

Research Paper Submission

The 10th International Conference on Arts and Humanities

Emil L. Fackenheim's Post-Holocaust Critique of Modern Philosophy

Topic Area: Philosophy/History

Presentation Format: Paper Session

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The philosophical desert in which the modern Jew wanders is the one that René Descartes (1596 – 1650) opened up with his equation of thinking with being: “I think, therefore I am.”¹ Not only do I *think*, therefore I am; just as importantly, *I think*, therefore I am. What, then, becomes of Torah? “Traditional Torah,” Emil Fackenheim observes, “and what the moderns with vast equivocation call ‘Torah’ differ radically in that the former is, in principle, absolute instruction, whereas the latter is merely random confirmation of the values to which the pupil subscribes to begin with,”² that is, in conformity with the pupil’s “I think.” Fackenheim’s post-Holocaust encounter with modern philosophy is a collision with this autonomous ego that equates itself with being; it is an ego that, from a traditional Jewish perspective, is unreal. Jewishly speaking, the “formula” is not “I think, therefore I am,” but rather “*God commands*, therefore I am.” The issue, then, begins with a tension between speculation and revelation.

“If revelation is impossible,” Fackenheim maintains, “then there is no significance to the human situation in general.”³ As the speculative philosophical tradition advances, Fackenheim understood, the otherness of God vanishes.⁴ With this vanishing of the otherness of the divine comes the vanishing of the connectedness to the other human being. And so the ontological heritage ultimately leads to a profound sense of horror and desolation, as we discover, for

¹ See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd Ed., trans. D. A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 19.

² Emil L. Fackenheim, *Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 57.

³ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴ See Emil L. Fackenheim, *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Michael Morgan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 22.

example, in the famous dying words of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's novel *The Heart of Darkness*—"The horror! The horror!"⁵ The horror is not that there is so much evil in the world but rather that there is no evil, no good, no meaning: there is simply what is, neutral, valueless, and indifferent—precisely as Heidegger understood *being*. His thinking vis-à-vis this neutrality of being—and the subsequent necessity of imposing "meaning" through one's own resolve—underlies what Fackenheim calls Heidegger's "ontic decision of great consequence,"⁶ that is, in his decision to align himself with National Socialism. In his analysis of Heidegger, Fackenheim correctly notes that "Dasein [the 'being there' of human being] is and remains, bound to finitude, and is nowhere able to transcend it."⁷ And so the word of the finite Führer becomes the ultimate ontological principle, as Heidegger himself affirmed, declaring, "The Führer himself and he alone *is* the present and future German reality and its law."⁸ Heidegger, however did not come out of nowhere.

The Roots of the Heideggerian Horror

Few thinkers have had a greater love for German philosophy than Emil Fackenheim. Indeed, there was a genuine pain in his voice when, more than once,

⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 111.

⁶ Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 166.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁸ From the *Freiburger Studentenzeitung*, 3 November 1933; see Guenther Neske and Emil Kettering, eds., *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, trans. Lisa Harries (New York: Paragon, 1990), 45.

I heard he declare, “The Golden Age of German philosophy”—the German Enlightenment— “was perhaps not so golden.”

Quoting Kant, Fackenheim offers this brief definition of *Enlightenment*: “Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage.”⁹ In Kant’s statement we have a prefiguring of the Heideggerian insistence upon resolve as the mark of existential authenticity. And we have the notion of courage as the courage to transcend, through resolve, any law that might be imposed from on high. What is tutelage at its worst, from a Kantian standpoint? It is precisely what is most essential to Jewish thought and Jewish identity, as Fackenheim understood it: it is Torah. Therefore, Fackenheim asserts, “If the belief in the creation of the world, the reality of biblical miracles, the valid law based on revelation at Sinai, is the foundation of Judaism, then one must say that modern Enlightenment has undermined its foundations.”¹⁰ And what is the most valid of the laws revealed at Mount Sinai? It is the prohibition against murder.

It is no accident that few philosophers of the Enlightenment, who were the champions of human rights and tolerance, allowed the Jews and Judaism the same consideration. This attitude toward Jewish teaching and tradition was not the result of slipping back into perennial culture prejudices; no, it was a defining

⁹ Fackenheim, *Quest for Past and Future*, 132-33.

