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From the Selected Works of Robert Erlewine

Winter January 1, 2009

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Reclaiming the Prophets:
Cohen, Heschel, and Crossing the
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Abstract: In this essay, I examine Hermann Cohen's and Abraham Joshua Heschel's respective accounts of the classical prophets of the Hebrew Bible, which contend with the Protestant biblical criticism of their day. Their accounts of the prophets are of central significance for their philosophies of Judaism, which mirror and oppose each other. This *Auseinandersetzung* addresses the often neglected topic of Jewish responses to German-Protestant biblical criticism and stresses the cogency of Heschel's thought. Additionally, examining Cohen and Heschel together problematizes the polarization between theocentrism and neo-humanism currently dominating the landscape of modern Jewish thought.

While the classical prophets were only active for a relatively short period of biblical history, from approximately 750—500 B.C.E., they are nevertheless crucial figures in the theological narrative of Israel.¹ For audiences from the rabbis to contemporary Jewish scholars, the prophets continue to be figures of great interest.² Their purported status as spokespersons of God; the claims they make in that capacity, particularly in regard to questions of ritual and morality; and the fascination they have always held for Christians make the prophets tantalizing, unsettling, even dangerous, and yet altogether necessary figures for Jewish thinkers to investigate philosophically and theologically.

While many Jewish thinkers have discussed the prophets, it is particularly useful to engage in a critical investigation of the works of Hermann Cohen and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Not only have Cohen's and Heschel's respective accounts of the prophets not received sufficient scholarly attention, they also speak to contemporary concerns in modern Jewish thought. Aside from the philosophical fruitfulness of this juxtaposition there are three additional reasons that such an *Auseinandersetzung* between Cohen and Heschel is warranted. First, Robert Schine has shown the considerable influence of Cohen's thought at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, where not coincidentally, in the 1920s and 1930s, Heschel spent formative years in his educational and intellectual development.³ Second, both thinkers do not simply analyze the prophets in their works, but rather, for both, the prophets are of central significance to their philosophies of Judaism. Third, both thinkers develop their accounts of the prophets in difficult, often contentious relationships with the Protestant biblical criticism regnant in their day. Neither thinker rejects this scholarship out of hand, but rather each seeks to utilize elements of it to further his own highly original account of prophetic Judaism.⁴ Cohen appropriates the methodology of the Protestant biblical criticism that not only parses the Bible into separate threads, but also seeks to claim the prophets as anti-Pharisaic proto-Christians. Using his critical idealism as a hermeneutic, Cohen carefully reweaves the strands of the Bible into a new unity, one that embraces the entire Jewish tradition as the authentic inheritors of the prophets and their vision of ethical monotheism. Heschel, in turn, appropriates elements of form criticism to find a new way of reading old texts, to find new ways to access what was always there, but which our categories, theological and secular, have obscured from our view. This new way of seeing refuses to separate the form from the content, the transcendent from the immanent, the objective from the personal.

Cohen and Heschel's novel reformulations of the Hebrew Bible, undertaken in critical conversation

with biblical criticism, have important implications for their respective understandings of the subsequent Jewish tradition which mirror and oppose each other in interesting ways. This juxtaposition not only helps to dispel lingering doubts about the philosophical rigor of Heschel's work, but it also speaks to the contemporary landscape of the field of modern Jewish thought. Examining the work of Cohen and Heschel together highlights the problematic polarization between theocentrists and neo-humanists which currently dominates the landscape of modern Jewish thought.⁵

Prophets Biblical Criticism, and Jewish Philosophy

It is important to bear in mind the subversive, hopeful and, unfortunately (in hindsight), hopeless, angle of Cohen's and Heschel's engagement with critical German-Protestant biblical scholarship. Susannah Heschel, explaining the nature of German-Protestant biblical scholarship that was regnant in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and whose disturbing presence continues to linger), writes,

The Christian made himself the transcendent subject of theological *Wissenschaft*, necessitating a radical dichotomy with an 'Other' in order to maintain order. The gaze of historical theology was Christian; the ordering of history, the questions raised, the evidence examined, all revolved around the central issue, explaining the rise of Christianity.⁶

In Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was taken for granted that the study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament was a Christian discipline, where Jewish voices were almost completely ignored. However, as important new research has brought to light, Jewish historians, philosophers, and theologians did not simply accept this scholarship in a feeble and servile manner but contested it with vigor and ingenuity.⁷ Cohen's and Heschel's works on the prophets must be viewed in this tradition of Jewish contestation of Protestant biblical "sciences." However, I wish to argue that Cohen and Heschel do not simply write as apologists against the Protestant biblicists, but rather that their engagement with Protestant biblical criticism genuinely informs their own constructive approaches to Judaism.⁸

Both Cohen and Heschel wrote in an era when the prophets were of great interest to Protestant theologians and biblical critics. This flowering of interest in the prophets among German-Protestants was largely due to the influence of the work of the biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen and his source criticism. With his tremendously influential configuration of the Documentary Hypothesis, Wellhausen revealed the Bible to be constituted by many once discrete fragments that had been stitched together into a whole by a redactor, such that the Bible is shown to be a composite and heterogeneous document through and through.⁹ Wellhausen, offering a (then) convincing means to distinguish and isolate the variegated textual strands constitutive of the Hebrew Bible, claimed that of all of these sources, the works of the prophets represent "the high-point of pre-exilic religion."¹⁰ Wellhausen's approbation of the prophets stems from their critique of the priestly aspects of the Israelite religion, which he takes to be evidence of their status as proto-Christians. Where Christianity is the heir to the prophets for Wellhausen, the later, decidedly "post-exilic" religion of Judaism is rooted in the stultified legalism of the priests as a result of its failure to heed the prophets' critiques of priestly legalism.¹¹

Despite the venerable tradition of carving up the biblical text into divergent sources and privileging those strands that lend themselves to anti-Jewish/pro-Christian interpretation in German biblical criticism,¹² Cohen nevertheless engages Wellhausen's source criticism (among other scholarly sources), albeit critically, making use of the new vistas on the Hebrew Scriptures it affords.¹³ There are two elements from Wellhausen's methodology that Cohen utilizes in his own philosophical-exegetical

approach to the Bible. First, Cohen follows Wellhausen in privileging the prophets and goes so far as to laud Wellhausen for recognizing their “ethicism” and “universalism.”¹⁴ Second, he makes use of Wellhausen’s rigorous exposure of the Bible as a composite document consisting of disparate textual strata. Cohen does not emphasize or even necessarily follow the specific details of Wellhausen’s theory so much as adopt these two broad premises.

Rather than undermining either the Bible’s integrity or Judaism’s claim to the prophets, for Cohen, the new framework legitimates both. In Cohen’s view, biblical criticism indicates that while the sources of the Hebrew Bible, including the prophets, lacked scientific knowledge, the Bible itself is a document illustrating a functioning process of reason. Cohen’s rationale here is that each subsequent layer of text consciously interprets and integrates earlier strata, constantly reflecting on its own sources and acknowledging (and thereby furthering) its conceptual development.¹⁵ Cohen, then, utilizes the same methodological assumptions (i.e., the special status of the prophetic texts, and the composite nature of the Bible) of the Protestant biblical criticism so eager to demonstrate the “spiritual death of the Jews”¹⁶ as a means to stress Judaism’s rational unity and continuing vigor.

While Cohen appreciates the rigor of the methodology of biblical criticism, he finds it lacking any sort of organizing structure by which to bring unity to the diversity of the findings it amasses.¹⁷ Cohen thinks philosophy can provide the corrective to this. As Eliezer Schwied puts it,

Cohen sought, by analyzing the “relation of the sources to their [conceptual] content,” to reinstate the idea of the unity of the biblical text, and at the same time to demonstrate how a non-philosophical literary text could contain modes of understanding which had been formulated in a systematic, conceptual fashion only by later philosophy.¹⁸

In short, Cohen uses a developmental structure, which source criticism made possible, as a hermeneutic by which to recover the unity that the historical study of the Bible, particularly source criticism itself, had shattered. If it is no longer feasible to view the Bible as a monolithic text, with every verse interpreting every other, one can instead find unity by tracing the rational development in the “sources of Judaism.” With this new approach, the ethical monotheism of the prophetic texts becomes the normative tool by which the rest of the biblical sources are interpreted.¹⁹

Indeed, Cohen’s hermeneutic does not stop with the Bible but extends throughout the history of Jewish thought up into the present. Following his hermeneutic through the literary texts of the Jewish tradition, Cohen reads the philosophy of Maimonides as “a subsequent continuation of the original meaning of prophetic monotheism [eine folgerichtige Fortführung der ursprünglichen Bedeutung des prophetischen Monotheismus].”²⁰ Even Cohen’s own thought is but one more rung in the ladder of the further clarification/development of the idea of monotheism, of which the prophets should be credited as the authors.

