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The Legacy of Abraham Joshua Heschel

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Rethinking Religion

Abraham Joshua Heschel was a singular figure in American Jewish history and, indeed, in Jewish thought. Born in 1907 and reared in the world of Polish Hasidim, Heschel studied philosophy and Biblical criticism in Berlin before becoming a pivotal figure in American Jewish and non-Jewish religious life, galvanizing Americans on issues of social justice. The conditions that produced a figure capable of such depth and breadth of traditional Jewish learning and secular studies seem no longer possible in our age, focused as it is on hyper-specialization. Heschel shared a vision of Judaism at once profoundly rooted in tradition and simultaneously subversive of the status quo. He offered a vision of Judaism that did not espouse separation from the larger society but rather demanded critical engagement with it. His theological commitments undergirded his courageous, outspoken efforts on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement, his protests against the war in Vietnam, and his work to improve Jewish and Christian relations. Given the singularity of his vision and the strength of his character, it should not be surprising that -- nearly four decades after his death -- his legacy remains towering and majestic in the consciousness of the American Jewish community and beyond.

In the wake of the centenary of his birth, a flurry of conferences and publications made clear that many find him to be a source of inspiration. And yet, while many claim discipleship and loyalty, there continue to be wide-ranging differences concerning his legacy and its relevance for our contemporary concerns. How fortunate then that Susannah Heschel has given us a new edited collection, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings*. Not only does this remarkable collection provide a sense of the breadth of Heschel's interests and writings, but the ordering of the selections and the insightful introductions highlight the deep coherence of the different dimensions of his work. This volume brings together particularly rich and striking passages from Heschel's oeuvre sure to draw readers into fresh and thoughtful conversations with this remarkable figure in modern Jewish thought.

Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings is perhaps the single best introductory text to the work of Heschel. There are six sections, which can stand alone or be read together. Passages from well-known works such as *The Sabbath*, *Man's Quest for God*, *Man is Not Alone*, *God in Search of Man*, and *The Prophets* rub shoulders with lesser-known works such as *Who is Man?*, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, and *A Passion for Truth*, as well as previously unpublished works. In this context, with passages from various texts juxtaposed thematically, we see how Heschel's philosophical theology under-girds his politics and his groundbreaking strides toward improving Jewish-Christian relations. Susannah Heschel's substantial introduction to the volume provides an excellent biography of Heschel filled with insights into his life and thought. Additionally, she provides a helpful essay to introduce each section. The rich introductions and the previously unpublished material make this work of significant interest for scholars; the thematic focus and the editor's guidance make the work accessible and relevant for students and thoughtful people interested in Judaism, Jewish-Christian relations, and American religious history. Moreover, the anthology illuminates the deep coherence of the different dimensions of Heschel's work.

A Philosophy of Wonder

Heschel's writings on prayer, race, Jewish education, and the prophets all find their roots in his theocentric, or God-centered, vision. Heschel's theocentrism does not simply challenge, but rather uproots and disrupts, our sensibilities. We moderns are accustomed to distancing ourselves from that which we think about; we believe that detachment or disinterestedness is the key to thinking carefully and critically. However, when it comes to matters of ultimate concern, Heschel charges that this mindset leads us astray. When it comes to religion, rather than doubt and disinterest, authentic thinking begins with "wonder or radical amazement." When in the grip of wonder, we face a

"state of maladjustment to words and notions," because our ability to reason, our capacity to think and to judge, reaches its limits.

As a philosopher of wonder, Heschel offers a distinctly critical vision of modernity. Juxtaposing reason and wonder, Heschel explains that through reason "we try to explain or to adapt the world to our concepts," while through wonder "we seek to adapt our minds to the world." Reason assumes that we can grasp the world, that we can understand all that there is. However, as Heschel repeatedly asserts, there are levels of reality that cannot be brought into the "discursive levels of the mind" that we "see more than we can say." Wonder and awe, dispositions that open us to the vastness of the universe, make us receptive to aspects of reality that lie beyond the categories of reason. The modern West has done a wonderful job cultivating the capacity to reason. Yet, as Heschel points out time and again, we have all but lost our ability for wonder and awe, and as a result, we have faced -- and continue to face -- a spiritual crisis.