¹⁰ Fackenheim, *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy*, 48.

feature of the philosophical stance of the Enlightenment itself. It was a stance that justified and legitimized antisemitism—that is, Jew hatred—because the Jews represented everything about the unenlightened past that the Enlightenment opposed. For this reason Kant declares, “The euthanasia of Judaism is the pure moral religion.”¹¹ The euthanasia of Judaism *necessarily* entails the elimination of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and with the God of Abraham the Jews who embrace that God. Kant takes a step in that direction when he relegates God to the status of creator of matter, and removes from Him the status of the God of the Covenant who gives to us commandments that are both rational (*mishpatim* in Hebrew) and beyond the rational (*chukim*).

The lie of the thinking that promised tolerance to all was declared soon after its advent. With the same clarity of vision that led him to assert that those who burn books will end by burning people, in 1834 Heinrich Heine wrote:

The German revolution will not be milder and gentler because it was preceded by Kant’s *Critique*, by Fichte’s transcendental idealism, and even by the philosophy of nature. These doctrines have developed revolutionary forces that wait only for the day when they can erupt and fill the world with terror and admiration. There will be Kantians forthcoming who will hear nothing of piety in the visible world, and with sword and axe will mercilessly churn the soil of our European life, to exterminate the very last roots of the past. Armed Fichteans will enter the lists, whose fanaticism of

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris, 1979), 95.

will can be curbed neither by fear nor by self-interest.... But the most terrible of all would be natural philosophers..., [who] can call up the demoniac energies of ancient Germanic pantheism... . A play will be performed in Germany that will make the French Revolution seem like a harmless idyll in comparison.¹²

Unfortunately, Heine proved to be a prophet.

If the Cartesian *cogito* situates being within the thinking ego, the Kantian critique deduces everything from the thinking ego and thus, as Franz Rosenzweig astutely understood, “reduces the world to the perceiving self.”¹³ Far from glorifying the human being, however, the reduction of the world to the perceiving self is radically dehumanizing. Insisting upon the creation of himself after his own image (as if he were there before he was there), the human being loses his human image. In the end he attempts to reshape and thus dehumanizes the *other* human being by absolving himself from all law except one that originates from the self. Fackenheim provides the caveat, however, that Kant does not say we *create* law; rather, we *appropriate* law *as though* we had created it.¹⁴ Still, he adds, “The same act which appropriates the God-given moral law reduces its God-giveness to irrelevance.”¹⁵ For once the human being is the “active agent” in the creation of nature and morality, God becomes superfluous, as Kant himself understood: “All

¹² Heinrich Heine, “The German Revolution” in *Words of Prose*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: L. B. Fischer, 1943), 51-53.

¹³ See Nahum Glatzer’s introduction to Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, trans. Nahum Glatzer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 24.

¹⁴ Fackenheim, *Quest for Past and Future*, 213.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

that does depend upon the direct will of God,” he writes in his *Universal Natural History*, “is the creation of matter.”¹⁶ Contrary to being defined by divine commandment, the human being is “determinable,” says Kant, “only by laws which he gives to himself through reason.”¹⁷ Thus Kant’s rationalist theology opposes revealed religion.

After Kant we have Hegel. His writings, as Paul Lawrence Rose has noted, “conform to the basic Kantian idealist and moralist critique of Judaism. Judaism is seen as the epitome of an unfree psyche.”¹⁸ Hegel maintains that revealed religion is ultimately superseded by the absolute knowledge of reason. In Hegel, Fackenheim explains, “divinity comes to dwell, as it were, in the same inner space as the human self.”¹⁹ With Hegel the perceiving self that had appropriated the world appropriates the divinity. By the time the Neo-Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach comes on the scene, God is nothing more than a projection of the psyche.²⁰ For the left-wing Hegelians such as Feuerbach, Marx, and Ernst Bloch, says Fackenheim, the “‘identity of the divine nature and the human’ becomes the appropriation of the divine nature *by the human*” through spirit.²¹ With the advent

¹⁶ Quoted in Frederick C. Beiser, “Kant’s Intellectual Development: 1746 – 1781,” in Paul Gruyer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 39.

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 101.

¹⁸ Paul Lawrence Rose, *German Question/Jewish Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 109.