Heschel has a more ambivalent relationship with the regnant German-Protestant tradition of biblical criticism of his time. On the one hand, as Jon Levenson points out, he accepts the tenets of source criticism, such as the multiple authors of Isaiah (Heschel only accepts two authors), and that Second Isaiah comes later than Micah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk.²¹ He also makes use of the works of form critics such as Gunkel, Hölscher, and Gressmann.²² Given his emphasis on the “wholeness of the prophetic personality as *unity* from *inspiration* and *experience* [die Ganzheit der prophetischen Persönlichkeit als *Einheit* von *Eingebung* und *Erlebnis*],” the appeal of form criticism makes sense.²³ That is, form criticism’s emphasis on the *Sitz im Leben*, “the social and literary settings in which [a text] arises and functions,”²⁴ is often quite useful to Heschel, given his penchant for analyzing the

prophets as individuals functioning in specific ways in the Israelite community/communities. Nevertheless, he does not limit himself to the strictures of this methodology.

On the other hand, Heschel is particularly troubled by the tendency of these same critics (he cites Gunkel, Hölscher, Duhm, and H. Schmidt specifically) to study the prophets primarily in terms of ecstatic fits.²⁵ Heschel rejects the psychologistic reductionism of the regnant German-Protestant biblical criticism of his time, where focus is placed solely on the “*facts of consciousness [Bewusstseinstatsachen]*” of the prophet.”²⁶ As a result, prophecy is reduced to feelings with no objective correlate. Heschel offers a critique of the very categories by which the prophetic books are read, arguing that it is simply not sufficient to reduce the event of prophecy to specific states of subjectivity, namely ecstasy or epilepsy. Instead Heschel offers a different, richer range of categories by which to understand the prophetic works.

Heschel is not only concerned with the historical-critical study of the Bible, but he also places his study of the prophets in critical relation with Protestant dogmatic theology. Whereas biblical criticism is focused solely on the form, which ultimately leads back to reductionist fixations on peculiarities of the personality of the prophet, dogmatic theology is concerned solely with the content of the prophetic writings, i.e., the revealed word. By critiquing dogmatic theology, which, as the antipode to psychologism, undercuts any conception of prophecy as a “personal experience,”²⁷ Heschel rejects the tendency in Protestant theology of that time to construct creedal formulations for the prophets torn free from their specific experiences. For Heschel this is but another form of reductionism.

It is with regard to this impasse between biblical criticism and dogmatic theology that Heschel offers his own account of the prophets. Heschel’s task, in both *Die Prophetie* and his later work, *The Prophets*,²⁸ is to steer a course between the Scylla of the subjectivism of prophetic experience as described by biblical studies and its fixation on form, i.e., the *experience* of contact with God or angels, and the Charybdis of the doctrinal objectivism of dogmatic theology, which focuses solely on the content that is revealed in such encounters.²⁹ In an attempt to escape this either/or, Heschel chooses phenomenology as a methodology for studying the prophets,³⁰ which homes in on the prophetic experience that “exhibits for the consciousness of the prophet an objective actuality [Gegenstandswirklichkeit].”³¹ In this way, he escapes the one-sidedness of both biblical studies and dogmatic theology by correlating the subjective and objective poles of prophecy, rather than being forced into a one-sided reductionism.³²

Much can be gleaned by observing the different manners in which Cohen and Heschel respectively approach the Protestant biblical criticism of their day. The scholarly deconstruction of the biblical text in source criticism affords Cohen the opportunity to rationally reconstruct the Hebrew Bible according to his critical idealism, tracing the teleological development of the idea of monotheism through the different strata of the Jewish literary tradition. Cohen offers a reconstruction of the entire Jewish tradition, using its sources as the material from which to erect a rational, unified whole; he restores (albeit in a reconfigured form) that which modern critical sensibilities had rent asunder.

Where Cohen uses the tools of modernity (source criticism, Marburg neo-Kantianism) to reconstruct the sources of Judaism in light of modernity, Heschel uses the tools of modernity (form criticism, phenomenology) to “go back behind” the tradition subsequently built upon them, to recover their voices in order to let them speak to the world afresh, and, as a result, to open new vistas for theology beyond its dogmatic variety. For Heschel, source criticism and especially form criticism are mixed blessings. On the one hand, biblical criticism is an ideology that distorts the prophetic event no less than dogmatic theology. However, form criticism allows us to think about the Bible in a way

conducive to recovering the prophets in their entirety as human beings in relation to God and their community, rather than merely figures spouting words that have become dogma by being decontextualized and mingled with the rest of tradition (whether Jewish or Christian). Only by recovering the *Sitz im Leben* of the prophet, but in a way that is radically open to prophetic experience, can the one-sided poles of dogmatic theology and biblical criticism be avoided.

The Prophets and Tradition

The divergences between Cohen and Heschel in regard to the prophets become more pronounced when we explore the notion of revelation and its relationship to tradition. For Cohen, prophecy is nothing other than rationality, the unpacking of the conceptual content inherent in the idea of ethical monotheism (i.e., the unique God), whereas for Heschel prophecy is something that comes from outside the human sphere and decenters human rationality. While both Cohen and Heschel insist on the continuity of prophecy with subsequent Jewish tradition, they do so in significantly different ways. For Cohen, the prophets, as the origin of genuine ethical monotheism, live on in subsequent Jewish thought that devotes itself to both deepening and further unfolding the conceptual content of this idea. Heschel, rejecting the austere rationalism of Cohen, maintains that the spirit of prophecy is largely continuous with rabbinic thought and that its challenge remains relevant today.³³

To understand Cohen's approach to the prophets, it is important to understand that his works on religion do not fundamentally deviate from his neo-Kantian system. As Michael Zank has shown, Cohen "developed and pursued a program for the renewal of Jewish philosophy contemporaneously with his systematic work."³⁴ Given that religion is rooted in the God of truth, and that truth is the deepest foundation of science, there remains a connection between the critical idealism of Cohen's system and his works on religion. Cohen's works on the philosophy of religion, or better, on Jewish monotheism, develop an analogous methodology of critical reason derived from the Hebraic tradition's theological literary sources.³⁵

Cohen, himself an accomplished hermeneut,³⁶ insists that it is the interpreter and not the history of religion, the literary texts themselves, or any other external source, who imposes order and reason upon the Bible and later Jewish texts. Cohen reads the Jewish tradition in light of his methodological apparatus rooted in the notion of correlation, whereby two different terms are related in such a way that they are simultaneously unified and yet held distinct, such that each party of the correlation is changed and influenced by the other, even though each term remains distinct from the other.³⁷ Additionally, Cohen operates with the methodological assumption that religion (Judaism) is conceptual, i.e., that it is ultimately governed by reason.³⁸ As such, constructing the religion of reason from its sources involves a tense interplay between the structures of a priori reason and the sources of Judaism, which ultimately results in the disclosure of their deep complementarity, i.e., their correlation.

We can get a good sense of Cohen's hermeneutic in action if we turn to a discussion of the prophets in *Ethik des reinen Willens*.³⁹ Citing Micah's speech "He has told you, O mortal, what is good" (Mic 6:8) as paradigmatic of prophecy, Cohen claims that the notion of God speaking "constitutes the device of prophetism." Revelation, Cohen argues, at its base, is a mythological concept, or at least it borders upon mythology, in that God appears as a personality that speaks his will to human beings.⁴⁰ However, in prophecy the mythological elements are dissolved as God's reason is "united and reconciled [vereinbart und versöhnt]" with human reason.⁴¹ For Cohen, religion differs from "mere" myth when the emphasis shifts from the personality of the divine to morality.