The privileging of wonder and awe as opposed to reason can be seen throughout many aspects of Heschel's work. He critiques philosophy of religion for viewing God as an object to be known, subject to proof and validation. He suggests that from the point of view of the pious person, the point of view proper to religion as such, "God is the subject." The key is "not to know Him but to be known by Him; not to form judgments about Him but to judged by Him." Heschel also advocates an inversion of our "common sense" in which we, as knowing selves, bestow meaning upon the world through our minds. For Heschel, it is not the act of knowing, or cognition in general that gives or creates meaning. Rather, according to the pious person, religion celebrates humility before the divine, the awareness that God's overwhelming priority decenters us and puts us in our proper place. Religion involves humility, which means that we recognize that God is the true subject and we are but objects, "dust and ashes" who hope to be known to God. Heschel's evocative language does not mean that he is literally denying that we have subjectivity; rather, he claims that human beings are situated in much grander horizons than many might think. There is a judge and center of meaning apart from and beyond our own minds.

Indeed, Heschel thinks that the forfeiture and loss of the sensibilities of piety, awe, wonder, and humility have been disastrous for Western civilization. In light of the atrocities of the twentieth century -- the Shoah prominent among them -- Heschel emphasizes that the public and private spheres, i.e., religion, politics, and ethics, are intimately interwoven, and any separation is artificial and dangerous. Religion is a public concern because it is inherently concerned with justice. However, Heschel is far from a conservative who turns to religion as a source of salubrious authority and legitimacy in civic life -- although some of his disciples later take this path.

A Prophetic Call to Political Action

For Heschel, the exemplar of the conjunction of religion and politics is the prophet. The prophet is a human being seized by God's pathos and through whose voice God's concern, "God's sense of injustice," is expressed. The prophet does not celebrate but rather brings to light the guilt of an entire culture. Heschel writes, "Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world." Anywhere injustice takes place it is the case that "few are guilty, but all are responsible." We are all responsible for evil because only a world indifferent to suffering will tolerate injustice and systematic inequality. Thus, the prophet teaches, "indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself."

The prophet and his intolerance for indifference is central for Heschel because he roots his ethics in *imago dei*, the concept that all human beings -- regardless of race or religion -- are created in the image of God. If one properly recognizes God's radical priority to one's self, and one accepts that the only legitimate image of God is the human being, then one cannot remain uninvolved in political action. As Heschel bore witness to with his life and in his more politically explicit works, to continue to conduct business as usual, including the business of religious worship, when segregation is the law of the land or when one's country conducts an unjust war is inexcusable, morally and religiously impossible.

And yet, we do all too frequently countenance injustice unmoved by what we see, as if nothing calamitous were happening. This is a result of our spiritual crisis, our loss of awe and wonder. Heschel writes, "The root of sin is callousness, hardness of heart, lack of understanding what is at stake in being alive." When we lose sight of God's priority to our very selves, of our proper place in the order of things, when we lose a sense of scale, we become callous and indifferent to our fellow human beings. Indeed, in his celebrated speech from 1963, "Religion and Race," Heschel provocatively asks, "The Negro's plight, the blighted areas in the large cities, are they not the fruit of our sins?" He suggests we are accessories to crimes by our indifference, our failures "to demand, to insist, to challenge, to chastise," which true religion demands that we do. The problem of evil -- whose manifestations include the

Holocaust and the terrible poverty and racism that beset the United States -- is a result of human failure. It is human beings who bring about evil, who close off the world to God and force God into hiding.

Heschel often reflects upon prayer and suggests that it is both an essential component of religious life and a key element in social action. Prayer, for Heschel, is an exercise of exorcising ourselves of callousness, of recognizing our failures before God. For Heschel, prayer causes "a shift of the center of living -- from self-consciousness to self-surrender." In prayer we realize God is the supreme Subject, and this demands that "humility is a reality... [that] humility is truth." In prayer we recognize that God is the ground of all value and that our worth, like that of all things, derives from God. Prayer decenters us and places everything under much wider horizons, breaking our egocentrism, thus both forcing and allowing us to see the world from this new perspective. Prayer allows us to recognize our own vanity, our tendency to make ideologies absolute, and the fact that we never cease to fail, even in our efforts to be good. Prayer allows us to break down the walls of our own self-righteousness and approach the world with fresh eyes, lest easy and convenient answers appear sufficient. Prayer is both a consolation and a demand. If we pray properly, so Heschel avers, we will be unable to live indifferently to what is going on around us. And what is going on around us cannot be separated from how we pray. Indeed, in a remarkable anecdote that Susannah Heschel includes in her introduction, Heschel explains to a rather flummoxed journalist that he is attending a protest against the Vietnam War because while it is going on, he cannot pray.

