

REVIEW ESSAYS:

Shalom Carmy

The author of this essay, who teaches Bible at Yeshiva University, is well known to the readers of this journal for his extensive contributions on philosophical, Biblical and literary themes.

MODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

Fossil or Ferment?

Dr. Eliezer Berkovits is that rarity among Orthodox Jewish thinkers: one whose work rewards attentive reading and does not require *colportering*. The present blurbless volume* presents Dr. Berkovits' critique of several well-known figures in modern Jewish philosophy. Most of the material has already been published in *TRADITION* and *Judaism* and the longish essay on Buber was published separately by Yeshiva University. For this book, as well as for his other important contributions, Dr. Berkovits, incidentally, received the Jewish Book Council Award for 1975.

The bulk of the volume treats the "Big Three" of German-Jewish philosophy: Cohen, Rosenzweig, Buber. If the promise implicit in Berkovits' title is to be fulfilled, his discussion will move beyond a critique of each particular philosopher and indicate the development, or the fate, of "Major Themes" in

these philosophers. If the threat explicit in Berkovits' Foreword is to be carried out, the results of this critique will be negative, bearing out the conviction that our generation does not yet have "a philosophy of Judaism that does justice to the essential nature of Jewish teaching . . . nor one that can be maintained with contemporary philosophical validity" (p. vii). The concluding chapter deals with Heschel's theology of pathos.

I

The previously unpublished chapter on Hermann Cohen has special significance for the English reader. English (for that matter Hebrew) translations of Cohen's *Religion of Reason from the Sources of Judaism* have been late in coming; expositions of Cohen have been produced by men strongly influenced by Cohen's personality, preoccupied with their own philosoph-

* *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism*, Ktav, New York, 1974.

Modern Jewish Philosophy: Fossil or Ferment?

ical considerations (e.g., Rosenzweig, Buber, Kaplan), and have been addressed to audiences for whom the basic categories of Cohen's thought are no longer vibrant. Berkovits' cool, analytic explication of Cohen's views is, therefore, especially welcome.

Cohen's specifically Jewish work has been judged from two perspectives. Rosenzweig viewed Cohen as a harbinger of his own anti-rationalistic philosophy: in his old age, the great neo-Kantian made room for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Buber, on the other hand, identified Cohen's God with that of the philosophers. It is clear that as Cohen grew older, as he devoted more of himself to the exploration of his Jewish heritage, he began to feel dissatisfaction with his earlier thoughts on religion and ethics: in particular, the notions of sin and repentance forced him to deal with the category of the individual as he had not done before. It is also clear that concern for these problems would predispose one towards the acceptance of a personal God, a God involved in history. But how close did Cohen actually come to taking this step? At this point Dr. Berkovits steps in with his analysis of the basic concepts in Cohen's *Religion of Reason*. His conclusion: Cohen's conceptual world remains of a piece throughout; his position does *not* open into any form of "personalism."

How Berkovits proceeds can be illustrated from his examination of Cohen's "correlation" between man and God, an idea often taken to be a precursor of the "dialogue" and

"I-Thou" relations of Buber. Berkovits carefully delineates three functions of the concept:

1. God as ground of Being, i.e., the causal principle that is the basis of theoretical knowledge.
2. God as ethical purpose, as paradigm of ethical action.
3. God as forgiver of sin.

In the first two cases it is relatively easy for the rationalist to dispense with the notion of a personal God; it is more difficult to do so with regard to forgiveness of sin: ergo the third function of correlation must, one might say, presuppose a personal relationship between God and the sinning individual. Berkovits, however, quotes Cohen's repeated assurances that the correlation not be "personified" but recognized with "logical strictness" (p. 17). The search for the strict logical meaning sends Berkovits to the earlier Cohen, for whom, if we may rush ahead to Berkovits' summary:

Correlation is a logical principle that relates two ideas in such a manner that their meaning is determined in logical mutuality (p. 18).