Reading the prophets as seminal teachers in the future-oriented process of ethical reasoning, Cohen

denudes revelation of its ecstatic and passionate qualities. In *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, Cohen stresses the importance of revelation, but seeks to free it of all mythic and irrational qualities. While the depiction of the Sinai event in Exodus is for all intents and purposes mythic—God’s presence is made manifest in space and time—Cohen points to Deuteronomy’s depiction of this same event as evidence of a rational evolution beyond myth.⁴² For Cohen, Deuteronomy sloughs off as mythical all that is miraculous and otherworldly, accepting instead that true revelation “is not in the heavens” (Deut 30:12), but rather “the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it” (Deut 30:14). For Cohen, revelation and reason become synonymous, and the prophet ceases to maintain a special theological status—which would imply a slippage back to myth—but rather becomes distinguished as a thinker.

Cohen’s use of the prophets is apologetic, but in a philosophically constructive sense, such that the prophets are not merely the founders of Judaism, but they also demonstrate the importance of Judaism for Western culture.⁴³ Not only are the prophets foundational thinkers in Western intellectual history, securing the fateful correlation between ethics and logic essential to scientific ethics,⁴⁴ but as the intellectual foundation of the sources of Judaism, they initiate a course whereby Judaism itself serves as the locus of the ideal’s critique of the actual. In short, Cohen’s philosophical reading of the prophets, which places them in a teleological framework, minimizes the challenges that the work and the lives of the prophets posed and still pose to daily life and established authority within Judaism. Rather, for Cohen, the prophets turn Judaism (at least in its idealized form) into that which challenges the regnant powers within history with the transcendence of the messianic future. Thus, for Cohen, rather than being themselves a challenge to Judaism, the prophets as the origin of ethical monotheism set the course for Judaism to be the provocateur to, and challenger of, the order of *Realpolitik* which reigns in history.⁴⁵

Whereas Cohen’s rationalist reading of the prophets is apologetic, Heschel’s phenomenological account of the prophetic mindset is not only refractory to the categories of reason, but it is also simultaneously ensconced in tradition while consistently serving to challenge tradition, whether Jewish, Christian, or secular.⁴⁶ Heschel’s position immediately contrasts with Cohen’s (and with certain prominent ways of thinking about the prophets among the rabbis),⁴⁷ in its claim that prophecy is an event, not a process. He writes:

Whatever the motive or content, and whatever be the mode in which inspiration is apprehended, there remains always its character as an event, not a process. What is the difference between a process and an event? A process happens regularly, following a relatively permanent pattern; an event is extraordinary, irregular. . . . The term “continuous revelation” is, therefore, as proper as a “square circle.”⁴⁸

In short, Heschel affirms the radicality of prophetic revelation by stressing its immediacy. The prophet is directly confronted by the divine and as such tradition does not serve as an intermediary. By no means is this to say that Heschel’s account of prophecy is unrelated to or incommensurable with the Sinaitic event or Jewish tradition. However, by emphasizing the immediacy of revelation for the prophet (for the community, the message of the divine is mediated by the prophet),⁴⁹ Heschel evokes the radical challenge that prophecy poses for everyone, including the established “religious” order of the day.

Next, Heschel emphasizes that the prophet is “an intermediary [ein Mittler]” between God and the community rather than a conceptual innovator.⁵⁰ Heschel carefully dissects the event [Ereignis] of prophetic revelation,⁵¹ which consists of two interrelated moments: namely, the turning or decision

[Wendung] of God and the direction [Richtung] of the human being.⁵² Heschel often refers to the event of prophecy as inspiration [Eingebung], which is in turn inextricably bound up with the historical world, the community at large. For Heschel, the prophet who experiences God immediately serves as a mediator in turn between “two subjects, the origin of inspiration and the destination of that inspiration: between God and the people.” In other words, “Origin and foundation, goal and destination are transcendent to prophetic inspiration.”⁵³ The prophet, as the intermediary, encounters God and is sent as God’s proxy to the community at large bearing a message, and in addition, serves as the community’s intercessor before God.⁵⁴

The first moment of the prophetic event is the turning, whereby God’s presence “breaks into the monotonous continuity of daily life [unterbricht die einförmige Stetigkeit des Alltags].”⁵⁵ Heschel uses phenomenology to attempt to elucidate what he takes to be the event of prophecy, whose most vital aspects are missed by both biblical criticism and dogmatic theology. For Heschel, at the heart of prophetic experience is a radical passivity whereby the turning happens *to* the prophet, rather than arising from her.⁵⁶ According to Heschel, the content of the experience of the prophet in inspiration is that of being radically decentered by the divine. For example, Heschel writes, “Prophetic experience is the experiencing of a divine experience, or a realization of having been experienced by God.”⁵⁷ In a rather felicitous turn of phrase, Heschel explains:

Man’s awareness of God is to be understood as God’s awareness of man, man’s knowledge of God is transcended in God’s knowledge of man, the subject—man—becomes the object, and the object—God—becomes the subject.⁵⁸

According to Heschel, these encounters with God have tremendous implications in terms of the identity of the prophet. Heschel makes the striking claim that “God was the point of view of their [i.e., the prophets’] thinking [Gott war Angelpunkt ihres Denkens].” Heschel explains that the prophet’s “engagement with the environment is the result of his transcendent standpoint from the point of view of God [aus dem Gesichtspunkt Gottes].”⁵⁹ In this passage, Heschel highlights that sympathy with God is not simply a response to God’s pathos, which the prophet encounters directly, but it constitutes the foundation of the prophet’s own sense of identity.

Heschel’s elucidations of prophetic experience have raised many objections from critics who, on methodological grounds, resist Heschel’s argument, which moves from the prophet’s experience of being experienced by God, to an acceptance of both theocentrism and divine pathos (God’s subjectivity). Indeed, discussion of Heschel’s account of the prophets, as with his larger corpus, has been brought to a virtual standstill (or has never really taken off in the first place) due to a fixation by critics upon this transition from prophetic experience to theocentric divine pathos at the core of his account of the prophetic event.

Two notable critics, Arthur Cohen and Arnold Eisen, see in Heschel’s dialogical phenomenology an argumentative slight of hand. Arthur Cohen, while appreciative of Heschel’s “moving and profound interpretation of the prophetic experience,”⁶⁰ nevertheless vigorously objects to statements where Heschel inverts the conventional placement of subject and object, human being and God. In regard to Heschel’s inversion of these relationships, Arthur Cohen infers that for Heschel, “God is given with our world: to think him is to already experience him, to acknowledge his life is already to accept his life into ours.”⁶¹ This is partly correct, but it lacks nuance. We see this lack of subtlety most glaringly when Arthur Cohen concludes that using such language

is but to say—and Heschel says it often and variously that the only way to enter the orbit of

faith is to *enter it*, the only way to apprehend God is to *apprehend him*. This essential tautology—and it is a persistent and aggravating tautology—underscores the fact that Heschel is essentially disinterested in argument.⁶²

Eisen offers a similar criticism when, in regard to *The Prophets*, he states, “Heschel could not and in fact did not suspend the question of truth. . . . Trust in the prophets’ account is assumed necessary to objective understanding.”⁶³ Both Arthur Cohen and Eisen charge Heschel with evading scholarly argument, not for lack of aptitude, but rather because both think that Heschel is at heart a rhetorician rather than a philosopher, trying to *persuade* by evoking the reader’s own latent religiosity, rather than to convince the reader through argumentation.

The *ad hominem* approach to elucidating (dismissing) Heschel’s writings, long a staple of Heschel scholarship, is fundamentally wrong-headed.⁶⁴ *Ad hominem* resolutions to difficulties in philosophical arguments should not be accepted, especially if other solutions present themselves. And while both distinguished critics offer far-ranging discussions of Heschel’s work (which I cannot match in this essay), I do hope to show that his works on the prophets, far from being mere rhetoric, make arguments that are important for modern Jewish thought and the philosophy of religion. To be sure, Heschel’s works on the prophets are not simply descriptive. However, as he makes clear in the opening pages of *Die Prophetie* and *The Prophets*, one cannot do neutral work when it comes to the prophets, as both biblical studies and dogmatic theology are one-sided. Heschel’s suspension of truth claims is not a means of avoiding argument, or rigging it in his favor, but rather a way to avoid falling into the reductionism of form (psychologism) or content (dogmatic theology). If one accepts the prophetic claims as straightforwardly true, one is pulled into the domain of dogmatic theology, and becomes preoccupied with the content of the claims rather than their form. If one challenges their veracity, form becomes decisively privileged at the expense of content. To avoid this either/or of biblical studies or dogmatic theology, Heschel employs the phenomenological *epoche*, which enables him to deal solely with prophetic experience that contains both form and content as inextricably intertwined.

