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ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF MAN

The subject of the following discourse is, as the title itself points out, the anthropology of Heschel. Considering the fact that Heschel is in general unknown in Poland, I shall take the liberty to make known, in short, some pieces of information about him.

Heschel was born in Warsaw, Poland on January 11th 1907. After graduating from the Gymnasium in Wilno he started his studies at Friedrich Wilhelm Universität, Berlin. At the Berlin University he studied at the Philosophy Department and, additionally, he took up studies in the sphere of Semitic Philosophy and History of Art. In 1937 Heschel was chosen by Martin Buber as his successor at *Mittelstelle für Jüdische Erwachsenen-Bildung* in Frankfurt on the Main. In October he was arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Poland together with all the Jews of Polish nationality. After returning to Warsaw he taught philosophy and biblical sciences at the Institute of Jewish Studies. Six weeks before the German aggression against Poland he left for England and then for the United States where he stayed until his death. He was the Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Except for his didactical activity, our philosopher did not neglect creative work. As time went on he was becoming a more and more well-known and appreciated intellectualist and social worker in America. His activity went far beyond the boundaries of the Jewish world. He is author of several books, including *Maimonides: Eine Biographie* (1935), *Man Is*

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Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion (1951), *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (1955), *Who Is Man?* (1965), *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (1966), *A Passion for Truth* (1973).

The philosophy of Heschel represents a trend which is, in a way, unpopular in America and uncompromising, as it is both the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of Judaism. In his intellectual struggle with the reality Heschel reaches for the absolute truth from which springs out, as a logical necessity, the way of human existence. His philosophy, as every philosophy of Judaism, is the philosophy of religion and that is why it is intermingled with the idea of realizing the truth whose source is God. For Heschel the starting point is an argument, based on ontological foundations, that the source of every historical development is the Creator acting through man. His actions occur and His goals are put into practice in the history of an individual and in history in general. History so understood is a mystical union between man and God. At its basis there lies a mystery which cannot be penetrated to the end by human mind devoid of faith. Human life is not, according to Heschel, given only objectively and empirically, it is a mystery. Judaism, just like Christianity, is to the highest degree historical, for it is the manifestation of God in history. That explains the presence of great dynamism in Heschel's philosophy, resulting from the Jewish idea of singleness and uniqueness of man's actions, God's actions and all historical events, which was alien to the ancient world. In the consciousness of Judaism there appears a thought that the essence of every possible human development is an act that took place once, a single act, unique and incomparable. It is a historical and metaphysical act, thus reaching the inmost depths of life. In this manner the history of the world and human life reflects the great drama of love and freedom. In this freedom the unknown quantity of human existence is inherited.

As we see, it is man that turns out to be the main subject of Heschel's philosophy. His philosophical anthropology is basically the theory of authentic human existence. For him being human is the primary fact and the central topic of anthropology. The basic anthropological category is not entity, but existence. The reason for such a preference seems to be imbedded in his principal observation that man remains invariably and independently a human being, although he is not always human. That is why the problem bears basically on being human and manifests itself in it.

With regard to all sorts of anthropologies with an existential bias, we can single out, depending on whether we choose one or another aspect of human existence, an interpersonalistic philosophy of man (M. Buber)

and a personalistic philosophy of man (K. Wojtyła). A sort of paradox is the fact, that Heschel seems to be closer to the Wojtyła's concept than that of Buber's, in spite of suggesting reasons for the opposite opinion.

However, it is difficult to give a supplementing, univocal definition of or to name Heschel's anthropology. Sometimes his philosophy is referred to as depth philosophy, and his philosophy of man as depth anthropology. Sometimes Heschel himself uses the word 'depth' with reference to his philosophy, explaining at the same time how this term should be understood. In accordance with our philosopher's intention, the depth anthropology refers to the philosophy of man which deals with the category of being human contrary to the traditional anthropology, which concentrates on the category of human being. If being, due to its substantial character, is easier to grasp, being human is difficult to penetrate, although it is the very thing that should be the area of searching for the essence of man. The goal of depth anthropology is not setting a doctrine, but uncovering some roots of our being, set in motion by the final question. Its subject is being as *status nescendi*. In Heschel's opinion, expressed in reflection on man, it is not only necessary to explore the surfacebeing, but also to get an insight into the interior of man – into his being. As Merkle put it, „the authentic understanding of man will be the privilege of those who will go below the surface of human being and discover its depth”. In Heschel's depth philosophy the question is, first of all, the furthest possible attainment of the depth of being, of a peculiar substratum, from which aspects of human being grow, since human existence has its roots somewhere. Depth philosophy is not characterized only by the fact that it makes being its subject of examination (it seems to be characteristic of all philosophies with an existential bias), but by coming at the final and deepest foundation of being, from which typical ways of human being can be developed.

