Repentance for the Holocaust

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After escaping from Nazi-dominated Europe, Abraham Joshua Heschel, a young rabbi, settled in the United States in the early 1940s at Hebrew Union College (HUC), in Cincinnati, Ohio. He brought with him a message that had first been addressed to a largely German-Christian audience in Frankfurt (see P2), but was now “translated” for his new, Jewish-American readers. “The Meaning of This War” he now called it. But what could possibly be shared by Germans and Jews when the extermination of European Jewry was under way at that very moment? One can only imagine how dumbfounded HUC Bulletin readers were when they saw the opening lines of Heschel’s article in 1943:

There have never been so much guilt. . . . At no time has the earth been so soaked with blood. Fellow-men turned out to be evil ghosts, monstrous and weird. Ashamed and dismayed to live in such a world, we ask: Who is responsible? . . . Few are privileged to discern God’s judgment in History. But all may be guided by the words of the Baal Shem:
if a man has beheld evil, he may know that it was shown to him in order that he learn his own guilt and repent; for what is shown to him is also within him.\(^1\)

With this prologue Heschel directed his readers’ attention to “our failures,” which were co-responsible for the outbreak of the atrocities, which ranged from doing nothing when the seeds of hatred and cynicism were being sown to betraying the Torah and the “ideals.”\(^2\) “Israel forfeited his message. . . . We have helped extinguish the light our fathers had kindled. . . . Where is Israel?\(^3\)

In short, Heschel was calling fellow Jews to repent. Not a single time—neither in the spoken nor in the printed words—was “Germany” or “German” mentioned. The “spotlight of illumination” (see P6) was solely cast on the self, Israel. In fact, if one compares the German speech and the English text, one observes the noticeably more pointed language in the critique of the Jews, even though it remains consistent with the original message that “it is the believers (die Gläubigen), not those nonbelievers, who are being judged [by God].”\(^4\)

For Heschel self-blaming was an essential attitude if the return of God was to come about. “Let Fascism not serve as an alibi for our conscience. . . . The conscience of the world was destroyed by those who were wont to blame others rather than themselves.”\(^5\)

Recalling the biblical passage (Ex 3:6) in which God was about to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians and showed himself to Moses, Heschel counseled against self-righteousness precisely in this hour: “Like Moses, we hide our face; for we are afraid to look upon Elohim, upon His power of judgment.”\(^6\)

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1. Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Meaning of This War,” Hebrew Union College Bulletin (Mar. 1943): 1. I would like to thank Edward Kaplan for generously providing me with all the available versions of this article.


3. Heschel, “Meaning of This War” (1943), 2, 18.


5. Heschel, “Meaning of This War” (1943), 2.

6. Ibid.
“But what is the evil in us that could plausibly be related to the ongoing slaughter of European Jews?” a Jewish reader of the 1943 text might reasonably ask. Although tshuvah is always necessary, it would still be wrong to profane it by using it indiscriminately or exaggeratedly. On this central point, Heschel’s message was unambiguous:

Iron weapons will not protect humanity. . . . The war will outlast the victory of arms if we fail to conquer the infamy of the soul: the indifference to crime, when committed against others. For evil is indivisible. It is the same in thought and in speech, in private and in social life. Our victory is in sight, we hope. But when will we start to conquer the evil within us?

The charge of indifference, which did not exist in the 1938 speech, indeed seemed to be the focal point of Heschel’s 1943 message, which he reinforced in the expanded 1944 version by adding the outcry of the Jews being slaughtered in Poland against the outside world: “We, Jews, despise all those who live in safety and do nothing to save us.” This might also explain the modification of the Baal Shem’s quote from “repent for what he has come to see” in 1938 to “repent; for what is shown to him is also within him” in 1943 onward. In an interview in 1963, Heschel would also speak of his frustration in these early years in the United States because of the indifference he encountered.

If indifference, among other things, was for Heschel the evil for which non-Germans—including Jews not suffering directly from the Holocaust—needed to repent, another contemporary European

7. Ibid., 18 (emphasis added).
9. The quote in 1938, as reproduced in 1962, read: “Wenn der Mensch Böses zu sehen bekommt, so mag er wissen, daß man es ihm zeigt, damit er seine Schuld erfährt und für das, was er zu sehen bekommt, Buße tut.” “Versuch einer Deutung,” 12. Judging from the sentence structure of this text, it seems unlikely to be a mere typographical error in the reproduced 1962 text, but an intentional addition in the 1943 version, which was repeated in the 1944 and 1954 versions.
Jew saw an even more radical and widespread culpability for the Nazi phenomenon. In 1946, Max Picard, a Swiss philosopher from a Jewish family, published a book in German titled *Hitler in uns selbst* (Hitler in Ourselves).11 Unlike Heschel and many other turners, Picard did not try to “spare” the Germans. In fact, many of the sweeping, judgmental, and seemingly self-contradictory statements about the Germans that one might expect to find in Goldhagen’s thesis (P8) also appeared in this work by Picard: “The German today has forgotten all about the defeats that he had only suffered yesterday”; “The discontinuity in Germany was before Hitler only a characteristic among many other characteristics; but then . . . it became essence.”12 Political flip-flop “is characteristic of the Germans.”13 Picard also discredited the “resisters”: “Most of the Germans who were against Hitler did that only because they are against everything that stands before them that is present at the moment.”14 He also voiced what many of his contemporaries thought, to which even Goldhagen would explicitly object: the Germans were incorrigible; “Without inner continuity,” he said, “there is no regret (Reue), hence no betterment (Besserung). What is sinful (das Sündhafte), like everything that happened in the past, is broken off from the present, in which the German now lives. Therefore all attempts to use books and teaching to change a German who lives in discontinuity are useless.”15 In this sense, then, was Picard’s *Hitler in uns selbst* a philosophical forerunner of Goldhagen’s *Ordinary Germans*, or even surpassed it in its collective condemnation of the accursed nation?