To be sure, if one wants disinterested scholarship or analytic arguments, Heschel’s approach presents methodological problems in that his investigation follows the paradox of prophetic experience: namely, that the experience of the prophet contains an awareness of another experience breaching and subsuming it, taking the subject beyond itself. In many ways, these objections are inevitable given that the very object of Heschel’s investigation, prophetic experience, can only be approached by means of a phenomenology of figures whose voices we can only access through highly edited texts that lend themselves to a variety of interpretations, are thousands of years old, and whose cultural sensibilities are radically different from our own (not to mention the vexed question of the mental health of the figures in question). And yet, for Heschel, to approach the prophetic texts with these concerns is precisely to have already closed oneself off to them. As Heschel puts it:

We Philistines continue to insist upon intellectual clichés, upon setting up our own life as a model and measure of what prophets could possibly attain. . . . But this is the principle of fools: what is unattainable to us is unattainable to others. The average man is not the measure. It is not the achievement of man that we are exploring. . . . It is not for us to say that God must conform to our standards.⁶⁵

That is, for Heschel, the prophets should alter how contemporary human beings understand the world and what is possible, rather than it being the other way around. By setting the prophets as standards for our experience, rather than making our experience the standard for what is or is not feasible for the prophets, Heschel is attempting nothing less than to reverse the anthropocentric tendencies of the

modern West.

With the increasing, albeit hotly contested, prominence of religious categories and themes in phenomenology,⁶⁶ Heschel's methodology no longer appears as unconventional as it once did.⁶⁷ To be sure, Heschel's radicality is not stifled, given that his phenomenological descriptions of the "interpersonal" encounter between human beings and God demand nothing less than a paradigm shift from modern anthropocentrism to theocentrism. Heschel's excavation of the layers of prophetic consciousness, especially as it exists in the event of prophecy, provides a theocentric anthropology that serves as the core of the argumentative structure of his writings. A passage in *Who Is Man?* helpfully illuminates this theocentric anthropology in a more straightforwardly propositional form.⁶⁸ In an obvious allusion to Heidegger and his fundamental ontology, Heschel uses phenomenology to elucidate an anthropology rooted in a fundamentally theological account of the universe and the human condition. Heschel writes, "I have not brought my being into being. Nor was I thrown into being. My being is obeying the saying 'Let there be!'"⁶⁹ This passage helps us understand that in the "tautological" passages Arthur Cohen finds so objectionable, Heschel is offering a theocentric anthropology—and more primordially, a theocentric ontology—that finds the core or "essence" of human identity in its status as "created."⁷⁰ In effect, Heschel is not trying to stymie all arguments, but rather to recast the terms of argument when it comes to God, religion, and the status of the human being in the cosmos.

Heschel's recourse to dialogical and decentering elements within prophetic experience, if looked at in the context of modern Jewish thought, is anything but radical. In fact, such strategies have a long history in modern Jewish thought, and interestingly enough, that Heschel makes use of them brings his thought into proximity with that of such twentieth-century neo-humanists as Buber and Levinas.⁷¹ As Martin Kavka points out:

It is no longer news to say that Jewish philosophers who appropriate phenomenology can be characterized by a dialogical theory of language that lies in opposition to Husserl's own account of language as representation and therefore as essentially performed in "monological discourse."⁷²

However, as Kavka correctly notes, what is novel in Heschel's approach, in opposition to Buber and Levinas, is that for Heschel, God is an interlocutor in dialogue.⁷³ In fact, as if in a direct critique of Buber and Levinas, Heschel writes:

Revelation is not a voice crying in the wilderness, but an act of communication. It is not simply an act of disclosing, but an act of disclosing to someone, the bestowal of content, God addressing the prophet.⁷⁴

God is not some anonymous force undergirding the inter-human sphere, but a personality that enters that sphere and communicates. Indeed, this personal God, not human beings, is what is meant to not simply found, but to explicitly orient, the inter-human sphere.⁷⁵

The divergences between Cohen and Heschel, we see, are beginning to widen. Cohen decontextualizes the prophets, generalizing the spirit of prophecy in such a way that their revelation is not event-oriented but rather an ongoing process, albeit one rooted in reason. Heschel, in contrast, stresses the event structure of prophetic revelation, and insists on the importance of the singularity of the prophet as a mediator between God and humanity. Whereas Cohen actively interprets the literary tradition of Judaism, building an edifice of the religion of reason out of the materials laid bare by the

biblical critics, Heschel hopes to bring about a paradigm shift such that human beings cease to be the measure of value, and reason ceases to be the primary mode of orientation for our thinking. By finding new ways of receiving the ancient biblical text, Heschel hopes to recover not merely the primacy of God, but also to highlight the model of God's call and the prophet's response.

God, Community, Morality, and Law

It is now time to bring our juxtaposition of Cohen and Heschel to bear on a current polarization in modern Jewish thought. Modern Jewish thought has splintered into two camps, theocentrists and neo-humanists, over the question of how God is involved in morality, if at all.⁷⁶ Despite drawing inspiration from the same sources and influences, it is as if the two groups speak irreconcilable languages. Cohen and Heschel, ostensibly on opposite sides of this increasingly well-demarcated border line (Cohen with the neo-humanists and Heschel with the theocentrists), help us see that these categories are not only insufficient, but also that the two sides are not as incommensurable as they first appear.

I use the term "theocentrism" to bring together a loose conglomeration of thinkers who prioritize the self's relation to God over all other relations, including ethical ones. In this category, I include such diverse thinkers as Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Michael Wyschogrod, Joseph Soloveitchik, and David Novak. What unifies such a broad and variegated group of thinkers, allowing them to be categorized together, are their shared beliefs that one's primary obligation is to God, that ethics is derivative of one's obligation to God, and that tradition (in one form or another) is the repository of God's will as disclosed in revelation. Emblematic of this position is David Novak's claim that

the normative Jewish tradition clearly requires us to serve God before man, even though there rarely has to be an explicit choice of God *in lieu* of man. . . . To overestimate the role of ethics is just as erroneous as to underestimate it.⁷⁷

While halakhah mediates all of one's relationships, and ethics is clearly an important aspect of halakhic life, ultimate priority rests with one's relationship to God and all other obligations are derivative.

I use the term "neo-humanism" as a rubric to bring together that strand of Jewish thinkers who affirm a this-worldly transcendence, and argue that morality and service to God are inseparably fused, such that ethics is not subordinated to the religious, but rather, the inter-human sphere is the very site of the religious. The most influential examples of such Jewish neo-humanists in the recent past are Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. The prominent contemporary Jewish neo-humanists Edith Wyschogrod, Robert Gibbs, and Martin Kavka are Levinasians. For neo-humanists, God is not something to be separated from the intersubjective sphere, but is rather inextricably bound up with it.⁷⁸

In order to highlight the contemporary relevance of Cohen and Heschel for breaking down the barrier between the theocentrists and the neo-humanists in Jewish thought, it is helpful to turn to a previous attempt at this very endeavor. In his rather remarkable essay, "Abraham and the Kantians," Emil Fackenheim seeks to bridge the gap separating theocentrism from neo-humanism by offering an account of Jewish morality that mediates between them.⁷⁹ Following the theocentrists, Fackenheim conceives of God's revelation as decisively authoritative, and yet this traditional revelatory authority renders morality part and parcel of the service to God in the manner of the neo-humanists.