¹⁹ Emil L. Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 190-91.

²⁰ See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 12-13.

²¹ Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, 135.

of Nietzsche, then, God is what one aspires to become in a self-apotheosis into the *Übermensch*, and other human beings are mere *Untermenschen*.

While this is admittedly a simplification, I do not think it is wrongheaded. History has demonstrated that, as thinking is identified with being, the divinity is internalized and finally replaced, in Fackenheim's words, "by a humanity potentially infinite in its modern 'freedom.'"²² Because it is infinite, the "modern freedom" eliminates the Infinite One, so that human beings may do whatever they have the will to do. Indeed, they are justified by will alone. Thus the God of Abraham is dead, as Nietzsche declared.²³ And the god of National Socialism is born.

At the June 1939 meeting of the National Socialist Association of University Lecturers, its head Walter Schultze declared before the assembly, "What the great thinkers of German Idealism dreamed of, and what was ultimately the kernel of their longing for liberty, finally comes alive, assumes reality... . Never has the German idea of freedom been conceived with greater life and greater vigor than in our day."²⁴ Schultz saw as clearly as any of Nazi Germany's philosophers the link between the German philosophical tradition and National Socialism. The thinking that began with Kantian Idealism and culminated in the camps *has to* seek the elimination of heteronomous Jewish thought, as well as

²² Ibid., 191.

²³ Nietzsche's most famous pronouncement on the death of God appears in Section 125 of *The Gay Science*; see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

²⁴ Quoted in George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1966), 316.

Jewish existence, since both embrace the absolute authority of the Holy One, who is known only through His uncompromising commandment. That embrace is what Heidegger complained of when he complained about the “Jewification” of the German mind.²⁵ And so the philosopher joined the Party that would see to a Final Solution to the Jewification Problem. The shocking implication is that, along with centuries of Christian antisemitism, there is a certain philosophical antisemitism that prepares the ground for the annihilation of the Jews.

Philosophical Jew Hatred

Modern thought has made God irrelevant by situating the thinking ego at the center of being. This movement alone is enough to make modern thought into “the hostile judge of Judaism,” as Fackenheim has described it.²⁶ It is not for nothing that we have come to preach tolerance for everything except biblically-based religion, beginning with Judaism. Like everything else in ego-centered thinking, the Jews were to be eliminated as a people apart, and relegated to a sameness as everyone else. To be sure, that was the meaning of Clermont de Tonnerre’s famous assertion before the National Assembly of the French Revolution: “To the Jews everything as individuals but nothing as a people,” that is, nothing as the millennial adherents of the Covenant of Torah. “But,” asks

²⁵ Reported in *Die Zeit*, 29 December 1989; see Theodore Kisiel, “Heidegger’s Apology: Biography and Philosophy and Ideology” in Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis, eds., *The Heidegger Case: On Philosophy and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 12.

²⁶ Fackenheim, *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy*, 43.

Fackenheim, “who was here doing the granting and denying? Sovereign man.”²⁷ And when man is sovereign, the bottom line is this: assimilate or die which, upon arriving at a *final* solution, the Nazis reduced to simply *die*.

And it *is* a *philosophical* solution, as Fackenheim correctly observes when he asserts, “If *der Nationalsozialismus* was the acting out of a *Weltanschauung*, and if antisemitism was the ‘granite-like’ core of it, then neither the Führer nor his ‘decent’ followers could be satisfied with a *Halbheit* that would have *Geschlossenheit* but stop short of confirming its truth. The ‘solution’ of the ‘problem’ posed by the Jewish ‘poisoners’ of the world, in that case, had to have *Ganzheit*, i.e. be ‘final,’ and remain so to the end.”²⁸ The philosophical system demands a systematic resolution and a logical conclusion. And it must be *total*. In its speculative, enlightened, rational mode, philosophy requires the Q.E.D. of finality; there can be no *Halbheit* or half-measures. Therefore the Nazis’ determination was without measure, as infinite as the Infinite One they sought to eliminate in the extermination of the Jews.

Ever since the Enlightenment, as Fackenheim has said, “the denial of the living God was an essential aspect of man’s scientific and moral self-emancipation. If man was to be fully free in his world, God had to be expelled from it.”²⁹ And: “The moment the living God became questionable, Jewish

²⁷ Fackenheim, *Quest for Past and Future*, 273.