And if correlation is a merely logical principle, then so must the forgiving of sin, however unsatisfactory such an account may be. Only man is active in the correlation; God is thought of as the goal of repentance.

Against this background one can understand Berkovits' tendency to accuse almost every philosopher of creeping pantheism. For the fact is that, without some conception of

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

the supernatural, pantheism and transcendentalism pass over into one another. This is fairly obvious in the case of pantheism: if nature (or the cosmos, etc.) is divine, then the ultimate ground of the universe does not stand in relationship with man: case in point—Spinoza, for whom the impersonality of the Divine is a corollary of pantheism. The converse is less obvious; but Berkovits manages to illustrate it, using the arch anti-Pantheist Cohen. The moment Cohen uses traditional religious terminology (“correlation,” “trust in God”) without granting God any measure of activity (“only man is active in the correlation”), he is, in effect, deifying man. Cohen can avoid this dilemma only by eliminating any type of positive statement about religion, adopting the skepticism of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, with its opaque, inaccessible *ding-an-sich*. It is the inconsistency in Cohen’s accounts of the relation between God and man that Berkovits diagnoses as his greatest flaw (p. 34). But more important, he is here sounding a theme to be repeated throughout the work. For the thinkers with whom we are here concerned invariably seek some value, some ultimate, above man, while at the same time maintaining the self, or some aspect thereof, as the measure of all things.

Mention needs to be made of Cohen’s attempt to co-opt Maimonides’ doctrine of attributes and assimilate it to his own philosophy: Berkovits’ discussion needs to be supplemented by his comments in *God, Man and History*.¹ Cohen believed that Maimonides’ negative

attributes correspond with the function of God in the realm of theoretical reason, while the attributes of action do not refer to actual volitional acts of God but rather to the role of the God-Idea in the ethical sphere, as paradigm for man. In the present book Berkovits points out that Maimonides’ doctrine of creation is explicitly opposed to the view of Aristotle because of the issue of miracles. Cohen would certainly have no room for the miraculous in his concept of creation (p. 22). In the earlier discussion Berkovits had added another interesting argument: For Cohen’s metaphysical conception of the God-idea, creation is, by definition, the ground attribute of God (for the metaphysical function of the God-idea is the grounding of causality, i.e., of all activity in the world). Maimonides, on the other hand, was greatly exercised precisely because his concept of God did *not* logically necessitate his belief in creation. In any event, Berkovits dismisses Cohen’s reading of Maimonides as a philosophical gerrymander.

II

The essay on Rosenzweig, also brand-new, is, despite its open admiration for the great *ba'al teshuvah's* life, unflatteringly critical. The focus of the analysis is on Rosenzweig’s conception of Jewish history (the Exile; the relationship of Judaism and Christianity) and his conception of Jewish identity.

Rosenzweig believed that *Galut* was the ideal situation for the Jewish people: Judaism survived be-

Modern Jewish Philosophy: Fossil or Ferment?

cause we were not committed to a finite land, because our culture and religion, being outside history, were not subject to the generation and corruption inherent in the historical process. The inadequacies of this position are obvious: the Bible certainly anticipates a Jewish State in Israel, a Torah that functions as the real law of an historical nation, and so forth. The virulent course of post-Rosenzweig anti-Semitism should underline in blood the physical dangers of Exile.

Yet it is not enough simply to regard Rosenzweig as a great man whose metaphysical propensities blinded him to the obvious truth. A philosophy of Jewish history which views Exile as a positive moment in God's plan for the world need not be dismissed out of hand. If a man like Rosenzweig experiences this positive aspect of Exile-existence there is no reason why he should remain indifferent or silent about it. In attempting to absolutize this experience and transform it into the norm for Jewish history, he is, of course, dead wrong. This should not invalidate the partial insight, nor deny the feelings of those for whom, even today, Rosenzweig's thoughts strike a responsive chord.