In contrast to Kant, for whom God is a background condition of morality, Fackenheim insists that

“the revealed morality of Judaism demands a three-term relationship—nothing less than a relationship involving man, his human neighbor, and God Himself.”⁸⁰ Whereas Buber and Levinas locate God’s presence (Buber) or trace (Levinas) in the inter-human sphere by means of analyses of experience,⁸¹ Fackenheim turns to the theocentric tropes of revelation, tradition, and Law. Fackenheim claims that God’s involvement with morality is by means of a Commanding Voice that has entered history and has prescribed behavior for human beings to follow. As Fackenheim puts it:

It is God Himself who bids man take his neighbor in his own right seriously. To obey God, man both accepts his neighbor, and the commandment concerning him, as possessing intrinsic value. He performs the commandment for its own sake.⁸²

For Fackenheim, in a moment of pristine self-disclosure, God’s divine commanding presence enters history and reveals the Torah. By depositing the Torah with the Jews, God enables the Jews to enact the (ethical) commandments simultaneously for their own sake and out of love for God.⁸³

Thus, whereas Buber and Levinas “uncover” God’s involvement as the third term in morality by means of the analysis of phenomenal (or in Levinas’s case supra-phenomenal) experience, Fackenheim turns to the theocentric foundations of biblical narrative and halakhah. And yet, contemporary Jewish theologians offering rigorously theocentric positions grounded in either biblical narrative, e.g., Michael Wyschogrod, or philosophy of halakhah, e.g., David Novak, vigorously disagree (if only implicitly) with Fackenheim’s emphasis on the theocentric grounding of human ethics. In contrast to the relatively seamless relation between God, self, and Other that Fackenheim depicts in his three-termed morality, Wyschogrod’s theocentrism rooted in the biblical narrative emphasizes that the individual’s relationships with other human beings are in tension with, if not mutually exclusive from, her relationship with God.⁸⁴ Similarly, Novak’s halakhic theocentrism renders ethics derivative, not coequal with one’s relation to God.

Interestingly, in Fackenheim’s later thought, despite the significantly different tone and focus from Wyschogrod and Novak, a similar set of priorities, in terms of privileging the relationship with God over morality, emerges.⁸⁵ In Fackenheim’s post-Holocaust philosophy, given the task of the Jews as witnesses to God on earth, albeit now only as an “*accidental*” rather than a “*holy*” remnant,⁸⁶ the Jewish people’s survival becomes the absolute religious commandment.⁸⁷ In this way, Fackenheim affirms the primacy of election and that the individual’s, or in this case, a particular people’s, relation with God is higher than the relation with the Other (ethics).⁸⁸

Fackenheim’s attempt in “Abraham and the Kantians” to account for the priority of ethics without accepting the terms of neo-humanism, while inspired, is ultimately unsuccessful. It does, however, illuminate the fault lines between theocentrism and neo-humanism in modern Jewish philosophy of religion. At first blush, the dispute seems to be primarily about whether one makes God or human beings the center of gravity in one’s worldview. In this light, we see the ingenuity in Fackenheim’s proposal to ground human ethics in the primacy of the divine, which would reveal the dichotomy between theocentrism and neo-humanism to be a false one. However, the incommensurability of his theocentric ethics with the deep theocentrism of others reveals that more is at stake in this dispute between the neo-humanists and the theocentrists.

What is revealed in the failure of Fackenheim’s argument is that this fault line between the theocentrists and the ethical monotheists is not simply about privileging service to God or human beings, but it also involves the relationship of revelation and tradition to ethics. Not coincidentally, the relationship of revelation and tradition to ethics is precisely what is at stake in interpretations of the

prophets. Hence, we can now understand both the philosophical and theological significance of the figure of the prophet in modern Jewish thought, and why Cohen and Heschel, as careful thinkers about the legacy of the prophets, possess resources to help close this gap, or at least demonstrate that it is less significant than it might initially appear.

At first blush, Cohen appears to be quite in line with Buber and Levinas; indeed, he is often credited as their forerunner. To be sure, where Buber and Levinas represent transcendence spatially, in the inter-human sphere, Cohen locates it temporally, in the messianic future. Nevertheless, Cohen argues that as a result of the prophetic discovery of the inherent connection between messianism and mono-theism, God's personal presence is evacuated from the moral sphere. In this respect, Cohen claims, the prophets overcome the "mythical" conception of God, according to which God *qua* personality is conceived as a mediator between the self and Other. For Cohen, maintaining such a mythic notion of God requires that our relationships to everything else, including other human beings, be drastically subordinated. Instead, Cohen claims, for the prophets, "God recedes [trat zurück]" in order to purify the "relation between human being and human being [Verhältnis zwischen Mensch und Mensch]." That is, "God recedes" in order to make the concern for the other person more "urgent."⁸⁹ In this regard, it is hard to miss the impact of Cohen's thought upon the neo-humanist tradition, especially in Levinas's thought.

However, if we follow the trajectory of Cohen's thought further, we see that his positioning in regard to the neo-humanist tradition of modern Jewish thought becomes more blurry. Unlike Buber and Levinas, who conceive of God as a presence or a trace in the interpersonal sphere, for Cohen God is the archetype according to which human beings *qua* moral selves construct themselves. As the archetype of the self, we should not understand God's "receding" to be any sort of vanishing or relegation to the background conditions of morality.

It is distinctive that for this idealized notion of the self, which in Judaism is configured in terms of the correlation between the self and God, the prophets "make knowledge a condition for reverence of God and, more particularly, the condition for the love of God as well."⁹⁰ However, this knowledge of God is not abstract, metaphysical knowledge, but rather is entirely ethical. Cohen explains that this knowledge of God, rooted in his influential albeit idiosyncratic reading of Maimonides "Attributes of Action," is to be understood "not so much [as] characteristics of God, but rather [as] conceptually determined models for action of man."⁹¹ Thus, for Cohen, love of God is nothing less than ethical action. And ethical action is nothing less than the perpetual striving to form the self, the ongoing task to construct the self in the image of God. Constructing one's self in the image of God, i.e., acting ethically, is to render oneself (or at least the sphere of one's actions) the medium in which God's holiness becomes manifest in the world.

The relationship between revelation, morality, and tradition in Cohen's thought is more complex than the polarization into theocentrism and neo-humanism currently allows. The relationship itself actually consists of two inextricably related two-term relations: namely, the relationship between God and the self and the relationship between the self and the Other. In what appears to be in open defiance of neo-humanism, for Cohen, the most important relationship is that between the self and God. It is this relationship with God that demands the ethical relation to the Other, but the Other is secondary to the messianic obligation incumbent upon the self in its relation to God: its responsibility to manifest God's holiness in this world. God does not mediate the relationship between the self and Other, as the personal god of myth does, deciding who is worthy and who is not depending upon beliefs, lineage, or so forth. Rather, God is an ethical ideal driving the self to the Other via ethics in the hopes of manifesting God's presence, if only momentarily, here on earth. Cohen argues that the habits ingrained

by religious life, such as prayer and observance of the Sabbath and other holidays, produce ethical selves. And ethics is in service to the goal of religion, the redemption of the world.⁹²

We see the correlation of ethics and religion, or even that ethics is inextricably bound to the goals of religion, in two closely related aspects of the self in Cohen's thought: its collective nature and the emphasis on the future. For Cohen, the self, as a construct, is not an isolated entity (*Einzelheit*), but inextricably bound up not only with the Other and with various associations of Others (*Mehrheit*), but also with the whole of humanity (*Allheit*). As the trajectory of reason unfolds, the identity of the self becomes increasingly intermingled with the Other—not in a Hegelian sublation of difference, but rather in a correlation that maintains this difference. The correlated unity-in-difference of the self and Other must be understood in light of the prominence of the future in Cohen's thought. In *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Cohen writes:

The future is the moment of law. And the self-consciousness is the content of law. The law is the moral law. *Self-consciousness constitutes the moral self that I only am insofar as we are* [my italics]. Just as the self-consciousness is positioned through the future, so is all of morality positioned through the future [Indem das Selbstbewusstsein auf die Zukunft gestellt wird, wird die gesamte Sittlichkeit auf die Zukunft gestellt].⁹³

In the present, any notion of the self (as ethically constructed in relation to the Other in the perpetual process of *imitatio dei*) is impermanent, an ideal, a fiction, to be forever reenacted. The self is only realized in the messianic future, when all of humanity will be united in one collective, correlated whole, which, in turn is correlated with God. Of course, the messianic future is a regulative ideal and will never arrive. Nevertheless, the driving force of Cohen's philosophy of religion is the relationship between the self and God, *not* the ethical relation to the Other. In this light, Cohen stands closer to Novak, Wyschogrod, and Leibowitz than to either Buber or Levinas.

