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## Being and Meaning

*"Ever more patients complain of what they call an 'inner void,' and that is the reason why I have termed this condition the 'existential vacuum.'" "The etiology of the existential vacuum seems to me to be a consequence of the following facts. First, in contrast to an animal, no drives and instincts tell man what he must do. Second, in contrast to former times, no conventions, traditions, and values tell him what he should do; and often he does not even know what he basically wishes to do."[1] - Viktor Frankl*

In this essay I will support Frankl's etiological assessment of the existential vacuum by laying bare the fact that it was the pulling apart of *is* and *ought* in the Western tradition that opened its existential vacuum. Then, by comparing and contrasting Hasidic Jewish ontology and Western ontologies, I will go further by showing that radical individualism is the reason that the existential vacuum has not been mended in the West. To commence the analysis I will introduce fundamental tenets of Heideggerian ontology (the assumption is that the reader already has some familiarity with it). Then I will build off of this foundation to provide an ontological analysis of Tanya, (a foundational Hasidic text). With an understanding of the ontology of Hasidism I will consequently unpack the meaning of Jewish being. Then I will introduce the is-ought problem and show how it is connected to Heideggerian ontology. From there I will unpack the meaning of Western beings as it appears in Heidegger's *Being and Time* and the scholarship of Viktor Frankl. With an understanding of Jewish and Western ontologies having been developed, I will conclude by turning our attention to the differences and similarities between the origins of Jewish and Western meaning respectively.

### In the Beginning

"She [Eve] ate… and he [Adam] ate. And the eyes of both of them were opened… [now] having the ability to know good and evil."[2] I will show that the ontology underlying Hasidic thought is encapsulated in this quote from chapter three of Bereshit. Before this claim can be

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[1] Frankl, V. (2014). *The Will to Meaning* (pp. 61). PLUME. (Original work published 1969).
[2] Bereshit - Genesis - Chapter 3. (n.d.). Chabad. https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8167/jewish/Chapter-3.htm

demonstrated, some preparation is needed. The necessity of this preparation follows from Dr. Isaacs' scholarship, which suggests that Hasidic thought is based on a philosophical foundation largely unfamiliar to Western audiences.[3] He claims, and I agree, that Hasidic thought is not founded on what I will call 'epistemic ontology' which grounds the existence of things in our cognitive processes, but rather Hasidic thought is founded on what I will call 'phenomenol ontology' (short for phenomenological ontology) which grounds the existence of things in one's 'thrownness' (being aware). Heidegger is the first person in canonized Western philosophy to develop a robust phenomenol ontology, therefore Heideggerian ontology is a good bridge between Western thought and Jewish Hasidic thought. It is for this reason, following Dr. Isaacs' approach, that we will use Heideggerian language to interpret Tanya.

**The Fundamentals of Phenomenol Ontology**

A critical difference between phenomenol ontology and epistemic ontology is the relationship between language and truth. In phenomenol ontology "the statement is not the primary 'locus' of truth, but the *other way around;* the statement as a mode of appropriation of discoveredness and as a way of being-in-the-world is based on discovering."[4] Truth is not to be understood as a condition of a proposition. A sentence, which is itself an inner-worldly-being simply indicates a different inner-worldly-being. Upon Dasein's being-with that other inner-worldly-being we say it has been revealed/discovered. "Being-true means to-be-discovering."[5] That inner-worldly-being which the sentence indicates is what is true, because it is revealed as a mode of Dasein's being. As a consequence "before Newton[,] his laws were neither true nor false," they became true as they "became accessible for Dasein."[4] This is not to say Newton's laws did not exist before Dasein's being-with them; it only says they were not discovered nor concealed. To summarize, in phenomenol ontology, language is revelatory/conciliatory rather than epistemically true/false. If a sentence is revelatory, the content of revelation is the truth, the sentence as an inner-worldly-being merely indicates that which is revealed (that which is true).