A New Take on Jewish-Christian Relations

Perhaps it was the priority of a God-infinitely-greater-than-our-minds-can-grasp over that which the finite human mind can know or formulate into creeds and dogmas that enabled Heschel to offer a groundbreaking vision of Jewish-Christian relations. As Susannah Heschel points out, "My father did not consider it helpful to discuss with Christians those issues that divide us, such as Christology, but to focus instead on the dimensions of faith: 'sharing insights, confessing inadequacy.'" Heschel's vision for inter-religious dialogue was "mutual enrichment and enhancement of respect and appreciation." He said that it was time to forsake "the hope that the person spoken to will prove to be wrong in what he regards as sacred." Focusing on depth theology, that level beneath or beyond what can be put into language and creeds, religious leaders can fruitfully discuss issues with one another without diminishing or disrespecting each other. While acknowledging the importance of doctrinal differences, Heschel's focus on the self-as-God's-ob-ject, where the affects become a site where more happens than can be said, allows a common ground to develop while preserving difference between religious traditions. Given the level of Jewish-Christian dialogue today, it is hard to recognize the radical nature of this teaching and indeed the way Heschel embodied it in his life full of encounters and friendships with Christians.

Heschel's view marked a sharp break with past Jewish thinking about Christianity. Unlike German Jewish liberal philosophical theologians like Moses Mendelssohn, Hermann Cohen, and Leo Baeck, Heschel attempts neither to read Jesus as a Jew nor to invert the dominant German trope of viewing Christianity as rational and universal at the expense of an irrational and particularistic Judaism. He also does not follow either Buber or Rosenzweig, who turn to highly stylized readings of the Bible or abstract philosophical systems to provide perspective for the disagreements between Jews and Christians. Of course, there were important historical circumstances that underlay, or at least were conducive to, Heschel's rather significant divergence from his distinguished predecessors. As Susannah Heschel points out, unlike in Germany, where the antagonisms between Christians and Jews were poisonous, in the United States, many of Heschel's closest friends and associates were Christians who deeply appreciated what he had to say. Undoubtedly, the United States provided a more hospitable environment for such discussions and diplomatic efforts, but it would be a mistake to underestimate the tactical brilliance and moral courage on Heschel's part, which brought these efforts to fruition.

While Heschel was critical of the critics of religion, he was also critical of its practitioners. Although deeply tied to Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Judaism, Heschel claimed allegiance to none, and criticized all. Judaism was not finished, but in constant need of innovation: "Human faith is never final, never an arrival, but an endless pilgrimage, a being on the way." On the one hand, too many observant Jews, Heschel charged, are satisfied with the Halachah and thus feel that no creative thinking is needed. On the other hand, too many liberal Jews simply do not know enough about Judaism to be able to innovate at all. Innovation requires "creative dissent," but the very ability to dissent creatively seems endangered by the conditions of Judaism in the United States. That is, there are no longer those who are deeply knowledgeable about Judaism, rooted in deep learning, and have the courage and love to bring about change. Deeply critical of Jewish education in the United States, Heschel saw it as too often rooted in "obsolete liberalism or narrow parochialism" and often simply "insipid, flat, and trivial." In various writings and speeches, he urges rabbis, cantors, and educators to have concern with the inner lives of Jews and not just the survival of the Jewish people as a whole.

Perhaps given the singular conditions that produced Heschel's sensibilities, it should not be surprising that Heschel has produced a rather variegated legacy. Heschel's presence is indubitably felt in contemporary theology, not only in the sense that many leading contemporary theologians were his students, but also in that these same figures claim his theological works as significant influences on their own work. However, certain elements have been absorbed more than others. Among contemporary theologians we see that the distinct vision Heschel brought to life has been refracted through different lenses: conservative traditionalism, new age spirituality, and naturalism.