If Cohen's thought problematizes the distinction between neo-humanism and theocentrism from the side of the former, Heschel's thought follows suit from the side of the latter. Like Fackenheim, Heschel maintains a three-term account of morality rooted in revelation, but unlike Fackenheim, he does not immediately subsume prophecy to prior and subsequent tradition. This difference enables Heschel to accomplish what Fackenheim could not, a robust theocentrism that makes the ethical relation with the Other a means of serving God. While Heschel diverges from Buber and Levinas concerning God's personhood, he nevertheless concurs with them on the inherent importance of the Other. Heschel, as a theocentrist, grounds all value and worth in God while nevertheless holding that this-worldly morality should have infinite value to us because it has inconceivable importance to God:

What the prophets proclaim is God's intimate relatedness to man. It is this fact that puts all of life in a divine perspective, in which the rights of man become, as it were, divine prerogatives. Man stands under God's concern.⁹⁴

So-called necessary or tolerable evils are horrifying and intolerable to God. Justice, morality, and goodness are rooted in God's love for humanity. To be sure, Heschel's theocentrism rejects the neo-humanist conception of God as some sort of transcendental condition for the encounter with the Other, but it also stands in conflict with a theocentrism that subordinates morality to one's primary obligation to God, though on theocentric grounds, i.e., prophetic revelation of divine concern for human beings. Now, to be sure, Heschel regards halakhah as having a genuine religious importance independent of morality,⁹⁵ but at the same time, ethics, events of the inter-human sphere *in the present*, are of the utmost religious significance.⁹⁶

Unlike the theocentric tendency to treat the halakhah as more or less eternally binding laws, Heschel, resembling Buber and Levinas more than Novak or Wyschogrod, insists on the radical religious significance of the present. Indeed, Cohen's account of correlation, which thrusts upon the human counterpart to God the perpetual, relatively unchanging task of the active emulation of God, parallels the insistence on the timelessness and eternal worth of halakhah among the theocentrists. In contrast to *imitatio dei*, where there is a fixed, indeed eternal, pattern, Heschel privileges sympathy, through which the prophet senses the needs of the present moment.⁹⁷ For Heschel, the prophets, taking their cue from God, are consumed by the ethical and therefore religious needs of the present moment. The prophet, as the envoy of God, speaks to the present, with a message that, in contrast to "perpetually true [immergültiger], timeless [gegenwartsloser] Law," speaks out of and to a historical actuality, to focus on the needs of the present.⁹⁸ Thus, like Buber and Levinas, Heschel turns away from the messianic future or timeless eternity in order to focus on the needs of the present, the Other before me. I serve God by serving the Other before me, even if for Heschel, this is a God who talks and to whom I can pray.

If Cohen is credited with being the father of neo-humanism in modern Jewish thought and yet his foundations are theocentric, and Heschel is a theocentrist who shares the priorities of the neo-humanists, what does this mean for contemporary Jewish thought? It would seem that not only has the increasing polarization between theocentrism and neo-humanism not been good for Jewish thought but it has not been warranted. Cohen and Heschel thickly interweave elements of both approaches with great fruitfulness. In conclusion, then, it would seem that not only are these respective traditions not as incommensurable as they might first appear, but they also have much to contribute when they are brought together. To be sure, any such reconciliation is to be accompanied by vigorous arguments and disputes, but surely this is better than the silence and critiques that serve as proxies for discourse.

I would like to thank Illinois Wesleyan University for providing me with an Artistic and Scholarly Development Grant for the Spring/Summer of 2008, which provided the resources and time necessary to complete this project. I would also like to thank Kevin Sullivan, Randi Rashkover, Matthias Henze, and Kari Irwin for their helpful input in this project. Martin Kavka and Susannah Heschel deserve special thanks for their continuous support, critical insights, and helpful suggestions; their specific contributions to this essay are too numerous to mention.

Notes

1. See Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, vol. 1, *The Assyrian Period*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 15; Michael Fishbane, "Biblical Prophecy as a Religious Phenomenon," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 63. In this essay, when I use the term "prophet" I am primarily speaking about those prophets whose words are collected in books (*die Schriftpropheten*) and who lived during what Fishbane ("Biblical Prophecy," 63) refers to as "the classical phase of biblical prophecy, which flourished between the eighth and the fifth centuries B.C.E." over against the "professional mantic types [of prophets] that preceded it (and even coexisted with it) or the apocalyptic types that followed."
2. For example, see Michael Fishbane, "Biblical Prophecy," 62—81; and Nahum Glatzer, "A Study of the Talmudic-Midrashic Interpretation of Prophecy," in *Essays in Jewish Thought* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1978), 16—35. Recently, Howard Kreisel explores the role of the notion of prophecy in medieval Jewish philosophy and concludes with a brief but suggestive discussion of the idea of prophecy in modern Jewish thought in *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001).
3. On Cohen's presence at the Hochschule see Robert Schine, *Jewish Thought Adrift: Max Wiener (1882—1950)* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992). On Heschel's relationship to the Hochschule, see Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 97—171.
4. Thus it is too rash to claim as Jon Levenson does in "The Contradictions of A. J. Heschel" (*Commentary* 106, no. 1 [July 1998]: 37) that for a modern Jewish thinker like Heschel to prioritize the prophets in his studies is simply to internalize the prejudices and suppositions of the field of Protestant biblical studies. Now, to be sure, thinkers like Cohen and Heschel are responding to Protestant biblical studies in their discussions of the prophets, but they are also responding to larger discussions in modern Jewish thought. In addition, while they certainly engage Protestant biblical scholarship, it is not by way of simply unconsciously internalizing the prejudices of their antisemitic environments. Rather, challenging the often antisemitic strains of Protestant biblical criticism was consciously undertaken by many Jews studying in Germany (often under the auspices of Cohen's legacy), as a way of reclaiming the prophets as Jews. On this phenomenon, see Schine, *Jewish Thought Adrift*, 1-69; and Christian Wiese, "'The Best Antidote Against Anti-Semitism?' Judaism, Biblical Criticism and Anti-Semitism Prior to the Holocaust," in *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness: Identities—Encounters—Perspectives*, ed. Christian Wiese and Andreas Gotzmann (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 145-193.
5. I am borrowing the term "neo-humanism" from William Schweiker's "Theological Ethics and the Question of Humanism," *Journal of Religion* 83 (2003): 539-561. Neo-humanism, as Schweiker defines it, is a revision of humanism traditionally understood, which celebrates "radical freedom, creativity, and the autonomy of the self" (541). Rather, neo-humanism, as a "chastened humanism," finds the good in intrahuman flourishing; indeed, it orients itself around responsibility for the Other rather than self-cultivation or self-fulfillment, the ends of more traditional forms of humanism (543). The Jewish neo-humanist thinkers I discuss in this article, namely Buber and Levinas, have recourse to an account of transcendence that is both this-worldly and rooted in relations with the Other (in accordance with Schweiker's criteria). However, whereas Schweiker leaves religious affiliation open in his broad account of neo-humanism, for Buber and Levinas there is a deep connection between their formulations of

neo-humanism and Judaism.

6. Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 19.
7. Of great importance in this (hopefully) growing body of research concerning Jewish responses to Christian biblical studies are Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*; Christian Wiese, “‘The Best Antidote’ ”; and *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, trans. Barbara Haarshav and Christian Wiese (Leiden, Brill, 2005). In regard to Cohen’s own ambivalence to Protestant biblical criticism see “‘The Best Antidote.’ ”
8. To be sure, Wiese (“‘The Best Antidote,’ ” 150) is certainly not wrong to claim that Cohen hoped that the “achievements” of Protestant biblicism would “result in far-reaching positive effects regarding the attitude of German society toward the Jewish minority at the beginning of the twentieth century.” However, it is also important to bear in mind the philosophical importance these “achievements” had for Cohen’s own thought. As Wendell Dietrich (*Cohen and Troeltsch: Ethical Monotheistic Religion and Theory of Culture* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986], 11) points out, “modern biblical criticism helps to set the agenda for Cohen’s own systematization and ‘idealization’ of Judaism as a religion of reason.”
9. See Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).
10. Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 83.
11. See Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, 82-83.
12. See Jon Levenson’s famous essay, “Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology,” in *The Hebrew Bible, The Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 40-45.
13. For an excellent and highly informative discussion of Cohen’s critical relationship to Wellhausen, see Michael Zank, *The Idea of Atonement in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000), 108-134.
14. Hermann Cohen, “‘Julius Wellhausen: Ein Abschiedsgruss,’ ” in *Jüdische Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Bruno Strauss (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1924), 464.
15. I am paraphrasing Eliezer Schweid’s masterful essay, “Hermann Cohen’s Biblical Exegesis,” in “Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums”: Tradition und Ursprungsdenken in Hermann Cohens Spätwerk / “Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism”: Tradition and the Concept of Origin in Hermann Cohen’s Later Work, ed. Helmut Holzhey, Gabriel Motzkin, and Hartwig Wiedebach (Hildesheim: Olms, 2000), 356-363.
16. Levenson, “Why Jews,” 42.
17. Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 2.
18. Schweid, “Hermann Cohen’s Biblical Exegesis,” 359.
19. See Dietrich, *Cohen and Troeltsch*, 12.
20. Cohen, “Religion und Sittlichkeit,” in *Jüdische Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Bruno Strauss (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1924), 133.
21. By the time Heschel’s *Die Prophetie* (Krakow: Nakladem Polskiej Akademji Umiejetnosci, 1936) was published, the discussion around Third Isaiah had already begun with important works by Bernhard Duhm and others. See Christopher R. Seitz, “Isaiah, Book of (Third Isaiah),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:502. Levenson is critical of this omission in Heschel’s account of the prophets; see “Religious Affirmation and Historical Criticism in Heschel’s Biblical Interpretation,” *AJS*

- Review* 25, no. 1 (2000-2001): 42 n. 50.
22. For a helpful summary of Gunkel, Hölscher, and Gressmann on the prophets, see Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 21-33.
 23. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 2.
 24. Marvin Sweeney, "Form Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1999), 58.
 25. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 4. See Susannah Heschel, introduction to *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): xv. For a helpful summary of the question of ecstasy among form critics, which also helps contextualize Heschel's position (although this is certainly not the focus of the article) see Robert R. Wilson's "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (September 1979): 321-323.
 26. Heschel, *Die Propheie*, 1.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper Collins, 1962).
 29. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 2; Heschel, *The Prophets*, xxi.
 30. Heschel's usage of phenomenology largely follows Rudolph Otto given its descriptive nature, although it takes from Husserl the anti-psychologistic stance. For the most sustained discussion of Heschel's relationship to phenomenology, particularly in regard to the thought of Husserl, see Lawrence Perlman, *Abraham Heschel's Idea of Revelation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).
 31. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 5.
 32. His particular methodology is the site of much controversy in Heschel scholarship, and I will discuss it further in the next section.
 33. It should be born in mind, however, that Heschel posits a fundamental theological difference between our contemporary religious situation and that of the prophets when he writes, "The prophets tried to expand the horizon of our conscience and to impart to us the sense of the divine partnership in our dealings with good and evil and in our wrestling with life's enigmas. . . . The appropriation of these categories, far from exempting us from the obligation to gain new insights in our own time, is a challenge to look for ways of translating Biblical commandments into programs required by our own conditions" (*God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955], 273). That is, for Heschel "our own conditions" are, or should be, rooted in the experiences and teachings of the prophets, but at best we can appropriate and translate them. Prophecy is not a lived experience for us; it can only be accessed through tradition.
 34. Zank, *The Idea of Atonement*, 18.
 35. See Andrea Poma, "Yearning for Form" and Other Essays on Hermann Cohen's Thought (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 77.
 36. It is important to point out the level of hermeneutical sophistication with which Cohen works. As Zank highlights (*The Idea of Atonement*, 218-219), before he founded the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism, Cohen not only received rabbinical training but also graduated from Berlin University, where, like Wilhelm Dilthey, he studied with August Böckh, a pioneer in the form of hermeneutics that is now paradigmatic in the humanities.
 37. See Martin Kavka, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 105; cf. Reinier Munk, "Alterität im Denken Hermann Cohens," in *Sinn, Geltung, Wert: Neukantianische Motive in der modernen Kulturphilosophie*, ed. Christian Krijnen and Ernst Wolfgang Orth (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998), 115.
 38. Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 5.

39. Hermann Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1981).
40. I deliberately use the masculine pronoun because mythology is rooted in anthropomorphism and more often than not it depicts God in the male gender.
41. Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, 55.
42. Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 73-84. On this point, see Schweid, "Hermann Cohen's Biblical Exegesis," 371-376.
43. Thus, to return to the content of n. 8 above, even as we bear in mind Dietrich's point about the constructive uses of Protestant biblical criticism for Cohen, we must not lose sight of Wiese's stress on the social and political dimensions of this aspect of Cohen's project in regard to the situation of the Jews in Germany.
44. Hermann Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, 210-216, 401-406; "Das soziale Ideal bei Platon und den Propheten," in *Jüdische Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Bruno Strauss (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1924), 306-330.
45. To be sure, the task of being a Jew for Cohen is itself a regulative ideal, and therefore one could argue that the prophets are rebuking Jews and everyone else. However, the regulative ideal as a critique of the actual is timeless in that it is a constant at all moments in history, as opposed to the very historically specific rebukes of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible.
46. One can see evidence of the deep rootedness of Heschel's reading of the prophets in traditional, i.e., rabbinic, Judaism in the essays in *Prophetic Inspiration after the Prophets: Maimonides and Other Medieval Authorities*, ed. Morris M. Faierstein (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1996); and *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*, ed. and trans. Gordon Tucker (New York: Continuum, 2007), 478-535. That being said, Heschel offers a refined and highly nuanced account of the rabbinic reception of prophecy, which contrasts with the more generalized account offered by Nahum Glatzer in "Talmudic-Midrashic Interpretation of Prophecy," which depicts the rabbis as actively seeking to domesticate the iconoclasm of the prophets and to subordinate them to the sages. While Heschel (*Heavenly Torah*, 513-514) acknowledges this trend represented in Glatzer's essay, he also stresses the strong currents of the yearning for, and belief in, prophetic ecstasy. As Heschel points out (*Prophetic Inspiration*, 67), "One cannot grasp the innermost thought of the holy men of Israel without remembering that in their eyes, prophetic inspiration hovered over human reason, and, at times, heaven and earth would meet and kiss. They believed that the divine voice which issued from Horeb was not stilled thereafter."
47. Glatzer ("Talmudic-Midrashic Interpretation of Prophecy," 21) writes that the rabbis sought to "counteract the revolutionary and challenging position inherent in prophecy." Cf. Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, 513-514 n. 45.
48. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 551.
49. To some degree the language of "immediacy" is improper, as Heschel (*Die Prophetie*, 106) points out that "revelation is not the disclosure of essence [Wesengeben], not immediately [God's] giving-of-God's self, but rather a giving of words [Wortgeben] The essence lets the word replace it and substitute itself for it. The Lord does not present himself, but rather lets himself be presented . . . for only insofar as the divine becomes capable of mediation [Mittelbarkeit], is there revelation." However, this sense of mediation concerns the manner in which this immediate encounter, this ineffable moment, transforms itself into a positive message that the prophet communicates to the community. This account of revelation is in direct opposition to Martin Buber's account of the non-linguistic nature of revelation in *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 157-159.
50. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 54.