Berkovits does not always realize this. When Rosenzweig states that other nations have squandered the blood of their sons for the land, while the landless Jew has conserved his strength and survived, Berkovits remarks:

It is hardly believable to what extent metaphysical preoccupation could blind a brilliant mind to facts . . . Is there any nation on

earth that has spilled as much of its blood over its land as the Jewish people have lost in their homelessness? . . . (p. 54).

It is not my concern here to determine the historical issue involved: whether or not the physical situation of the *Galut* facilitated Jewish survival. It need only be mentioned that, right or wrong, Rosenzweig did not come up with this theory in some ivory tower, dazzled by a metaphysical crystal ball. The *Star of Redemption* was written from the trenches of World War I, in the midst of unprecedented carnage, the wreckage of nations, the eclipse of cultures. The mutability and vulnerability of "normal" national existence was exhibited in real life, not merely in Hegelian dialectic. That the Jew had survived must be attributed to the fact that the Jewish people has avoided the trap of history, argues Rosenzweig.

With regard to Christianity, it is even more obvious that Rosenzweig's attitudes were shaped by personal experience. As far as the timeless parameters of Jewish theology are concerned, Christianity plays no role whatsoever; to the extent that Christianity makes a positive religious contribution it may be evaluated and judged under the general rubric of Noachite religion. Thus a Jewish theology forced to come to terms with the inner workings of Christian experience will invariably reflect an unusual attempt at sympathy on the part of the individual Jewish thinker. It will, of course, have little to offer to individuals for whom the problem of Christianity or the destiny of the Christian is of no inter-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

est. Rosenzweig, like Maimonides, believed that Christianity had contributed to the realization of the Divine plan. Unlike Maimonides, however, he wished to understand Christianity from within (how close he came to conversion is a well-known story), and to relate the positive role of Christianity to the actual contours of Christian dogma and institutions as they have unfolded.

Now one of Rosenzweig's basic assumptions — and this is what arouses Berkovits' ire — is that Christianity has the job, as it were, of converting the world, while Judaism, unchanging and inactive, eschews activism; Judaism conserves its religion and withdraws from the historical world. Berkovits resents this straightjacketing of Judaism, which seems, in his opinion, to be an unnecessary validation of the Christian self-image. What Berkovits does not notice is that, in fact, at least under the circumstances of Rosenzweig's own life, the choice for Judaism involved a deliberately embraced estrangement from European culture. The same sacrifice may often be demanded of the Jewish intellectual today. That isolation and withdrawal from the mainstream of Western culture, not excluding the socio-political context of contemporary life, accompanies religious commitment, is a product of experience, not vague ecumenism. If Rosenzweig ignored anything, it was the inevitable alienation from society that is the fate of *all* religious individuals in the contemporary world, and the failure of Christianity to provide more than a veneer of civilization upon the

unreconstructed human condition.

Jewish identity, according to Rosenzweig, is essentially biological: one is a member of the Jewish people by birth; the introverted character of Jewish religiosity discourages conversion. At times Rosenzweig resorts to racial terminology to elucidate this doctrine: purity of the blood becomes a religious value. Berkovits objects to this doctrine on two distinct grounds. First, it attributes the unique destiny of the Jew to factors with regard to which the Jew is passive: it was not the spiritual commitment of numberless individual Jews that sustained us through *Galut*; no, credit be given only to the power of blood. Berkovits had already argued in similar fashion against Cohen, who had spoken of suffering as a force that made for Jewish fulfillment, rather than temptation to despair and apostasy. The unwillingness to speak of particularly Jewish qualities of spiritual courage and commitment, Berkovits sets down to the acceptance, on the part of these philosophers, of the Christian, or assimilated-Jewish, image of the Jew. Secondly, of course, Berkovits deplores the racial jargon employed by Rosenzweig, spelling out the sharp differences between Jewish concepts of identity and those of racist theory.