One of the goals of phenomenol ontology is to understand the structural whole of 'being'. Although Hasidism and Heidegger disagree about what this structural whole is, the methodology

[3] Isaacs, A. (2022). [Lecture notes on Heidegger and Jewish Thought].
[4] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 217). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).
[5] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 210). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).

for coming to understand the structural whole is the same. It is not analytic cognition like in epistemic ontology. Instead, Dasein must ascertain what can be gleaned about the structural whole of being based on the inner-worldly-beings made accessible to Dasein, which are understood to be constrictions of the structural whole. As Heidegger puts it, "thrownness is the mode of being of a being which always is itself its possibilities in such a way that it understands itself in them and in terms of them [the possibilities]." We come to understand our thrownness (our being conscious) in terms of the contents of consciousness. At the same time as we must understand the structural whole in terms of inner-worldly-beings, "the phenomenal *manifoldness* of the constitution of the structural whole … can … easily distort the unified phenomenological view of the whole as such."[6] This is saying that, when Dasein is in the mode of being-with inner-worldly-beings, parts of the structural whole are consequently concealed and made inaccessible to Dasein. An analogy that might be useful is that, in phenomenol ontology, we are trying to reconstruct the forest from the trees. Just like how by looking into the greater details of an individual tree - its bark, the bugs, its leaves, etc - you lose further sight of the forest, being-with inner-worldly-beings will conceal from Dasein parts of the structural whole. We must be careful not to take the analogy too literally because it is not that being-with specific inner-worldly-being makes us lose sight of the whole per se, but that inner-worldly-beings are themselves constricted manifestations of the whole. In Hasidism this idea is called *tzimtzum.*

**Phenomenol Ontology in Tanya**

A crucial difference between Hasidism and Heidegger is that for Heidegger the structural whole is Dasein whereas in Hasidism the structural whole is the Ein Sof. In *Being and Time* Dasein tries to come to be-with Dasein by laying bare Dasein's own being-with inner-worldly-beings (constrictions) whereas in Tanya it is "G‑d [the Ein Sof that] can be described … by means of numerous 'contractions' (tzimtzumim)."[7] We will unpack the implications of this difference later. For now we will continue to build off of the phenomenol ontological foundation we have so far outlined to explain the notion of the Ein Sof and the relationship of Nefeshot (souls) to the Ein Sof.

[6] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 175). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).
[7] Zalman of Liadi, S. (1998). "Likutei Amarim Chapter 2." *Lessons in Tanya: The Tanya of R. Shnuer Zalman of Liadi.* (Y. Wineberg, Trans.). Kehot Publication society. (Original work published 1796)

There "are two *nefashot.*"[7] "One soul [nefesh] originates in the kelipah…, *[the] nefesh of the flesh, … from [which] stems all the evil characteristics"*[8] and "the second, uniquely Jewish, soul is truly 'a part of G-d above.'"[7] We can understand the concept of soul as simply a mode of being-in-the-world. The first soul, sometimes called Nefesh HaBahamis, which originates in Kelipah, is the "animal soul".[9] "Kelipah means a 'peel'."[10] The Nefesh HaBahamis is to be understood as the mode of being-in-the-world in which Dasein is concerned with matters of the flesh, the human 'peel', and the physical world (sex, food, shelter, etc). In itself, the Nefesh HaBahamis is not bad; people need to eat. To say that this soul is the source of evil characteristics is simply to reveal the tendency of human beings to succumb to evil because of concerns of the body (for example gluttony, rape, and stealing). Remember, propositions are not to be understood epistemically as true, they are supposed to be revelatory.

The second soul, what is often called the "Nefesh HoElokis" is the "G-dly soul."[9] When someone lives according to their Nefesh HoElokis, they are in a mode of being-in-the-world in which they are concerned about spiritual matters. In the Jewish context this can mean studying Torah, praying, or carrying out mitzvot. The division between Nefesh HaBahamis and Nefesh HoElokis is just one division of the modes of being-in-the-world (souls).

There is also the division of the soul into "nefesh, ruach, and neshamah…[which] all are derived … [from] chochmah ilaah (supernal wisdom)".[11] The chochmah ilaah is a particular way of talking about G-d; it is the constriction of the Ein Sof.  From chochmah ilaah comes those modes of Dasein's being-in-the-world in which Dasein is concerned with different levels of being. "Nefesh… is awareness of [and concerned with] the physical body and the physical world [inner-worldly-beings]."[12] Ruach is the mode of being-with a passionate attunement like "love and awe of G-d."[12] Neshama is the mode of being concerned with "the concept of continuous creation (the coming-into-being)."[12] Neshama is most similar to Dasein being in the mode of being-with its own thrownness. However, Neshama does not understand Neshama as the source