51. For his accounts of this encounter see *Die Prophetie*, 102-111; and *The Prophets*, 557-562.
52. I follow Heschel's own English terminology of "a *turning*, or a *decision*," for *Wendung*, and "direction" for *Richtung* in *The Prophets*, 557. One should note the Maimonidean overtones of "turning" and "direction" as they are hardly coincidental, although Heschel's relationship with Maimonides is too complex to discuss here.
53. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 54.
54. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 55. Levenson, in "Religious Affirmation," is critical of Heschel's methodology for what he sees as a lack of rigor in regard to the use of the historical-critical method. That is, Levenson takes Heschel to be offering a biblical theology that fails to live up to the rigorous standards of such a field. I think Levenson misunderstands Heschel's ultimate intentions. As I read him, Heschel is a philosopher engaging in debate with Maimonides and the thinkers in the canon of modern Jewish thought. While, to be sure, his philosophical theology is heavily inflected by a biblical sentiment, it is nevertheless unfair to judge Heschel by the standards of the highly specific discipline of biblical theology, when his thought is more properly located in to the context of philosophical debates. However, that being said, Heschel's project, as I understand it, involves the recovery of the prophetic voice, and thus objections challenging the legitimacy of his historical recovery of the prophets cannot be rejected as irrelevant. Levenson's objection does indicate that more investigation needs to be undertaken to discover (a) precisely how rooted Heschel's thought is in the historicity of the prophets; and (b) whether or not his account of the prophets is sufficiently sensitive to this historicity.
55. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 105.
56. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 553.
57. *Ibid.*, 623.
58. *Ibid.*, 624.
59. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 68.
60. Arthur Cohen, *The Natural and Supernatural Jew: An Historical and Theological Introduction* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), 246.
61. *Ibid.*, 244.
62. *Ibid.*
63. Arnold Eisen, "Re-Reading Heschel on the Commandments," *Modern Judaism* 9, no. 1 (February 1989): 10; it should be noted that Eisen takes a more sympathetic tone to Heschel later in the essay, arguing that other works of Heschel's help to explain the theoretical problems posed by *The Prophets*. He writes ("Heschel on the Commandments," 12), "Where Spinoza had attacked the prophets upon the basis of their *words*, most notably by demonstrating their messages were often at variance with one another, Heschel took his stand upon the unity and veracity of the prophetic *experience*." While sympathetic to Heschel, Eisen ultimately concludes that his arguments are unsuccessful.
64. That being said, Eisen offers a particularly suggestive *ad hominem* reading of Heschel that culminates in an assessment of his life as an exemplary "pedagogy of return" for the Jews of America. Citing Moses Mendelssohn's lament of the loss of living examples in modernity, Eisen states "Heschel on the Commandments," 27) that "I believe he [Heschel] crafted a larger-than-life image of himself to assist in the observation of piety from afar. If that is the case, we should perhaps read Heschel's life, as well as his work, as a way of providing instruction to his audience. Heschel could exemplify the authority of mitzvah, even if he could not argue it successfully."
65. Heschel, *God in Search*, 236.
66. For example, see Dominique Janicaud, Jean-Francois Courtine, Jean-Louis Chretien, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The*

French Debate (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

67. Martin Kavka discusses Heschel explicitly in the context of the dispute between Dominique Janicaud and Jean-Luc Marion over the relationship between phenomenology and revelation in "The Meaning of That Hour: Prophecy, Phenomenology, and the Public Sphere in the Early Writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel," in *Religion and Violence in a Secular World: Toward a New Political Theology*, ed. Clayton Crockett (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 108-136.
68. Abraham Heschel, *Who Is Man?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965).
69. *Ibid.*, 97.
70. See *ibid.*, 94-119.
71. Again, for my use of the term "neo-humanist" see n. 5 above.
72. Kavka, "The Meaning of That Hour," 124.
73. *Ibid.*, 125.
74. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 560.
75. Heschel's affinities to and divergences from Buber and Levinas will be discussed further in the next section.
76. In this essay I am only focusing on those strands of modern Jewish thought that still maintain at least some degree of transcendence. Thus, I am not discussing the purely immanentist notions of God in the Reconstructionist camp.
77. David Novak, "Emmanuel Levinas and Ethical Monotheism," in *Ethical Monotheism, Past and Present: Essays in Honor of Wendell S. Dietrich*, ed. Theodore M. Vial and Mark A. Hadley (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2001), 257.
78. It is important to point out, given that Levinas was Orthodox and Novak was Conservative but now counts himself as a Traditionalist (somewhere between Conservative and Orthodox, I suppose), that the theocentrism/neo-humanism divide does not split neatly down denominational lines. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the voice of liberal Jewish thought has waned since Jews have acculturated successfully into American society, and as the voice of theocentrism (whether Christian or Jewish) has grown louder both here in the United States and worldwide. It is fairly remarkable there has not been more discussion of the diminishing voice of liberal Jewish thought, given the prominence of liberal German and French thinkers in the canon.
79. Emil Fackenheim, "Abraham and the Kantians," *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1973), 31-78.
80. *Ibid.*, 48.
81. To be more precise, for Buber God's presence is not limited to the intrahuman sphere, as the possibility of the I-You relation extends to all that is finite. Buber also maintains a notion of the Eternal You (God) which serves as something like the transcendental condition for all other I-You relations, but which also can be encountered directly by the finite subject.
82. Fackenheim, "Abraham and the Kantians," 49.
83. *Ibid.*, 51; as we will see, Fackenheim's argument resonates with Heschel's. Fackenheim was an appreciative, if somewhat critical reader of Heschel and this article is clearly influenced by him. However, part of the problem Fackenheim runs into is that he does not maintain the iconoclastic and revolutionary nature of the prophets in the manner of Heschel, but rather tends to conflate them with the Sinaitic and rabbinic tradition "whole hog," as it were (to use a non-kosher expression). This lack of nuance costs Fackenheim on many levels.
84. Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 112.
85. This is by no means to suggest that there is agreement between these thinkers. For example, Novak applauds Wyschogrod's work in *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People*

(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 241-245. However, in this same work, he offers a much colder reception to Fackenheim (19). And Wyschogrod offers a famous and influential critique of Fackenheim's post-Holocaust thought in "Faith and the Holocaust," in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 164-171.

86. Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 308.
87. Benjamin Pollock ("Thought Going to School with Life: Fackenheim's Last Philosophical Testament," *AJS Review* 31, no. 1 [April 2007]: 133-159) suggests that in the last years of his life Fackenheim began to think that there is no authentic *lived* response to the Holocaust in the contemporary world, and in fact philosophy, especially Jewish philosophy, now is enlisted to bear witness to the absolute nature of the breach that was the Holocaust.
88. Gregory Baum uses Kierkegaard's notion of the teleological suspension of the ethical in *Fear and Trembling* to characterize Fackenheim's late thought in "Fackenheim and Christianity," in *Fackenheim: German Philosophy and Jewish Thought*, ed. Louis Greenspan and Graeme Nicholson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 184. This critique is particularly interesting in our context because in "Abraham and the Kantians," Fackenheim faults Kierkegaard for maintaining a two-termed morality between God and the individual rather than the three-termed morality that he ascribes to Judaism.
89. Cohen, "Religion und Sittlichkeit," 134.
90. Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 90.
91. *Ibid.*, 95.
92. Kavka nicely explains the nature of the self-God relation in terms of the primacy of philosophy (since the relationship to God is grounded in philosophical/ethical reason, i.e., knowledge of God). He writes (*Jewish Messianism*, 127), "An individual's philosophical analysis tells her that her redemption lies at the end of the teleological path, and that a cultivation of rational perfection (along with the ethical principles that are corollaries of this perfection) is the way to achieve this redemption. Ethics is a side effect of reason." This section of my argument owes a great deal to Kavka's exposition of Cohen in *Jewish Messianism*, 106-128.
93. Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, 282.
94. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 280.
95. See Heschel, *God in Search*, 379.
96. For example, Susannah Heschel (introduction to *The Prophets*, xiv) discusses how her father saw the march on Selma with Martin Luther King Jr. as "an extraordinary moral and religious event For my father, the march was a deeply spiritual occasion."
97. Prophetic sympathy is a virtue at the heart of Heschel's thought and can be seen as pervading many, if not all, of his works. However, it is important to recognize that this virtue is realized to such a degree by the prophets that, to use Kantian-Cohenian language, they will always be regulative ideals whose examples modern human beings can always strive to emulate even though they will always fall short. Heschel, however, would probably not like such language.
98. Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 100-101. I am quoting from an important passage that is enormously difficult to translate into English: "Denn die Worte entstehen im Geben und aus historischer Aktualität heraus, sie kommen aus einem lebendigen Wollen, sind »ursprungsfrisch«, reich an Gegenwart, und haben nicht die Starrheit immergültiger, gegenwartsloser Gesetze."