The purpose of the following discourse is to show Heschel's anthropological views against the background of his philosophy of religion, which has its basis in the philosophy of Judaism. It is not only a question of delivering an orderly lecture on the basic categories, of reconstructing the concept of man, but also of revealing and analysing the rules that form its basis. The nature of this dissertation is historical, although it sometimes touches upon a systematic plane. For that reason the choice of the topic is not accidental. The problem of man has become the main issue of this work for a few reasons. Firstly, the problem of man constitutes the essential part of all Heschel's philosophy and, in Friedman's opinion, it is the most comprehensible and convincing achievement of his philosophy. Secondly, according to our philosopher, it is just this question that seems to be the most essential one in

philosophical investigation as well as in education. Thirdly, Heschel's uneasiness about the contemporary theories of man in science and philosophy is not isolated. The anthropological crisis, which is the crisis of the lost identity of man, did not spare pre-war Poland. Also today the social, economical, political and religious life, for the bewildered and confused by 'newness' Poles, is becoming more and more irrational and resembles an area of personality outspread between science and faith. Philosophy, whose task is, among other things, consolidation of the reality in which man lives, should be the source of the theoretical foundations required to understand the world and oneself. For that reason it cannot fail to take into consideration the spiritual dimension, although in the theoretical sense it would be easier, because man is a religious creature. In his anthropology Heschel goes, to some extent, against the tendency negating the necessity of a relationship between man and religion. The present work tries to show the way in which Heschel tried to justify the conviction about a human being as a religious being. Thus the aim of this work is not exactly the promotion of Heschel's philosophical ideas in Poland, but rather to point out and bring nearer in Polish conditions the specific and extremely interesting anthropological views of an outstanding representative of the contemporary Jewish philosophy.

In the case of Heschel it has a specific significance. Heschel was born in Warsaw, which was the place of his intellectual and spiritual development. Despite his life in distant America, he remained, in his way of thinking and in his creations, a European philosopher and a Polish orthodox Jew. In this way his thoughts come back to Poland, how very different Poland, but still marked by the wealth of Jewish orthodoxy. Besides, Heschel's philosophy has its value in the sphere of Christian-Jewish or Polish-Jewish dialogue. In the hitherto dialogue much room has been occupied by historical and theological matters, whereas philosophical problems, which should have formed the basis for a broad dialogue, have been generally ignored or underestimated. A rational reflection on man is a perfect location for an encounter of the two cultures and two religions because „we are not always united by faith, but the fact that we are humans. And the boundaries of religion are where man is”. Heschel's anthropology, broadly open to the transcendental dimension of reality and taking into account the situation of man, is a distinct confirmation of his conviction that, above all, we are united by the common concern for human being.

So far, the author himself and his philosophy have been unknown in Poland. For that reason, there are no Polish-language critical analyses about it, and some few articles which were published in European countries have a general and highly theological nature. All publications

with reference to Heschel's ideas took place mainly in the United States. Despite great interest in Heschel's philosophy in America, it is difficult to find in the literature dealing with philosophy positions which would be a systematic and academic elaboration. Most of them refer to questions connected either with the tradition of Judaism or with Jewish theology and, in general, do not go beyond an immanent presentation of selected opinions of Heschel's. Only selected works by Penman, Clarke and Merkle deserve our attention. The aforementioned authors, notwithstanding their chiefly theological interests, separated the essential categories in Heschel's philosophy and made the first analyses of our philosopher's method. Their works are characterised by a methodological order and a high degree of understanding of Heschel's ideas. However, systematisation of Heschel's views remains an open question. The presented work is merely a modest beginning of becoming acquainted with his philosophy in Poland and an attempt to grasp his ideas in the field of the philosophy of man.

The author of this work makes use of the analytical synthetic method. Heschel was not a systematician, that is why the analyses made by him often have a reconstructive character aiming at defining the unexplained (at least not till the end) opinions of the author's, on the grounds of those which he expressed in a clear and unequivocal way. In the course of the presentation an effort has been made to compare Heschel's ideas with the ideas of other philosophers, in order to point to their genetical context and their merits. An attempt has been made to elucidate Heschel's opinions in the context of commonly accepted philosophical and historically-philosophical terms. Sometimes it proved quite difficult, and even impossible, considering the original, in a philosophical respect, metaphorical language which is characteristic of Jewish way of thinking, connected very often with the poetic style of Heschel's. Taking into consideration the shortage of Polish translations of his works and the above difficulties, the writer was compelled to make a Polish translation of the quoted excerpts and to match Polish names to English terms, which sometimes bordered on neologism. If commonly accepted equivalents of English names already existed in Polish philosophical literature, they were usually approved and used at work; but if such linguistic analogues were not found, then the rule of semantic faithfulness rather than lexical fidelity was employed.