In dealing with Berkovits' first line of attack, it should be noted that religious conversion experiences often involve a sense of compulsion: "Here I stand" accompanied by "I cannot do otherwise." Recognition of truth erases our options; we are no longer free to poetize. For Rosenzweig—and his

Modern Jewish Philosophy: Fossil or Ferment?

story is that of many—the compulsion was two-pronged: 1. Judaism becomes a live option; 2. Because of one's birth, Judaism is *the only* option. The *ba'al teshuvah* may not have asked for this commitment; it may upset his life, undo his hopes for happiness. In an unguarded moment, he had sold his soul to truth; and with sad satisfaction he realizes the bargain is for keeps. Berkovits is right, to be sure, in insisting that failure to recognize the glorious sacrifices of our people is a distortion of Jewish history and a flaw in Jewish theology. Yet, at the same time, one might do justice to the experience of men who find themselves plucked out by God for this unsought destiny.

With regard to the charge of racism, one should remember that naturalistic categories have been used by many great Jewish thinkers, among whom R. Yehuda Halevi, the *Tanya*, and, in our century, Rav Kuk, stand out. That these theories encounter difficulty in explaining the possibility of *gerut*, that they may be offensive to our moral sensibilities, should not obscure the fact that Jewish identity is a mysterious concept, and that Jewish thinkers may be pardoned for utilizing what they considered to be adequate scientific terminology, in order to elucidate it.

These animadversions should not lead us to disregard the care with which Berkovits treats Rosenzweig's writings, particularly his comparison of Rosenzweig's correspondence with the *meshumad* Rosenstock-Huessy with the subsequent *Star of Redemption*.

III

Dr. Berkovits challenges Buber's philosophy of dialogue on both the ontological and the axiological levels. Buber assumes that the "I" does not exist outside of relation: it stands in either an "I-Thou" relation or an "I-It" relation and has no separate, discrete, existence. At the same time, the encounter does not involve identity: Buber denies the claim to identity with the Godhead often found in mystical writings. But, argues Berkovits, Buber is unwilling to give God real independence in the relationship; mutuality is stressed to such an extent that God ceases to be God. The Biblical Encounter to which Buber so readily refers presents a God whose Presence is overwhelming, who may initiate the Encounter without an equal reaching out on the part of man.

The major weakness which, according to Berkovits, drives Buber—you guessed it!—into pantheism, is his doctrine of the self. If the "I" does not exist outside of relation, then, in its Encounter with the Eternal Thou (for which read: God) its whole being consists of the Thou, namely the Divine. This attack can be countered: *A* might not exist independent of either *B*, *C*, or *D*, yet not be identical with any of them: a living heart, e.g., does not exist apart from a host (disregarding the limiting case where the host is a lab set-up), yet the heart is not identical with its host; it may be transplanted from one individual to another. Yet even if Buber can be defended, this does not guarantee the cogency of his

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

formulations. Berkovits also hits hard at Buber's conception of the Eternal Thou, with whom relation may be both exclusive and inclusive. The paradoxical nature of Buber's assertions can be resolved, concludes Berkovits, if we assume that Buber's religious terminology functions within a pantheistic framework of discourse.

If this is the case, then Buber's concept of revelation, and consequently his notion of responsibility, are subjective. For either Buber is a pantheist *malgré lui*, or his concepts are so unclear that one cannot disentangle the subjective from the objective anyway, thus arriving at the moral equivalent of pantheism: subjectively judged self-fulfillment. Berkovits applies this argument particularly to the question of ethics, where the opposition between Buber and classical Judaism is especially sharp. Buber rejects the traditional law-giving religions because these trammel the free "spontaneity" of the religious personality, who must respond freshly to each "I-Thou" encounter. What happens, asks Berkovits, if one is not standing in I-Thou relation at this moment (and admittedly, such moments of realization are few and far between)? The much-maligned historical religions, at least, provided for this through the mediation of law: even when grace is withdrawn, and man is afloat in the stagnant waters of the quotidian, he need not drift. To reject law in favor of faith is not to choose faith, writes Berkovits: "One has rejected life and thus needs no law" (p. 141).