²⁸ Emil L. Fackenheim, “Holocaust and *Weltanschauung*: Philosophical Reflections on Why They Did It,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3 (1988): 206.

²⁹ Emil L. Fackenheim, “Jewish Existence and the Living God: The Religious Duty of Survival,” in Arthur A. Cohen, ed., *Arguments and Doctrines: A Reader of Jewish Thinking in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 260.

existence became questionable.”³⁰ Why? Because the essence of Jewish life lies in the living presence of the divine, which is manifest in Torah, Covenant, Hebrew prayers, Sabbath observance, adherence to the commandments, and so on. Without God such things are empty, and if such things are empty, Jewish life is meaningless. Hence the Nazis placed a ban on all of these essential features of Jewish existence. What began as a philosophical assault on Torah led to the ideological assault not just on the body of Israel but on the very soul of the Jew: pursuing this logic to the end, the Nazis *had* to kill Jewish souls before they killed Jewish bodies, as Fackenheim has noted.³¹ It was the only way they could be philosophically consistent.

Inasmuch as Jewish philosophy is rooted in the Torah, it affirms the human heteronomy that lies in the human dependence on the Holy One. Taking the divine spark within every human to be derived from one God, Judaism represents a view of God, world, and humanity that is diametrically opposed to the Nazi Weltanschauung, which shares elements of an ontological philosophical tradition that is inherently antisemitic. Nor is the Nazi Weltanschauung reducible to mere racism. To be sure, the Nazi intellectual Peter Heinz Seraphim insisted that the antisemitism that formed the basis of National Socialism was much more than prejudice or racial hatred; Nazi antisemitism, he maintained, was rooted in an all-

³⁰ Ibid., 261.

³¹ See Emil L. Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 74.

encompassing philosophical outlook, not in ethnic or religious difference.³²

Which is to say: the Jew is not the “other”—the Jew is the “evil”: both for Nazi ideologues and for modern philosophers, the Jew represents the ultimate threat to autonomous freedom, insisting as he does that freedom lies not in autonomous reason and resolve but in the heteronomous adherence to Torah (see, for example, *Avot* 6:2). To be sure, either the Jew is evil or the ontological tradition is evil. And those who have the will and the power to act upon the philosophical implication will do so.

Hence, as Fackenheim has argued, the Nazis were not antisemitic because they were racists. It is just the reverse: they were racists because they were antisemitic.³³ The Jewish teaching concerning the human being is that (1) each one is created in the image and likeness of the Holy One, (2) each one has his or her origin in a single one, in Adam, and (3) each is bound to the other both through blood and through a common tie to God. Nothing could be more opposed or more threatening to Nazi ideology and Western philosophy. The Nazis were antisemitic for the same reason that Western ontological thought is antisemitic. Who among the postmodern philosophers, heirs to the speculative tradition, can affirm that the Holy One creates every human being in the image of holiness? Who among them can insist, with the Jew, that this interweaving of human and divine relation into a

³² See Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 78.

³³ See Emil L. Fackenheim, “The Holocaust and the State of Israel,” in Michael L. Morgan, ed., *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 132.

single relation is *the revealed truth*? We see what the antisemite is anti. And we realize that, as a *Jewish* philosopher, Fackenheim is neither a modern nor a postmodern philosopher, at least not in the usual sense of those terms.

Because the Jew was consigned to the anti-world not as a punishment but as a relegation to a state of non-being, as Primo Levi rightly understood,³⁴ the internment of the Jew persisted even within the walls of the camp itself: in the camp, says Levi, every Jew was “desperately and ferociously alone.”³⁵ This condition of utter isolation is the radical opposite of the interweaving of human and divine relation. It manifests itself—from Nazi legislation, to the ghetto, to the camp—as a refusal of sustenance, of bread and hospitality, a refusal of a place to dwell. Indeed, the Talmud teaches that three things deprive a man of his senses and of the knowledge of his Creator: idolaters, an evil spirit, and oppressive poverty (*Eruvin* 41b). All three went into the Nazis’ internment of the Jew in the time of the Shoah. The “evil spirit” of philosophical antisemitism, to borrow the words of Fackenheim, was the “all-too-spiritual anti-Spirit that affirmed the modern identity of the divine nature and the human in an unprecedented, enthusiastic, self-sacrificing celebration of hatred, degradation, and murder.”³⁶ As he has pointed out, the Nazi idolaters were the children of the Enlightenment,³⁷ and their favorite son was Martin Heidegger.