[8] Zalman of Liadi, S. (1998). "Likutei Amarim Chapter 1." *Lessons in Tanya: The Tanya of R. Shnuer Zalman of Liadi.* (Y. Wineberg, Trans.). Kehot Publication society. (Original work published 1796)

[9] Kremnizer, R. (n.d.). *Nefesh HaBahamis (Animal Soul) Nefesh HoElokis (G-dly Soul).* Chabad. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/80970/jewish/Nefesh-HaBahamis-Animal-Soul-Nefesh-HoElokis-G-dly-Soul.htm

[10] Dubov, N. D. (n.d.). *Kelipot and Sitra Achra.* Chabad. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/361900/jewish/Kelipot-and-Sitra-Achra.htm

[11] Zalman of Liadi, S. (1998). "Likutei Amarim Chapter 2." *Lessons in Tanya: The Tanya of R. Shnuer Zalman of Liadi.* (Y. Wineberg, Trans.). Kehot Publication society. (Original work published 1796)

[12] Miller, M.. (n.d.). *Neshamah: Levels of Soul Consciousness.* Chabad. https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/380651/jewish/Neshamah-Levels-of-Soul-Consciousness.htm

of its own being, whereas Dasein in *Being and Time* understands Dasein's existence as a consequence of Dasein's being-with Dasein. Instead, Neshama is the mode of being in which one contemplates the "coming into being from [both] nothingness" and the Ein Sof, of which Neshama is but a constriction.[13] There is an ascending hierarchy to these souls (modes of being-in-the-world) based on the proximity one gets to the Ein Sof: Nefesh, Ruach, and highest is Neshama.

**The Meaning of Jewish Being**

Now that we have set up a fair amount of the ontological structure of Hasidic thought (the structure of the modes of souls and their relation to the totality of being) we can explain how Hasidism interprets the meaning of being (in particular Jewish being). In phenomenol ontology, the meaning of being is the realization of the mode of being-in-the-world which one should strive to be. A larger discussion explaining where this definition comes from will be presented later when the topic of meaning is specifically addressed.

In chapter 31 of Tanya, it is explained that "within me [or any Jew], there is a veritable 'part' of G-d… it is only that … the divine soul [Nefesh HoElokis] is in exile… therefore, I will make it my entire aim and desire to extricate it from this exile… as it was before being clothed in my body, when it was completely absorbed in G-d's light and united with Him."[14] In Hasidic ontology, the Nefesh HoElokis is housed within the HaBahamis, the body soul. The structure is similar to how authentic Dasein is covered over/ concealed by inauthentic Dasein. The G-dly soul is understood to be in exile and in need of return through aliyah to its source. The exile-redemption narrative holds a special thematic role in Jewish thought. After being slaves in exile in Egypt, the people of Israel, led by their greatest prophet (Moses), return to Israel. During the path of ascension (aliyah) back to the holy land, the people of Israel receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. This is the moment that binds them to G-d as a nation. To return the Nefesh HoElokis from exile in the body, one must also make aliyah up the levels of Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshama. In order to make this ascension one must, in parallel to Exodus, receive the Torah anew by "concentrat[ing] all … [their] aspirations on the Torah and the mitzvot."[13]

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[13] Miller, M.. (n.d.). *Neshamah: Levels of Soul Consciousness.* Chabad. https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/380651/jewish/Neshamah-Levels-of-Soul-Consciousness.htm

[14] Zalman of Liadi, S. (1998). "Likutei Amarim Chapter 31." *Lessons in Tanya: The Tanya of R. Shnuer Zalman of Liadi.* (Y. Wineberg, Trans.). Kehot Publication society. (Original work published 1796)

