Popper's views on scientific theories may also be applied to ideas and, to a certain extent, also to cultures. I am not going to introduce here the evolutionary model, but suffice it to state that truth has to be founded upon a struggle of ideas and not on peace. Following the biblical Psalmist (Cf. Ps. 85, 11) «Truth and peace touched» (*nashaqu* — the Hebrew stem includes both the sense of close touch and of weaponry) — a state of war exists between truth and peace. Beruriah's tenet, «sins and not sinners,» teaches us that we have always to differentiate between conflict between ideas and conflict between people. The dominant culture may not necessarily be that of the dominant people, but the struggle between ideas and between essences is the hub of history. Both the Marxist position and that of modern sophistic thought tend to ignore this. The economic dimension eradicates the character of the essences, but the struggle between them is the very essence of history that has not yet reached its end.

### *The Thistle*

We have come to recognize various dangers involved in the relationship between the one and the other. The secret of their resolution may be found in the one and the other reaching equilibrium. I wish to conclude with a Hassidic treatment of the Midrashic confrontation between the one and the other, to which I have referred in the beginning of the present work. That idea has appeared twice in Hassidic writings, once in the book *Mei Hashiloah* by Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica (2001), and before that in the book *Agra Dechalla* (p.215/1) by Rabbi Zwic Elimelech Schapiro of Dinow (1910). The following quotation is from the latter book.

«And the Lord spoke unto Moses: Go, get thee down...» (Exod. 32, 7),

«alterity» to the political and moral domain, without falling into the traps lurking there.

#### Notes

1. Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik (1992b) discussed the questions of the I and the thou. The new equation is expressed in that every encounter also includes the third party. In the encounter between man and God there appears man's soul as the third party. In the encounter between man and his fellowman, one quintessentially represented by meeting of Adam and Eve, and subsequently of every couple, the third participant is God.
2. Classical philosophical sources use the term «the One» to refer to God, and that on the basis of various principles. The central one of them is God's absolute singularity. Maimonides referred to that in the second of the thirteen tenets of faith, detailed in the introduction to his commentary on the *Mishna*, chapter *Heleq*. Regarding God's unity and uniqueness, he wrote: «Namely, that we must believe that He who is the ultimate idea of One and not like one of a pair, nor like one of a species, nor like the one man that may be one of many, nor like one of counted items, the total number of which may reach infinity. We must believe instead that God is one in a unique sort of unity like no other, and this second tenet ascribes to Him what is meant by 'Hear O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One'» The One turns in this way from an adjective into a noun, a term referring to the Divine noun.
3. Rabbi S. R. Hirsch believed that every language expresses by its structures and the connections between its stems and words a philosophy and *Weltanschauung*. This is the real significance of the Tower of Babel, not the difference between the words *per se*. Of the latter difference it was said: «Of these were the isles of nations divided in their lands, everyone after his tongue, after their families, in their nations» (Gen. 10, 5), and similarly regarding the descendants of Ham and Shem (*ibid.*, vv. 20 & 31, resp.). In the Tower of Babel there occurred something quite different. Not just the phonetics changes, but the philosophy expressed through them. Language describes reality «according to the particular views current in the nation concerning matters and how they relate to each other» (Rabbi Hirsch's commentary on Gen. 11, 7).
4. Similarly, he interprets the verse «and ye shall not misdeem their signs» (Job 21, 29) as: «do not be mistaken in the meaning of their signs,» and in the same vein the verse «and they misdeemed this place» (Jerem. 19, 4).
5. Rabbi Hirsch sees a similar phenomenon in the Hebrew word «zar»

- (stranger, alien), derived from the stem *zor*, meaning according to him «to set aside.» Also, the word *naqav* (named, but also cursed, blasphemed), is derived from the stem *naq*. Rabbi Hirsch sees that stem as indicating the removal of an object from the generality of its kind by calling it by its own particular name, i.e. setting an object at its own particular essence by naming it (his commentary to Lev. 24, 11).
6. Regarding this, see Rosenberg (1993).
  7. In his exquisite commentary, Rabbi Hirsch ties purity and transparency, corresponding to sincerity, to the absence of untoward motives in deed, as well as between cleanliness to the absence of stains resulting from immorality. Already Maimonides has noted the difference between the senses and the fact that only the senses acting at a distance (sight, hearing, and smell) are associated with God in the Bible. In spite of that, Jewish law rightfully sees in all senses an element of touch.
  8. In his Hebrew lectures, Lévinas referred to the etymological connection between *aher* (other) and *aharayuth* (responsibility). In French, this connection was shown using a different play of words: Responsibility is *non-in-difference*. Removing the double negative yields *difference*, or alterity.
  9. Here lies the profound meaning of the demand for humanism of the other, as formulated by Lévinas. It is not the humanism born of the recognition of the abstract value of man, but rather from the encounter with the other. The asymmetry between the one and the other is wonderfully brought out in Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbizta's *Mei Hashiloah*. A wonderful interpretation of the verse «Thou shalt not exploit thy fellow nor rob him» (Lev. 19, 13) is offered in that book (part 1, p.118): «One who is able to give his fellow some good thing and does not do so is considered to have robbed him. Moreover, even one who is able to pray to God for his fellow and does not do so is considered to have robbed him. We may see this with Samuel who said: «As for me, too, far be it from me to sin before the Lord and refrain from praying for ye...» (*I Samuel* 12, 23).
  10. It should be emphasized that the connection between eating and gaining knowledge has been offered by Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed*, part 1, p.31 in the Hebrew Kappah edition): «the terminology of eating has been lent to wisdom and study.» The term «eating» has in its origin two different dimensions: growth on one hand, and the loss of the eaten object and the ruin it causes, on the other hand.
  11. This amazement has caused thinkers and researchers to understand the Creation on the basis of theoretic principles, namely, that God is in need of the deeds of human beings. More on this in Rosenberg (1998).
  12. In Jewish philosophic thinking we have found three different kinds of inter-

pretations to the term «one»: (a) one and not two; (b) one and not composite; (c) one and no one else. Maimonides adds a fourth, novel meaning: one and nothing like him.

13. This is also Rabbi A. I. Kook's approach. Human development will ultimately make possible overcoming the multiplicity.
14. It should be noticed that Hegel turns the Christian drama into a symbolic expression of that distance and the way to overcome it. According to him, Judaism represents the distance, and Christianity the approach and reconciliation through the Incarnation. If we ignore the Christian myth that has undergone philosophical demythologization, we should be able to find close parallels to Hegel's views in the duality to which we have alluded in the text.
15. More on this in Rosenberg (1983).
16. The phenomenon of alienation grew in importance and scale in idealistic thought. Thus, for example, in one of the phases of Schling's thinking alienation assumed cosmic dimensions. Nature is but the spirit that does not recognize itself.
17. We may look at the process inversely. From a situation of alienation will be born, or may possibly be born, self-cognition. This is the meaning of the bondage out of which the nation of Israel was born.
18. F. W. Nietzsche, (1974), *The Will to Power*, § 461.
19. F. W. Nietzsche, *ibid.*

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