³⁴ See Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 82.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁶ Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, 147.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

The Heideggerian Complicity in National Socialism

In 1922 Heidegger proclaimed that what had attracted him to philosophy was “the full-blown antireligious attitude of the German *Geist* ripened from German Idealism.”³⁸ And in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* he maintains that “it was not German Idealism that collapsed; it was the era that was not strong enough to match the stature, the breadth, and the originality of that spiritual world.”³⁹ In National Socialism Heidegger saw the strength necessary to match the stature, the breadth, and the originality of the original idea. As Rector of the University of Freiburg, he wholeheartedly embraced the Nazi Party. In his infamous Rectorial Address delivered on 27 May 1933 at the University of Freiburg he extolled the “magnificence and greatness” of “the new movement”⁴⁰ and declared that “all abilities of will and thought, all strengths of the heart, and all capabilities of the body must unfold *through* battle, heightened *in* battle, and presented *as* battle”⁴¹—where any contemporary German listener would immediately associate the word *battle*, or *Kampf*, with *Mein Kampf*, the “sacred text” that provided the ideological grounds for the Nazi genocide. Thus the philosopher joined his discourse to the discourse of the Führer.

³⁸ See Kisiel, 34.

³⁹ Quoted in Victor Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism*, trans. Paul Burrell (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 219.

⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” in Neske and Emil Kettering, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

“The scandal would be minor,” says Fackenheim, “if at issue were merely Heidegger’s personal behavior. The indisputable and undisputed fact is, however, that when he endorsed in advance the Führer’s actions as German ‘reality’ and ‘law,’ he did so not, like countless others, impelled by personal fear, opportunism, or the hysteria of the time, but rather deliberately and *with the weight of his philosophy behind it*.”⁴² Although some would try to excuse the Nazi philosopher by claiming that he later reappraised Nazism, he “in no way reappraised his own philosophy, which,” Fackenheim writes, “while not responsible for his surrender to Nazism, had been unable to prevent it.”⁴³ But what can it mean to suggest that the thinking of the greatest of the existentialist thinkers was not responsible for his words and his deeds?

It seems to me that Fackenheim is a bit too generous here. Heidegger’s philosophy was unable to prevent his surrender to Nazism because, logically, Nazism was the ultimate expression of that philosophy. In 1936 Karl Löwith voiced to Heidegger his concern that there was an essential “partnership” between National Socialism and Heidegger’s philosophy. “Heidegger agreed with me [about this],” says Löwith, “without reservation and elucidated that his concept of ‘historicity’ was the basis of his political ‘engagement.’ He also left no doubt about his belief in Hitler.”⁴⁴ Heidegger himself understood that he was not a

⁴² Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 169.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁴ Karl Löwith, “Last Meeting with Heidegger” in Neske and Kettering, 158.

philosopher who happened to be a Nazi; no, he was a Nazi who happened to be a philosopher.

Grounding freedom in autonomy and authenticity in resolve, the Heideggerian *Denker* or “thinker” situates freedom beyond the Law and is therefore lawless. There is no more blatant manifestation of sheer idolatry. And “once idolatry is mentioned,” Fackenheim correctly declares, “there appears the specter of Auschwitz.”⁴⁵ The ontological philosophical tradition that had influenced and led to Heidegger was bent on “demythologizing” the symbols and icons of all revealed religion. This “demythologization,” Fackenheim correctly understood, “withdraws the infinite feeling; thus the object is reduced to its proper finitude and loses the power to command worship. But, because the withdrawn feeling is infinite, it does not vanish but rather is transformed in the inner realm into which it is withdrawn. It thus acquires the power of generating what may be called *internalized idolatry*.”⁴⁶ Precisely this internalized idolatry—with its infinite feeling that would become an infinite capacity for evil—is the Nazi idolatry. It is the Heideggerian idolatry.