Upon eating from the tree of *knowledge*, Adam and Eve became conscious (= con + scire = with knowledge) and gained the ability to know good and evil, what we might call 'becoming *conscience'* (= con + scire = with knowledge).[15, 16] Their first concern upon becoming 'with knowledge' was matters of the flesh, their nakedness and then the need to be clothed. This represents how the Nefesh HoElokis is clothed within the Kelipah (the peel) of the Nefesh HaBahamis. Correspondingly, Adam and Eve were cast into exile from the Garden of Eden. Why would G-d allow Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge? After all they had not yet known good and evil? Tanya takes up this question in the parallel context of Nefesh HaBahamis and Nefesh HoElokis by asking "why then has G-d [caused] … a part of His light … to descend into [the body]"?[17] The answer is that "this descent must be for the sake of a subsequent ascent … by means of clothing them [souls] in the action, speech, and thought of the Torah … for the laws of the Torah are G-d's 'thought' and 'speech.'"[17] Although this descent is often referred to as 'The Fall' we might instead refer to it as man's 'being-thrown.' In order to ascend to the mode-of-being of Neshama, in which one is concerned with the creation of being from Totality, man must seek to be close to the source of his thrownness, that by which he was thrown, G-d. The path to being close with G-d is the Torah, which prescribes how to differentiate good *from* evil. Only when man has redeemed himself through a total commitment to Torah (by using his ability to know good *and* evil to do only good) can man return his Nefesh HoElokis to its source, from exile to Eden. This is the meaning of Jewish being and as Tanya proclaims "this shall be … [the] sole aim throughout … life."[17]

**The Phenomenol Ontological Fork**

Now that we have ascertained the meaning of Jewish being, we will turn our attention to Western understandings of the meaning of Being. First we will outline how the question of the meaning of Being implies the phenomenol ontological equivalent of Hume's epistemic ontological is-ought problem. Then we will examine Heidegger's proposal for the meaning of Being and see that the move to phenomenol ontology does not escape the phenomenol ontological version of Hume's Fork. Then we will show that there is an essential unity between

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[15] Online Etymology Dictionary. (n.d.). *Conscious*. Online Etymology Dictionary. https://www.etymonline.com/word/conscious

[16] Online Etymology Dictionary. (n.d.). *Conscious*. Online Etymology Dictionary. https://www.etymonline.com/word/conscience

[17] Zalman of Liadi, S. (1998). "Likutei Amarim Chapter 31." *Lessons in Tanya: The Tanya of R. Shnuer Zalman of Liadi.* (Y. Wineberg, Trans.). Kehot Publication society. (Original work published 1796)

Heidegger and Frankl's philosophy as to how one goes about discovering the meaning of being. This unity will reveal to us the essence of the Western approach to helping people discover meaning in their lives. From there we will compare the meaning of Jewish and Western beings as it is grounded in their ontologies.

To understand the deep connection between Heidegger's ontology and Hume's is-ought problem (also known as Hume's Fork) let us first review Hume's Fork. In a *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume remarks

> "in every system of morality… the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when suddenly… instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or *ought not.* ... this ought , or ought not, expresses some new [propositional] relation. … [it] seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it."[18]

Hume is saying that from a sequence of propositions of the form 'a is/is not b', there is no rule of deductive logic that can suddenly introduce a proposition of the form 'c ought/ought not to d'. From only having descriptive propositions (and no normative propositions) within your assumptions, you cannot derive further normative propositions. This is often summarized by saying that one cannot jump from *is* to *ought.* This is a problem because much of Western philosophy, following the Enlightenment, tried to ground moral/ethical claims in something descriptive that can be universally verified by man's innate rational cognitive capacity (like how mathematics is built up from self evident axioms). Hume's Fork presents a fundamental impasse to all such approaches and raises the question: how can I derive *ought* from *is,* or said otherwise, what can implicate what I *should do* given what *is*?

This question is the epistemic ontological equivalent to Heidegger's primary phenomenol ontological question in *Being and Time.* In *Being and Time*, Heidegger repeats explicitly that his primary goal is a "*searching* for the answer to the question of the meaning of being in general" (italics are original).[19] Following Dr. Peterson in his book *Maps of Meaning,* in the epistemic ontological Western tradition, meaning (robustly understood)† is "*implication for action [what **to***

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[18] Hume, D. (2015). *A Treatise of Human Nature* (pp. 295). Digireads. (Original work published 1739).

[19] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 221). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).

***do].''*[20] We can therefore rephrase Hume's problem as asking, 'where is the meaning (the implication for what *to do*) of beings in the world (what there *is*) ?'. There are two types of meaning. The meaning of objects which is often referred to as *semantic meaning* and the meaning of subjects which is often referred to as *existential meaning* (meaning of life). One of the main revolutions of Heidegger's approach is the destruction of the subject-object division. The division of beings into subjects and objects is replaced with Dasein's being-with. This is what allows Heidegger to ask about the 'meaning of being *in general*' (italics added).