It seems ironic that Berkovits ac-

cuses Buber of latent pantheism and discovers in the "I-Thou" ethic a way of life rooted in certain special moments, certain "peak experiences" but unresponsive to ongoing life. For Buber's mature philosophy was generated by the precise considerations Berkovits blames him for neglecting. A refugee from high-fallutin', "enthusiastic" mysticism, Buber had sought to develop a religious approach sensitive to the concrete, everyday responsibilities between man and man, between man and the world. If Cohen fell into these difficulties, it was unwittingly; if Buber did, it was because he was all too aware of the dangers before him, and yet unable to overcome them.

In his treatment of Jewish peoplehood it is again clear that Buber wishes to avoid the errors of previous Jewish philosophers. The correct relationship between religion and nationalism is one in which God stands in relation, not only to individual members of the nation, but to the nation as a whole. This approach, states Berkovits is "in the best of Orthodox Jewish tradition" (p. 100). Had he wished, Dr. Berkovits could have discovered a genuinely startling instance of "Orthodoxy" in Buber's unabashedly sincere belief that there exists a special, sacred bond between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, deriving from the spiritual history of the Jewish people: neither the youthful anti-Ugandist delegate nor the aged Jerusalem savant wavered in this.² Buber's ontology, however, is inadequate to his insight into the nature of community. For, as Berkovits points out, one

Modern Jewish Philosophy: Fossil or Ferment?

can relate to one "Thou" only at a time, and even if one could speak of multiple relations by including a manifold of latent "I-Thou" relations, the question remains: what constitutes the congeries of "I-Thous" as a "We."? These difficulties become even more severe if we consider the historically continuous relationship of Israel and its land, to which Buber is committed.

In these last cases, the point is certainly not to impugn Buber's experience, but rather the theory in which he situates that experience. So that when Buber proceeds to reject classical religious norms on the basis of his philosophical system, the flaws in the philosophy immediately become evident. That this is true is established, I believe, albeit somewhat heavyhandedly, by Dr. Berkovits' critique.

IV

It is difficult for this reviewer, whose dates overlap those of John Dewey but slightly, to get excited over a critique of Reconstructionism. The optimism of Reconstructionism derives philosophically from a typical confusion (drawing its Kaplanian authority from Hermann Cohen): initially one posits God as an impersonal concept, then one appeals to the idea of God to guarantee the fulfillment of our hopes. Similarly the Reconstructionist doctrine of evil as negation makes sense, if at all, within the classical religious, or at least Platonic, tradition. In any event, the sunshiny fallacies that flourished in turn-of-the-century Germany or reassured the second-generation Jew in the

Eisenhower Era, are not the fallacies craved by our own generation. Dr. Berkovits' essay on the subject was written in 1959.

V

A. J. Heschel's doctrine of Divine pathos and his thesis that prophetic experience involves sympathy with the Divine pathos, are probably his most stimulating contribution to theology. It is no wonder that Berkovits' critical examination of this philosophy has attracted attention, controversy and misunderstanding in the decade since it first appeared in *TRADITION*.

Two misunderstandings have colored reaction to Berkovits' article and should immediately be cleared away:

1. That Berkovits' animus against Christianity leads him to reject anything that sounds "Christian" to him; in other words, that Berkovits is adopting the anti-Heschel view simply because of some real or imagined propinquity between Heschel and Christian theology. Such a stance is, of course, more worthy of a pulpit rabbi than of a serious thinker.

2. That Berkovits' position is identical with that of Maimonides. Berkovits can then be saddled with whatever inadequacies we moderns find in the doctrine of negative attributes. Anyone accepting Heschel's modest contention that our conception of personal Divine involvement with the world requires a revision of this philosophy would then be committed to Heschel's entire programme.