Heidegger saw in Nazism the “new unconcealment of Being” that finally frees itself from the appeal to an infinite or divine being, from all revelation of values, both above and below, from every remnant of “onto-theology.” Over against the “inauthentic” onto-theology stands the authentic “existential ontology.” “Existential ontology,” Heidegger declared, “has as its sole objective the

⁴⁵ Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 71.

⁴⁶ Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, 187.

explication of the primordial transcendental structure of the *Dasein* in man,” which, in turn, “manifests itself as the need of the comprehension of Being,”⁴⁷ and not as, say, the need for the embrace of the other person or of God, the responsibility for the life of one’s neighbor, or the like.

To be sure, one of the central features of the Heideggerian thinking that characterizes Nazi ideology is the elimination of the other human being from its concern. “*Dasein* exists for the sake of itself,” Heidegger declares.⁴⁸ Whereas Jewish teaching maintains that other people are children of God placed in my care, for the Nazi Heidegger, other people are *das Man* or “the They,” who threaten my authenticity.⁴⁹ Ideologically extended, this existence for the sake of oneself alone becomes an existence for the sake of one’s Volk; one can be only with others who are like oneself, that is, who are German, in service to the Führer, as Fackenheim realized: “The *Führer*, no emperor-god, embodies the *Volk*, and the *Volk*, no worshipping community, realizes its selfhood in blind obedience and total sacrifice. Because Nazism internalizes divinity, it is an idealism. Yet since it idolatrously identifies finiteness and infinitude, it is an idealism *totally without ideals*.”⁵⁰ And therefore totally inhuman. Thus the Heideggerian complicity in National Socialism.

⁴⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. J. S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 244.

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, 5th Ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1965), 38.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1963), 254.

⁵⁰ Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, 194.

Neither the new unconcealment of Being nor the comprehension of Being has anything to do with human relation; hence it has nothing to do either with a moral or with a religious good. Neither Heidegger nor his Nazi colleagues thought they were doing a moral good by pursuing the Nazi agenda. On the contrary, they believed they were doing an ontological good, with its corollary *social, political, and cultural* good. The ethical concern for the other human being becomes not only superfluous but harmful. Says Heidegger, “If one takes the expression ‘concern’... in the sense of an ethical and ideological evaluation of ‘human life’ rather than as the designation of the structural unity of the inherently finite transcendence of *Dasein*, then everything falls into confusion and no comprehension of the problematic which guides the analytic of *Dasein* is possible.”⁵¹ The “ethical evaluation of ‘human life’” requires a capacity for having one’s thinking disturbed by a concern for another, a capacity for hearing the cry of the victim. The “analytic of *Dasein*” is possible only when we grow deaf to that cry.

Diametrically opposed to a being-for-oneself that characterizes the Heideggerian outlook is the being-for-the-other represented by Jewish teaching—what Heidegger deprecated as “Jewified” thought. The *Sein-zum-Tod*, or “being-toward-death,” that Heidegger takes to be so central to authentic existence is a concern for *my* death.⁵² The death that concerns the Jew, on the other hand, is the death of the *other* human being, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, who are

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 245.

⁵² Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 118.

of no concern to Heidegger. Responding to Heidegger, Fackenheim asks, “By what right do we deny authenticity to individuals who are individuated (and thus rendered authentic) not by their being-toward-death, but rather (if a singling out call of God must be ruled out) by a concern for others, the concern for a son and daughter being, perhaps, the most individuating of all?”⁵³ What must be opposed to the evil of Heidegger’s ontology is not the autonomy of the self but the sanctity of the other, not the universal maxims of reason but the uncompromising commandments of God—from *on high*.

Opposed to the ontological erasure of absolutes is the Jewish insistence on absolutes that are neither culturally nor politically determined but are commanded by the Most High. This height, and not our resolve or will to power, is what opens up truth, meaning, and the good in life. For Fackenheim’s the capacity to make such distinctions—between high and low, God and humanity, good and evil—forms the basis of every notion of the holy, from which the sanctity of human life is derived. And so in his post-Holocaust critique of philosophy Fackenheim returns us to the most fundamental of philosophical questions: with the Holocaust, he asserts “philosophers must face a *novum* within a question as old as Socrates: what does it mean to be human?”⁵⁴ How *now* shall we answer

⁵³ Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, 215.

⁵⁴ Fackenheim, *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy*, 133.