'Meaning' understood as 'implication for action' is an epistemic ontological conception because it signifies the action of a subject within a larger world. Phenomenol ontologically, meaning is understood as "that upon which the primary object is projected, that in terms of which something can be conceived in its possibility as what it is."[21] The 'primary object' is Dasein and 'that which it is projected upon… in terms of which something can be conceived in its possibility as what it is' is Dasein being-with a potential mode of Dasein's being-in-the-world in which Dasein be-comes that mode of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Epistemically this would roughly translate to becoming a possible version of oneself. This translation is incomplete because it only accounts for existential meaning, but Heidegger's definition unifies semantic and existential meaning because a mode of Dasein's being can be being-with inner-worldly-beings; thus the meaning of Dasein could be, for example, to be-with a blade of grass.

In asking for the meaning of Being, Heidegger must find a methodology that can take him from his existential-analytic to the meaning of beings. This forces him to address the phenomenol ontological version of Hume's Fork. A way of asking the question using language that is somewhere in between phenomenol and epistemic ontology would be: given that we exist (Dasein's being-with Dasein) and we can choose who to be (Dasein's being-with potential Dasein as what it is), how can we figure out who we ought to be? Now we can see that

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[20] Peterson, J. B. (2002). *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (pp. 1). Routledge. (Original work published 1999).
[†] An important lengthy discussion can be had about the reduction of meaning to essence in Western thought. That the meaning of 'fire' is often something like 'a hot plasmic, warm colored, entity resulting from the combustion of the oxygen' is an example of this reduction. 'Fire' depending on the context might more accurately *mean* 'run!'. Essence is the perceptual meaning of a syntactic token, but not all meaning is perceptual. I add the word **robust** in the text to emphasize that I do not mean essence when I use the word meaning.
[21] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 309). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).

Heidegger's fundamental task in *Being and Time* is to address the phenomenal ontological version of Hume's problem, how you go from being to ought-to-be.[22]

**Heidegger's Answer to the Meaning of Being**

I discussed Heidegger's proposed solution to bridging the phenomenol ontological version of Hume's Fork in essay three.[23] To summarize, Heidegger discovered that an inner voice called conscience can disclose existentiells (values and imperatives grounded in the individual's unique being) as a mode of Dasein's being. This is what he means by "conscience summons Dasein's Self from lostness in the They."[24] He further found that being-towards-death in an attunement of fear/anxiety manifests the call of conscience as a mode of Dasein's being. This is what he means by "authentic 'thinking about death' is wanting to have a conscience."[25] Put together, it is the case that Dasein's Being-with Dasein's *dead*line is a methodology by which Dasein can reveal authentic Dasein from its concealment in inauthentic Dasein. Implicitly in *Being and Time*, Authentic Dasein is the mode of Dasein's being-in-the-world which Dasein *should* project itself upon as what it is. Authentic Dasein is the meaning of Being in general, realizable by the call of conscience. The revelation of conscience is what bridges *is* to *ought.*

Note how *should* was snuck into the argument just as Hume prescribed. Heidegger does not escape the Fork. In order for his argument to hold he must take it on assumption that the commands of conscience are what one ought to do. He acknowledges this himself, putting the statement in italics: "*wanting to have a conscience is rather the most primordial existentiell presupposition."* The primordial normative ought claim (existentiell presupposition) that Heidegger accepts in order for his project to get off the ground is that 'one should listen to conscience as it is manifested by being-towards-death.'

Heidegger's (Dasein's) answer to what the call of conscience reveals is the need to respond to "the Moment" which is the large scale historical situation Dasein is present-in.[26] In

[22] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 221). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).

[23] Karpati, L. (2022). *Introduction to the Logology of Being and Time* [essay for class].

[24] Wolin, R. (2010). *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (pp. 40-41). Columbia University Press.

[25] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 296). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).

[26] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 366). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).

Heidegger's context this was the redemption of the German people to their allegedly rightful place at the height of European culture.