The charge of knee-jerk anti-Christianity would run, more or less, as follows: Christianity, with its drama of the Passion, puts great

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

stress on God's involvement with the world. Therefore the idea of Divine pathos is a "Christian" idea: ergo, it is false. A reader of Berkovits may, without being sloppy or festinate, get the impression that he is arguing along these lines. This, however, is not the case. He now claims that he did not mean, in bringing up Christianity, to impugn the "Jewishness" of Heschel's formulations, but to explain their meaninglessness. For Heschel states that the prophet partakes of the Divine pathos, and this "passibility" of God is conceivable, in Berkovits' opinion, only within the Christian framework, in which God (as the Second Person in the Trinity) is supposedly passible to man. Let me quote Berkovits' recent response to one who misunderstood him:

But to say that the prophets of Israel felt the sorrow of the God of Israel as their own, that they shared in the inner life of God, is to use words that have no meaning for me.³

As early as his *God, Man and History*,⁴ Berkovits had rejected Maimonides' theory of attributes. His use of Maimonides against Heschel expresses his respect for the philosophical problems raised by the medievals, which, he suspects, Heschel is cavalierly dismissing. On at least one point I find Berkovits' objection unjustified: Heschel's concept of pathos requires a revision of the idea of Divine immutability; the Eleatic tradition which dominated medieval philosophy viewed immutability as an ingredient in perfection; therefore, argues Berkovits, to

modify belief in the immutability of God is to threaten the perfection of God (p. 202f.). This isn't so: it simply means that perfection does not necessarily include immutability.

There is another curious argument in Berkovits' attack that deserves attention. Heschel would concede, of course, that when we attribute pathos to God, we do not mean to create His Image in our own: God's pathos is qualitatively other than our pathos. Dr. Berkovits bristles:

Those "greater and better men" than Maimonides, to whom the *Ravad* refers in a famous passage, who believed that God existed in bodily form, knew Him of course as the Creator of heaven and earth, superhuman and transcendent. If God had bodily form it was of course Divine and not human, just as, in Dr. Heschel's defense of anthropopathy, God's pathos is Divine not human . . . They imagined that by refining and elevating concepts derived from human experience one could reach the Infinite . . . The essence of Maimonides' criticism of the positive attributes of God is that all our concepts are derived from our finite experience . . . (p. 196).

This proves that Heschel doesn't agree with Maimonides. But does not the very existence of the "great and better" men indicate possibilities worth exploring (to say nothing of sophisticated philosophers like Gersonides and Crescas, who found the Maimonidean theory inadequate to our religious language)?⁵

To sum up: Heschel is valuable, even according to Berkovits, because he has made us aware of the

Modern Jewish Philosophy: Fossil or Ferment?

need to deal with the question of God as Absolute, who is nevertheless involved with the world He has created.

What of Heschel's doctrine of prophecy—that the prophet participates in the Divine pathos? If Heschel's treatment of the Divine pathos itself is flawed, it is obvious that his treatment of prophecy would be vitiated too. But if Heschel can establish the validity or need for his analysis of prophecy, one would be compelled to set philosophical qualms aside, and re-examine the notion of Divine pathos. One can explore this opening in several possible ways:

1. The very concept of prophecy depends upon the Divine pathos.
2. The experience of prophecy, as described by normative sources, presumes Divine pathos, and possibly prophetic participation in it.
3. Divine pathos is described explicitly in classical sources, thus vindicating Heschel's reliance on his formulations.

The first possibility sets out from the perennial difficulty of explaining exactly "how" God communicates with the prophet. But, as Heschel himself asserts:

What quality or capacity was there in the prophets that enabled them to hear the voice of God? In truth, however, there is no explanation . . . Nor is the theory of sympathy able to unveil the mystery . . . It is not through sympathy that the prophet learns of the Divine pathos, for the latter must already be known in some way if the prophet is to share it.⁶

Thus Heschel's claim for prophetic

sympathy must rest upon some conviction that the theory somehow describes the phenomenon of prophecy adequately.