Critics and Admirers of Heschel's Theocentrism

Of course, Heschel's theology has not been universally celebrated. For example, Neil Gillman has expressed discomfort with Heschel's theocentrism. In his essay "Epistemological Tensions in Heschel's Thought" in *Conservative Judaism*, Gillman argued that this theocentrism is tantamount to "the notion that our experience of God is self-verifying." Such a view, Gillman added, does violence to reason and invites fanaticism (although he does not charge Heschel with this personally). Gillman thinks Heschel had other more philosophically sound options open to him but that he chose a less philosophically responsible approach in his attempts to capture the commanding nature of religious experience. To be sure, Gillman celebrates Heschel as a premier phenomenologist of religious experience, but he regrets some of the choices that Heschel made as a philosopher.

It is not difficult to find the source of Gillman's dissatisfaction with Heschel. Gillman, more traditionally modern in his philosophical sensibilities, is unwilling to follow Heschel's decentering of the self by a God that cannot be proven but only experienced. While Gillman often uses terms adopted from Heschel, his emphasis (evident in his book *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew*) is that "all of our human thinking and speaking about God uses our familiar human experience in a metaphorical way." For Gillman, Heschel's attempt to elucidate religious experience, to make people aware of more than they can "know" is simply an exercise in metaphorical language that is, to be sure, inspiring. However, it is ultimately more philosophically responsible to remain within the limits of human reason and modern sensibilities when talking about God. In short, to the degree Heschel lives on in Gillman's work, it is as a colorful but inadequately rigorous philosophy of religion. Ultimately, where Heschel wants to change modern sensibilities in the direction of his theocentric Judaism, Gillman seeks to adapt Judaism to modern sensibilities.

In sharp contrast to Gillman, David Novak finds theocentrism to be the most outstanding feature of Heschel's work. Novak, who began in the Conservative tradition but who has shifted to what he now terms "Traditionalist" Judaism, eagerly embraces Heschel's theocentrism and his call to disrupt modern sensibilities. Indeed, Novak moves further to the right (at least theologically) than Heschel, but he appropriates his theocentrism while stripping it of its iconoclasm. That is, Novak uses Heschel's theocentrism as a method more than he follows its substance. He uses theocentrism as a bridge to Jewish traditionalism and a means for rejecting modern Jewish thought, from Baruch Spinoza and Moses Mendelssohn through Hermann Cohen. As Novak sees it, modern Jewish thought, primarily in its liberal cast, proceeds philosophically out of human reason and experience. According to Novak's arguments in *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People*, this approach is fundamentally wrongheaded, in that "Torah can never and, therefore, must never be justified by the world or anything in it." In other words, it is not reason that justifies revelation; revelation has validity in and of itself. Reason can help elucidate revelation but it does not possess equal worth.

Novak's theology is anti-philosophical in its nature, whereas Heschel is more ambiguous on this matter. Novak, like Heschel, is quite learned in philosophy but he rejects its ultimate and independent validity. Heschel, however, continually engages with philosophy, trying to subvert its assumptions, to turn conventional thinking on its head by exposing it to categories that are fundamentally incommensurable with its very nature. In a fascinating autobiographical statement about his time as a young man studying in Germany, Heschel explains that to his professors, who "spoke of God from the point of view of man," the questions that concerned him "could not even be phrased in categories of their thinking."

Heschel challenges modern philosophy, trying to expose Western thinking to a religiosity that it has only tried to debunk but never taken seriously in its own terms. Novak, on the other hand, finds in Heschel a resource for rejecting, rather than engaging, the "secularism" of modernity in favor of revelation and the authority of tradition. And like Heschel, Novak also seeks to reach out to Christians, but more on what is shared or overlapping in tradition and text, rather than on "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, where all formulations and articulations appear as understatements." While Novak values Heschel's critique of secularism, he does not share Heschel's critical distance from the authority of religious tradition -- at least as a fixed and established form. While Novak follows Heschel in challenging the secular assumptions of modernity, he does not follow him in also challenging the assumptions of religious authority and tradition.