**The Unity of Western Meaning**

Despite deep philosophical and attitudinal differences, the essential approach Heidegger and Frankl take to bridging Hume's Fork is the same. We will start by outlining the difference so as to show that what is similar really is fundamental to Western philosophy and is not a mere product of a particular Western philosophical foundation.

The first major difference is that Frankl's philosophy is largely epistemic ontological whereas Heidegger's is phenomenol ontological. This difference informs their different understandings of time/ temporality which in turn informs their different understandings of death. For Frankl "man's position in life is such that at any moment he may select out of many possibilities a single one which by actualizing he rescues … into the realm of the past."[27] "What has been conserved in the past is alone preserved from passing."[27] As an analogy to explain Frankl's perspective: time can be visualized as a line extending infinitely from past to future. The eternity of time means that every action one takes and every value one realizes is made permanent as a point on the eternal line. For Heidegger there is no such line without Dasein because "the movement of existence [time] is not the motion of something objectively present. It is determined from the stretching along of Dasein."[28] Consequently, upon Dasein's death the line, which is itself a product of Dasein's being-with, is obliterated. It is precisely for this reason that being-towards-death projects Dasein upon its authentic possibility as what it is. Dasein's death is not the same as other people's death. 'I am' is not the same as 'I run.' When 'I' stops *running* the total number of subjects running decreases by one. When 'I' stops *being*, there ceases to be numbers which can even decrease. When this is internalized, one is forced to prioritize who they wish to be for the totality of Dasein's stretching along. Frankl comes to a parallel conclusion from his epistemic ontological perspective. Frankl understands death as the point on the line after which no more action nor values can be realized. It is the second end that bounds the time which we refer to as man's life (the first end being birth). "If we were immortal" Frankl explains "we

[27] Frankl, V. (1946). *The Doctor and The Soul (pp. 63-92)*. Random House.

[28] Heidegger, M. (2010). *Being and Time* (pp. 358). State University of New York Press, Albany. (Original work published 1927).

could legitimately postpone every action forever. It would be of no consequence whether or not we did a thing now."[29] Therefore, "death itself is [a real factor in] what makes life meaningful."[29]

For both Heidegger and Frankl, despite their different philosophical foundations, death creates the uniqueness and urgency of every instance of time. The question remains, at least for the case of Frankl, how can we determine what to do given the present situation (Hume's is-ought problem)? Frankl answers with "first of all, [he must listen] to his conscience … an irreducible thing-in-itself."[29] In a different book Frankl explains "man is guided in his search for meaning by conscience. Conscience could be defined as the intuitive capacity of man to find out the meaning of a situation."[30] Just like Heidegger, in order to bridge is to ought, Frankl makes recourse to this irreducible primitive being called conscience.

However, for Frankl, it is not being-towards-death that realizes the particular meaning of a situation but rather it is what we might call being-towards-uniqueness, the honing in on the uniqueness of the *situation* coupled with the uniqueness of the subject (what Frankl calls man's *disposition*). The honing in on the uniqueness of the combination of man's situation and disposition (which together constitute his *position*) is what gives substance to the call of conscience.[29]

Listening to conscience and figuring out what that means/ how best to do it is *the fundamental approach of the West for bridging **is to ought**.* We see it not only in Frankl and Heidegger but also in Kierkegaard/Derrida. I discussed this in more detail in "Faith in the Conflict of Conscience" so the following is a summary using language from Heidegger's phenomenal ontology.[31] *In Whom To Give To: Knowing not to Know*, Derrida presents Kierkegaard's toil over the meaning of the Binding of Isaac. Kierkegaard is torn between two different calls of conscience, "general and absolute responsibility."[32] One call of conscience compels him to 'general responsibility' (publicly certified duties) and the other call of conscience compels him to 'absolute responsibility' (an entirely unique duty which is not to be shared with anyone else). Kierkegard regards the absolute responsibility as being more authentic, yet struggles to live by it. Kierkegard's tension and valuation of the different modes-of-being are

[29] Frankl, V. (1946). *The Doctor and The Soul (pp. 63-92)*. Random House.
[30] Frankl, V. (2014). *The Will to Meaning* (pp. 43). PLUME. (Original work published 1969).
[31] Karpati, L. (2021). *Faith in the Conflict of Conscience* [essay for class].
[32] Derrida, Jacques. "Whom To Give To: Knowing not to Know." *The Gift of Death.* University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 59-61

exactly parallel to Heidegger's valuation in *Being and Time*. General responsibility is inauthentic Dasein and absolute responsibility is authentic Dasein. The meaning of being is to live authentically. Spanning atheist (Heidegger), agnostic (Frankl), and religious (Kierkegard) thinkers, Western thought tries to overcome Hume's fork by recourse to conscience.