Heschel believes that the religion of sympathy explains the extreme bitterness and anger expressed by the prophets: the prophet is identifying with the Divine wrath. Berkovits vigorously disputes Heschel: if the prophetic wrath is otherwise unexplainable, what of the Divine wrath? Is God's anger not even more inexplicable? And if God's anger is viewed as metaphorical, why not the prophets? For that matter, why not understand the Divine pathos as no more than a metaphor? He states:

One can see that Dr. Heschel does not relish the idea of an angry God but, at least intellectually, he rather appreciates the thought of a suffering God (p. 200).

Likewise Heschel argues that *da'at ha-Shem* should not be understood as "knowledge" but as "sympathy." While *Yada'* certainly means more than purely abstract knowledge, it does not necessarily mean "sympathy" with God in Heschel's sense.⁷

The most interesting example of "prophetic sympathy" in the sources, one already cited against Dr. Berkovits when the article first appeared,⁸ is undoubtedly the Talmudic discussion of Hosea (*Pesahim* 87a-b):

Hosea should have said: "They are your sons . . . have mercy on them." Not only did he not say this but he said: "Lord of the universe: the world is Yours; exchange them for another nation." Said the Holy One: "What shall I do with

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

this old man: I will tell him to take a wayward wife and father children of waywardness and then I will tell him: Send her away. If he can send her off I will also send away Israel . . ." Hosea said: "I have children by her; I cannot get rid of her or divorce her!" Said the Holy One: "If your wife is a whore and your children may be yours and may be anothers, what of Israel the sons of Abraham . . ."

According to Heschel, the prophet is taught to sympathize with God's pathos. Just as God, as it were, is committed to his love of Israel, so the prophet, through his tragic experience, learns to identify sympathetically with the Divine pathos. The standard attack on Heschel would maintain that Hosea is not taught sympathy for God but greater sympathy for Israel.

In order to untangle this situation, it is necessary to distinguish between *sympathy with* someone and *sympathy for* someone.⁹ If, for example, a friend of mine gives a failing grade to a student he likes, I will sympathize *with* my colleague, but *for* the student. The original suffering belongs to the student; the suffering of my colleague is a response to it. My own reaction is a response to the student's situation (although my only data about the student may be that which is provided by my colleague). I imagine the student's pathos, and something within me twitches in sympathy *for* him in his plight. Because I assume or recognize a similar response in my colleague, I am entitled to claim sympathy *with* him (only if my colleague's reaction is so drastic as to constitute a suffering in its own

right, independent of the origin, would I speak of sympathy *for* him). In the case of Hosea, using my terminology, the prophet sympathizes *with* God's pathos *for* Israel, as a result of the prophet's having learnt sympathy because he had sympathy *for* his wife. It will be noted that to have sympathy *for* God requires the Divine nature to be passible to man in a way that sympathy *with* God does not. Sympathy with God indicates an analogy between God's pathos and man's; sympathy for God implies that the prophet somehow "clothes himself" in the Divine pathos—a much more difficult concept. Heschel seems committed to the view that the prophet experiences sympathy *for* God; the Talmudic discussion speaks of sympathy *with* God.

In fairness to either Heschel or Berkovits or myself, one should note that Heschel's language is not consistently rigorous, to say the least. At times it would even appear that the prophet's assumption of the Divine pathos means simply that his ultimate concerns are those of God, that he has abdicated, *qua* prophet, his finite personality, politics, etc. This is a much more modest claim.

Lastly, as we move from the doctrine of prophecy back to the Divine pathos itself, we must deal with sources which seem to speak of a Divine emotional involvement with the world. Even in Kabbalistic literature, Dr. Berkovits asserts, anthropathic language is balanced by an unwavering insistence on the impassibility of God, and even the anthropathisms are restrained:

Modern Jewish Philosophy: Fossil or Ferment?

not "the Divine pain" but "the sorrow on high."