Heschel's Dissent Undergirds Efforts to Renew American Judaism

Other students of Heschel embrace his dissenting side -- his attempt to reformulate Judaism and his emphasis on social justice. Perhaps the two most notable students who appropriate this element of Heschel's thought are Arthur Green and Michael Lerner. However, neither Green nor Lerner retains the personal God of Heschel's theocentrism, though they do not abandon theocentrism altogether. Green, who frames his recent book *Radical Judaism* as an answer to Heschel, explains his theological differences from Heschel in terms of sensibility. Green writes, "I do not have Heschel's ability to speak unself-consciously the personalist and pathos-laden religious language of the biblical prophet." According to Green, where Heschel offers a "personalist" theology with "mystical overtones," he offers instead a "mystical-panentheist" theology that uses "personalist metaphors." In other words, Green cannot embrace a personal God and instead turns to science and mysticism to formulate a notion of God that is nonpersonal, one which both permeates and transcends the world.

Michael Lerner, like Green, claims deep affiliation with Heschel. Indeed, about his own book *Jewish Renewal*, Lerner writes, "So much of what I say in this book derives from [Heschel's] insights that in some ways I see this whole book as a footnote and update to his thinking." However, while Lerner shares Heschel's insistence that God is inextricably bound up with the call for prophetic activism, it is an understatement to regard his work as a mere footnote or update to Heschel's. Indeed, like Green, Lerner embraces a naturalistic language instead of Heschel's personalist theology and pathos-laden language. Echoing Mordecai Kaplan but with language infused with kabbalistic references, Lerner's God is "the Force that makes possible healing and transformation." For Lerner, God is that which ensures that the way the world is now is not how it must be; God ensures that there can be change and improvement. Like Green, he too has recourse to the theological category of panentheism. Or as he puts it in *Jewish Renewal*:

God is the totality of all Being and all existence that ever was, is, or will be, and more than that. At any given moment we are part of God and God is part of us, but we are not all that there is to God, nor is God simply the sum of all physically existing things in the infinite universe, though that is also part of God, just as a given moment of our conscious experience is a part of who we are at that moment, though not all of who we are at that moment and certainly not all of who we are in our totality.

To be sure, both Green and Lerner are keen to take from Heschel an insistence on the role of awe and the ineffable, the reality and power of that which cannot be put into words. However, they avoid Heschel's personalist God, preferring a notion of God refracted through Kabbalism mingled with science and/or psychoanalysis.

There is no question that part of the power of Heschel's work, aside from its profundity and the rightly celebrated prose in which his ideas come to expression, is the fact that Heschel is both a traditionalist and a radical. The tenor of writing is often quite traditionalist, even as it challenges and subverts traditionalism. Despite the breadth of his learning, Heschel speaks to a universal audience from the standpoint of one thickly and profoundly rooted in traditional Judaism. This is a path that both Green and Lerner do not, and perhaps cannot, follow. Even Novak, a traditionalist, is much more self-consciously rooted in the Jewish tradition than Heschel, who seemed to just embody it.

Heschel's background is singular, whereas Novak, Green, and Lerner are children of a later generation for whom new-age spirituality, science, religious pluralism, and self-consciousness of one's own beliefs in a world of social fragmentation are foregrounded. If Novak embraces a traditionalism to overcome and/or elide the fragmentation of modernity, Green and Lerner are more disposed to incorporate different voices and traditions in their visions of Judaism.

Green, whose religiosity is much more self-consciously modern than Heschel's, thinks that religious thought cannot avoid the scientific developments that have transformed our understandings of ourselves. Green's vision of Judaism begins with universal concerns, which by virtue of their universality involve Judaism. This allows him to relativize Judaism, like all traditions, in the grander narrative of science. It is in the grandeur of science that Green seeks to renew and replenish Judaism, to formulate an account of Judaism compatible with our contemporary pluralistic and scientific sensibilities. As Green writes in *Radical Judaism*:

As a religious person I believe that the evolution of species is the greatest sacred drama of all time.... It dwarfs all the other narratives, memories, and images that so preoccupy the mind of religious traditions, including our own.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims, Green charges, have been "overinvolved" with their "own particular stories" and have neglected the "infinitely bigger" story that they all share. "How did we get here, we humans, and where are we going?" To be sure, Green emphasizes that "God is not an intellectual proposition" but rather "the ground of life itself." Green turns to a mixture of new-age spirituality, Kabbalah, and science to explain how a nonpersonal ground of life can still have existential relevance for individuals, seizing us in moments of "radical amazement" (a term he consciously borrows from Heschel). He explores the resources that this "ground of life" can contribute to the renewal of Judaism in an age of ecological disaster, one where the sensibilities of most privilege science.