**The Difference Between Western And Hasidic Meaning**

The summons of conscience is the Western attempt to jump from is to ought. Hasidism does not get around is-ought either. Its fundamental premise for endowing beings with meaning is that the meaning of being is found through the study of Torah and the doing of mitzvot. The crucial difference is that the Western approach to realizing meaning in life is intimately tied up with the individual. As Frankl says, "to have a destiny means in each case to have one's own destiny."[33] We might contrastively say that in Hasidism (and perhaps more generally in Judaism), to have a destiny means always to be a part of the collective destiny. The Torah was not given to a singular person. Although it was revealed to Moses, the Torah was addressed to the entire nation of Israel. Both traditions lean on revelation to acquire wisdom (knowing what to do/ who to be), this is largely necessitated by Hume's Fork. The difference is that the West insists upon the wheel being reinvented each time; each person must confront each present situation by recourse to their own conscience, whereas in Judaism one lives based upon a collective memory of the revelations of one man - Moses at Sinai.

The difficulty for Western beings is that revelation is hard to come by, particularly revelations about fundamental questions regarding the meaning of one's own being. Hence we should not be surprised that many people in the West struggle to find meaning. The reason the existential vacuum persists in the West is that Western thought maintains that the revelations of others are to be seen as suspect and inauthentic; it demands that revelation must come from the uniqueness of the individual. In Judaism there is a collective historicity (the Torah) to inform personal revelation. And there is also a collection of various people's revelations based upon this collective historicity (the prophets for example) which serve as an additional source of wisdom for when you do not know what to do/ who to be. In the West "the meaning of individuality

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[33] Frankl, V. (1946). *The Doctor and The Soul (pp. 63-92)*. Random House.

comes to fulfillment in the community" whereas in Judaism the meaning of the community comes to fulfillment in the individual.[34]

**Back to the Beginning**

Man was cast out of Eden to prevent him from eating from the Tree of Life. But life is one of the highest values in Judaism, so why wouldn't G-d want human beings to live forever? Unlike in the West, it is not because death provides man with a deadline by which he must fulfill his commandments. Rather it is because in eternal life man will no longer see that there is anything beyond him which calls him to ascend. He will mistake his own thrownness for the totality of Being. As it is written in Tanya, "[this world] is the lowest in degree… nowhere is G-d's light as hidden as in this world… so much so that it is filled with *kelipot* … which actually oppose G-d, saying: 'I am [Dasein=אני], and there is nothing else besides me [Dasein].'"[35] This is the attitude of Heidegger's phenomenal ontology exactly.

"Lest he stretch forth his hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat and live forever" man would be more like G-d in existing for eternal time, but he would have lost the horizon which informs him that something lies beyond him.[36] In eating from the tree of knowledge man became like G-d in "having the ability of knowing good and evil."[36] But he did *not* gain the ability to know good *from* evil because man's being is only a constriction of G-d's being. This is why the Torah is necessary. As it is said in Tanya, "for in the light of Your Countenance, You gave us…a Torah of life."[36] The Torah is the supplement for the Tree of Life. Instead of eating from the Tree of Life, in which the human individual becomes eternal, the Torah was given to man so that he might use his knowledge of the good to come closer to the universal eternal, the Ein Sof. To eat from the Tree of Life and live forever would be a constriction not even the Torah could have remedied because man would no longer be able to believe in any source of revelation, any G-d, other than himself.

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[34] Frankl, V. (1946). *The Doctor and The Soul (pp. 63-92)*. Random House.
[35] Zalman of Liadi, S. (1998). "Likutei Amarim Chapter 36." *Lessons in Tanya: The Tanya of R. Shnuer Zalman of Liadi.* (Y. Wineberg, Trans.). Kehot Publication society. (Original work published 1796)
[36] Bereshit - Genesis - Chapter 3. (n.d.). Chabad. https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8167/jewish/Chapter-3.htm