In at least one case, Dr. Berkovits' reading must be disputed, or at least qualified: speaking of the sorrow of the *Shekhinah* (*Sanhedrin*, 46a), Berkovits claims that the term *Shekhinah* which replaces "God" indicates "how strongly rooted in the Jewish consciousness is the thought of God's impassibility (p. 218). Dr. Berkovits is undoubtedly influenced here by the use of the term *Shekhinah* by the Aramaic translations to weaken anthropomorphic implications of Biblical phrases. Apart from doubts as to the integrity of the published text,¹⁰ it is also unlikely that *Shekhinah* serves simply as substitute for "God." Professor Urbach, in his study of rabbinic theology,¹¹ interprets the term *Shekhinah* as an expression indicating God's presence in the community; its use as a substitute for "God" in anthropomorphic situations is understandable on the basis of a positive function of the word.

VI

What conclusions can we draw from this erudite collection? Dr.

Berkovits has demonstrated many characteristic errors of modern Jewish philosophers; but what of philosophy? Shall we abstain from philosophizing and theologizing until an impeccable ontology is worked out? Thank God, *rishonim* were not that fastidious. Shall we concentrate on historical scholarship? But how shall we then respond to the very special challenges and experiences of each new generation? Perhaps all that men like Rosenzweig could accomplish is to articulate their own experiences, and in linking them to the philosophical tradition, participate in it. But even then philosophy cannot deteriorate into autobiography, analysis cannot be replaced by disguised assertion, or honest examination by sentimentality. And books like this, therefore, will still be needed and welcomed.

One might suggest, though, that the book would be even more useful if Dr. Berkovits had also applied his critical faculties to major Orthodox thinkers of our time, to men like Rav Kuk and Rabbi Soloveitchik, or even Samson Rafael Hirsch. One would look forward to this deficiency being remedied.

NOTES

1. *God, Man and History: A Jewish Interpretation* (New York, 1959), p. 161, n. 23.
2. See Buber's *On Zion* (Schocken, 1974: reprint of *Israel and Palestine*); how difficult this conviction is to communicate is evident in Buber's letter to Gandhi (in *Pointing the Way*, New York, 1956).
3. Correspondence in *Judaism*, Winter 1975, pp. 115-6.
4. P. 55f and chapter VII.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

5. On the intent of the *Ravad's* statement see I. Twersky: *Rabad of Posquieres* (Harvard, 1962), pp. 192ff. Cf. H. A. Wolfson on this question in *JQR* LVI (1965).

6. A. J. Heschel: *The Prophets* (Harper & Row, 1962; paper, 1971), Vol. II, p. 91.

7. On "Knowledge of God" in the Bible, cf. Berkovits' *Man and God: Studies in Biblical Theology*, pp. 54 ff. Berkovits does not distinguish between *da'at E-lohim* and *da'at ha-Shem*.

In general one must complain that Berkovits has not referred to his later relevant work in the notes. Nor in his discussion of Cohen does he refer to the now available English translation of Cohen.

8. See exchange of letters in *TRADITION*, Fall 1964. I have been unable to identify the Prof. Vervotim cited by Dr. Berkovits' critic as an authority.

9. This distinction is familiar from Scheler's *The Nature of Sympathy*: I do not know that I am making it in the same way. It should be noted that most social scientists would define sympathy in such a way that, contrary to Scheler, the sympathizer would enjoy nothing like direct access to the mind of the other. It would be highly desirable to resolve the question of our relations to other human minds before one attempted to deal with our relation to the Divine pathos. Many Wittgensteinians deny that mental events can be accessible to any descriptive language. Cf. Heschel, *ibid.*, p. 93f.

10. See *Dikdukei Sofrim*, *ad. loc.* and Y. N. Epstein: *Introduction to Mishnah Text*, p. 87. Berkovits' text, by the way, should read *Sukkah* 45a instead of *Megillah*.

11. *Hazzal: Pirkei Emunot veDeot* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 32f and 50, n. 94.