The work consists of five chapters. Chapters one and two play a supplementary role to characterise the main topic of our deliberation. Although they may seem to go beyond the framework of our interests, yet without them Heschel's anthropology would in a way come to a sudden pause and be left in a vacuum, devoid of its reference.

The first chapter explains the controversy related to the philosophy of Judaism and reveals the way of thinking characteristic of this philosophy. Thus it has been demonstrated that it is a philosophy which makes use of a different, in relation to Western philosophy, manner of arguing and speaking. Although this philosophy has also derived benefit from all philosophy, still some elements are unacceptable for it (e.g. Greek notion of God as an Unmoved Mover or the use of definitions). The relationship between the philosophy of Judaism and Western philosophy consists much more in osmosis than assimilation. For that reason it seems incorrect to interpret its contents only basing oneself on the frame of Western ideas which may sometimes turn out to be insufficient and improper. Jewish philosophy does not stand in opposition to Western philosophy, but, on the grounds of the conclusions that have been arrived at not only in the following discourse, it shows oneself as an attempt to reach selfunderstanding within one's own religious tradition. Heschel shows himself as the most characteristic contemporary representative of this philosophy. That is why it was necessary to explain the method used by our philosopher, which proved to be a broadened or transgressed phenomenological method, and to characterise the basic and characteristic of Heschel's categories: care, radical amusement, inexpressibility, mystery, polarity, on the strength of which his philosophy of man is built.

The second chapter shows the role played in Heschel's thought by ontological assumption. This is the very assumption on which all the anthropological argumentation is based. Our author goes from the feeling of certainty towards the certainty of God's existence. This transition is not the transition from an idea to reality, but just an ontological assumption. The certainty of the reality of God has its source in the reaction of the whole person to the mystery and transcendence of human life.

In the third chapter close attention has been paid to the way in which Heschel's analyses pertaining to man are made. He did not agree with any naturalistic, psychological and learned concepts which reduce man to the level of a machine or an animal. Likewise, his analyses do not refer to the substantial basis of man's existence, to human entity. Because of searching for „profoundness” in his anthropology, he turns towards the existence of man. For Heschel man is a polar notion, which includes both human being and being human. Any being without entity is not possible since being is always being of something or someone. Human being is a completely distinguishable being in relation to being of other beings. The difference is not a quantitative one, but a qualitative one, manifesting itself in a suitable for a human being way of existence. Being human, not human being, is

the main subject of Heschel's philosophy of man. It is being human that is, according to him, most problematic and, at the same time, most important among a number of questions concerning a human being. In this chapter it has also been shown that Heschel in his phenomenological descriptions pays attention to the characteristic features of man's existence, in order to emphasise their significance and problems connected with them. The basic anthropological questions: Who is man? has been in Heschel's philosophy reduced to the question: What is man like? In what way does human being manifest its being human?

In Heschel's opinion, the phenomenological method is enough to understand what man is; in order to understand what man means, it is necessary to go beyond this method, because the existence of a human being can be known only when it suspends its indifference towards its own existence and the existence of other beings, including God. Human being, due to its relationship with the immanent world of things, oscillates towards possession; being human, because of the ability to transcend the world of matter, oscillates towards meaning. The vectors of these two aspirations are not very often in line, that is why human fate is set by their resultant. The fact that Heschel set of the meaning of the problem of being serves the purpose of making known the truth that being human demands for its meaning, and the anthropological reflection should also include the problem of meaning. Chapter four shows the interpretation of Heschel's meaning of being human, which in turn helped to state that he gives a priority to „meaning” ahead of „possession”, which, in Wojtyła's language, means *to be* ahead of *to have*. This priority does not depreciate the connection of man with the world of things – otherwise indispensable – but indicates the priority of meaning or being ahead of possession for man, and the impropriety of closing oneself in an immanent reality, and the threat of reducing human existence to endless multiplication of possession. As Heschel once said, man's anxiety results much more from the fear of being without meaning, of life without sense, than from the fear of not-being. The final meaning as an idea is not an answer to man's anxiety. Likewise, nature cannot pretend to the role of the determinant of the sense of being human, because it is immanent and impersonal. Similarly, man cannot look for support either in himself or in society. The ultimate meaning for being human is, according to Heschel, only a transcendental and final reality, namely God.