However, whereas Heschel unselfconsciously reinterprets and derives meaning from Jewish tradition, Green is clear that while he finds the "dogmatic truth claims of tradition" unconvincing, the "richness" of the tradition's language and symbols continue to hold power. That is, where Heschel proceeds from the particular, the Jewish tradition, to matters of universal concern, whether they be God, justice, war, or whatever, Green moves from the universal, the big bang and evolution, to the particular, Judaism. Indeed, where Heschel challenges the secular assumptions of Western modernity with old-world Hasidic sensibilities, Green explains, "I understand the task of the theologian to be one of reframing, accepting the accounts of origins and natural history offered by the scientific consensus, but helping us to view them in a different way, one that might guide us toward a more profound appreciation of that same reality." Green offers a profoundly different vision from Heschel, even as he remains in dialogue with him.

Lerner is very close to Heschel in the inextricable link between God, Judaism, and social justice. However, where Heschel grounds his vision for renewing society in traditional Jewish spirituality, in a sensibility at odds with, or one that has been largely lost in, Western modernity, Lerner finds both Judaism and society in need of renewal. For Lerner, Judaism is itself is a universal teaching or way of thinking, or as he puts it in *Jewish Renewal*, "a metaphysics of healing and transformation." That is, Judaism is not simply a culture, ethnicity, and set of religious teachings and practices, but rather a way of viewing the world rooted in *tikkun olam*, healing the world. To live on earth means to be mired in partial truths and misunderstandings in which we misrepresent, and are misrepresented by, others. That is, as long as we are living, we and our fellow human beings are caught in the mire of misunderstanding, the distortion of failed or inadequate recognition. Judaism in its normative sense (as opposed to its empirical and all too human sense, which is itself filled with such distortions) represents the belief that this state of imperfection and misrecognition is not final and that "God is the Force in the universe that makes possible this process of recognition."

Like Heschel, Lerner makes use of the notion of *imago dei* (the human being as the image of God), arguing that "part of what is recognized is the God within each of us (namely, the way that we are created in the image of God and hence equally worthy of respect and love)." Indeed, God's presence becomes manifest in this process of mutual recognition. Judaism is then both a particular religious tradition and a way of understanding the world, "the metaphysics of social transformation." Social transformation is rooted in the nature of the universe, its telos, or so Judaism teaches. Lerner follows Heschel in arguing that we are morally and religiously compelled to improve the world. However, Heschel believes this obligation is rooted in the will of a personal God outraged at injustice, while for Lerner this obligation derives more from a particular reading of *tikkun olam*, which he reads as Judaism's essence -- that the universe can and should be other and better than it is presently.

Green and Lerner attempt to follow Heschel's own attempts to renew American Judaism. Heschel's spiritual writings, at once demanding and encouraging, call on the reader to cultivate her sensitivity for awe and amazement as well as charge the reader to change her life. By critiquing the Judaism taught in synagogues in the United States as empty and flat, filled with trivialities, Heschel hopes to bring Jews back to a Judaism filled with wonder and awe rather than banalities. This dimension is not lost on Green and Lerner.

Green agrees that Judaism needs to be revitalized, but his approach is different from Heschel's. As Green sees it, our new intellectual horizons dictate a new approach to Jewish theology. In *Radical Judaism* he writes, "As postmoderns we cannot simply appropriate a premodern system and expect it to work for us, even if the terminology and metaphors are updated. We do not, and should not expect ourselves to, believe in the same way as our premodern forebears." If science has forever changed our intellectual and cultural landscape, it is disingenuous to flee to dogmas and orthodoxies. Rather, he writes, we need to turn to the power of "myth and symbols" that can coexist with "our modern baggage." We must forge new paths into deeper and untapped states of mind. Thus, as opposed to Heschel, who eschewed reducing religion to psychology and symbol, Green thinks that given the scientific realities facing us, such conclusions are inevitable. And once we embrace this, we can find our life surprisingly rich and spiritually fulfilling.