The fifth chapter has been dedicated to Heschel's main anthropological thought, that is the authentic human existence. An effort has been made to portray the way in which Heschel showed and validated the specific and typical being human, which our philosopher regarded as fully human. Heschel not only pointed to the requirements which are

the necessary prelude to being human, and whose lack of fulfilment makes genuine human being unattainable, but he also revealed the basic ways of being human which, in a way, are the continuation of the authentic existence of person. The manner of being human is not, according to our philosopher, an accidental and free imposition, but the necessary way of a person's realization, because the lack of proper and suitable being results in the fact that being of human being admittedly still remains a sort of being, but certainly not of human kind.

On the basis of the analyses made by Heschel being human can be characterised by means of a multiple identity. Being human = being, which happens (is not a process) = personal being, i.e. rational and free = chance being, i.e. created = moral being connected with normativeness of truth = being open to transcendentness = being sensitive to what is unutterable = being with the awareness fear = being aware of God's pathos = religious being = being the partner of God = being the symbol or the picture of God. Only by observance of the aforementioned identities, whose scopes sometimes overlap, will man be able, according to Heschel, to achieve his humanity and to realise himself in the personal dimension. At first he argues that 'being human', as described by him, is possible for human being; then he points out that this possibility becomes an obligation; and an obligation, by virtue of reason and will, becomes the current. If being human is to be really human, then, what is possible, necessary and brought up to date, becomes a necessity. The quantifier „I can” turns into „I should”, and this one in turn into the quantifier „I must”. In other words, man must meet certain conditions in order not to depart from his humanity. Man's freedom, whose putting into practice depends on powers of reason and will, manifests itself in being human. Thus the freedom of a human being is nothing else but the realisation of the truth deciphered by man. On the other hand, deciphering the truth by human being is a separate problem. It is so because we can experience the same thing, but our experiences do not have to be the same. It is quite possible. The anthropological rule in Heschel's philosophy of man can be formulated as follows: the more human human being is, the more it approaches God's being; the more inhuman human being is, the more it approaches animal being.

The philosophy of man proposed by Heschel is not a comprehensive vision of the problem. It certainly lacks a reflection on the substantial aspect of the basis of being of a human being (a consideration of the second field of the fundamental anthropological polarity), thus on the analyses concerning being. However, it is not a conscious attitude and our author's intentional attitude towards the problems of man. As he himself said, his concept is due to serve as a supplement of those

philosophies which concentrate on the category of human being. This aspect seemed to him to be broadly discussed, while human being still remains covered with the mist of unawareness and uncertainty, and this is what is most problematic for our philosopher and it determines the greatness and the littleness of man. Man remains human being always and independently, but whether or not he is being human depends most of all on him. The thing that sticks out most of all from Heschel's anthropological concept resolves itself into the conviction that every man has his depth which cannot be omitted in the philosophical considerations by reducing it to the physical or mental dimension, depriving him of the spiritual dimension or minimizing it arid, at the same time, making little account of man's concealed question: what for and why? Heschel's philosophy of man is just a compact and convincing answer to these questions, though only one of the possible answers.

One of the objections raised to the philosophy of the author being the subject of our discussion is the fact that it cannot be commonly accepted. This objection is justified but at the same time unjustified. This is so because one should ask whether any philosophy can be accepted by everyone. Heschel's philosophy was born through experiencing the reality of God. One has to experience the presence of God to become open to understanding and accepting the ultimate truth of life. For that reason the demurrer that Heschel's views are completely unacceptable to agnostics and atheists is justified and quite obvious. Nevertheless, according to the same principle, the philosophies which are based on ontological foundations (frequently hidden) about non-existence of God are unacceptable to those people who see and interpret in quite a different manner, who believe in God. Heschel's proposal does not resolve all existential problems. What it certainly does is throwing much light, which makes it possible to see a human being from a slightly different perspective. If it even does not give an answer to the ultimate questions, his philosophy, to some extent, succeeds in calling back the answers to the ultimate questions, which concern all people, to the consciousness of contemporary man. It also makes evident the fact that man's freedom makes being human a unique, exceptional and unstable drama from which there is no escape. Every human being has to raise a glass of the divine nectar of life, but not every one has to empty it to the last drop, to the very consummation, because twixt cup and lip there is many a slip.

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