Lerner's opening chapter of *Jewish Renewal* incisively explores the spiritual bankruptcy of much of contemporary Judaism and indeed relates the critical role that Heschel played in Lerner's own life, helping him discover "a Judaism that stood as a radical critique of what was claiming to be 'official' Judaism." Lerner finds contemporary (empirical)

Judaism ailing, but this is not simply a modern problem but rather a perpetual one; Judaism is in constant need of renewal. If the true message of Judaism is "**tikkun** olam, the healing and transformation of the world," there has always been the countermovement in every generation, in which, Lerner writes, "this insight has been muted, avoided, abandoned, or outright denied by many people, including those people who claim to be the official priests, spokespeople, leaders, rabbis, teachers, or orthodox embodiments of Judaism." To be sure, the situation is particularly grim in the United States due to American Judaism's spiritual sterility and authoritarianism. Lerner provides an overarching theory of Judaism, of Jewish Renewal, in order to critique contemporary Judaism and offer a more hopeful vision for the future.

Time for a Scholarly Second Look?

Heschel's thought brings together a tremendous array of seemingly contradictory tendencies. While attendant to traditional Judaism, he does not ignore the challenges of modernity; while a giant of rabbinical learning, he demands creative dissent in the name of tradition. At home in all walks of Judaism, tremendously learned in Talmud, and in Yiddishkeit generally, he was also fluent in philosophy and modern biblical criticism. His most significant works were popular in nature, their prose beautiful and accessible, and yet their premises are surprisingly sophisticated and complex.

Where Heschel dwelt between Eastern European Hasidism and Western learning, his students are products of the West. From Novak's self-conscious traditionalism to Green's struggles to maintain intellectual integrity and spirituality and Lerner's grounding of Jewish ethics in a metaphysical order, we see the challenges of a later generation struggling to come to grips with the meaning of Judaism in a fragmented world where old authorities no longer hold. Even Gillman cannot refrain from frequent references to Heschel in his attempts to explain Judaism in modernity. For Novak, Green, and Lerner, despite their significant differences, Heschel's thought represents not only a reservoir of learning to draw upon but the challenge and demand to renew an ailing Judaism in the face of a fragmented, pluralist society in which Jewish life and identity are fraught with tensions, and in a world where injustice -- whether ecological, economic, or sociopolitical -- continues to demand prophetic action.

While Heschel's thought lives on in the work of his students, it has by no means become outdated or irrelevant in our own time. Given Heschel's own fearless and iconoclastic nature when it came to challenging authority, it is fitting that his students struggle to adjust his vision to meet their own concerns. However, we must not conclude from this -- and I believe his students would be the first to insist upon this -- that Heschel's work is of mere historical importance, to help us better understand his students. While the work of his students commands attention in its own right, it is by no means time to confine Heschel's work to the dustbins of history. Indeed, while theologians demonstrate a clear appreciation for Heschel's work, academic scholarship has been less responsive to it. In scholarly quarters, with certain exceptions, his work is too often buried under a mountain of praise or dismissed without being addressed with the rigor and care it deserves. Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings provides a fresh impetus for the scholarly community to explore this giant's work anew, to plumb its range and depth, and to carefully elucidate its contours. Only then can we rethink many of the clichés that blunt the force and challenge of Heschel's work. That theologians continue to take him seriously is notable; it is now time for the rest of us to also engage in such challenges. Heschel's writings stretch us, demanding that we rethink how we live and conceive of our place in the world.

"Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel" by Pamela Chatterton-Purdy (chatterton-purdyart.com). Based on a photo from March 21, 1965, this mixed-media piece shows Heschel arm-in-arm with Rep. John Lewis, Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Bunche, and Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth during the march from Selma to Montgomery.

'Shema Israel" by Samuel Bak. Oil on linen, 40x39"A", 1992.

Rabbi Heschel's input helped shape the Second Vatican Council's 1965 "Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions," a major turning point in Jewish-Christian relations. Here, Heschel (left) talks with Cardinal Augustin Bea at a March 1963 meeting in New York.