But for one difference this might have been the case. Whereas Goldhagen endeavored to distance the “ordinary Germans” from the generation of his present-day readers, which could only include himself, Picard did the exact opposite. Indeed, the unifying structure of Picard’s *Hitler* was “in ourselves, too.” Every section

12. Ibid., 33, 49.
13. Ibid., 103.
14. Ibid., 104 (emphasis in the original).
15. Ibid., 36 (emphasis in the original).
that analyzes the evil in and through Hitler/National Socialism/Germany invariably comes to the conclusion that there was shared sinfulness, a real homogeneity between “them” and “us.”

It was already long before the Nazis that a man was considered solely for his ‘effectiveness.’

It was already long before Hitler that the word and the object did not correspond to each other.

Racial antisemitism was not alone in its inability to see a man as a complete form (Gestalt) and being (Wesen); it was already long before Hitler that one became used to seeing and assessing oneself and the others under a reduced scheme.

It is not only the German who has lost the right relationship with time, but also the man of Europe and of America.

A clear phenomenon found its expression in National Socialism, which was widespread in the German people, and not only in the German people, but in almost every country on earth.

In other words, Picard led his readers to see the contemptible situation of the Germans, the Nazis, and Hitler himself, and then showed them how they were not better than them, for—to paraphrase Heschel quoting the Baal Shem—what was shown to them was also in them. In the section on European literature, Picard

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16. Ibid., 62.
17. Ibid., 87.
18. Ibid., 135.
19. Ibid., 222.
20. Ibid., 248. See Heschel’s agreement in this: “Our world seems not unlike a pit of snakes. We did not sink into the pit in 1939, or even in 1933. We had descended into it generations ago.” Heschel, “Meaning of This War” (1944), 19.
21. One might observe, of course, that this “strategy” is the other side of Thielicke’s coin (see P8). Yet, aside from the important asymmetry between the victims’ and the perpetrators’ respective burdens of turning (Maier), there is also the fine difference between a situation where guilt is apparent but its recognition is avoided, which then requires the dismantling of escapist stratagems, and a situation where guilt is mostly hidden, which may call for more intuitive means of demonstration before the counterintuitive turn.
explicitly drew on this point: “It is a sign that discontinuity is everywhere, that we belong to one another in guilt (daß wir alle zueinander gehören in der Schuld).”\(^\text{22}\) Here he raised the example of “today’s literature” as exemplified by Sartre’s *L’enfance d’un chef* (1939), in which both obscenity and shamelessness were “surpassed” in the “ephemerality” (*Augenblickhaftigkeit*) so characteristic of the age of discontinuity. “Here is Hitler superhitlered (*überhitlert*). For with Hitler there was still the alternation of one ephemera with another. With Sartre there is only that *one* ephemera, nothing else. . . . If Nietzsche’s ‘blond beast’ was an early sign of the full-blown Hitler-beast, what then is that human like whose early sign is found in Sartre’s tales?”\(^\text{23}\) So here is where Picard’s reflection and Heschel’s converged:

The Hitler regime and its catastrophe have a clarity, a superclarity (*Überdeutlichkeit*): we should see what happens when human being is without connection with things, with human beings, with himself, with God. That is directly held out to us and demonstrated to us for instruction (*Belehrung*) . . . the happening is so clear for the sake of us.\(^\text{24}\)

Much of the evil that was done in Germany actually happened for the others vicariously (*stellvertretend*).\(^\text{25}\)

The Germans have no right to say that they had taken the evil upon themselves vicariously. . . . But the *other* peoples must say this to themselves, that a monument was erected here for the evil that was also in them.\(^\text{26}\)

It was from this common point of departure that Heschel and Picard moved toward other common self-reflective conclusions. In the assessment of modern science, for example, whereas Picard broadly condemned the mechanistic worldview for contributing to the out-of-boundness of Nazi crimes,\(^\text{27}\) Heschel, as usual, concentrated

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\(^{22}\) Picard, *Hitler in uns selbst*, 166.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 166–68.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 246 (emphasis in the original).

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 248.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 250 (emphasis in the original).

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 87–88.
on the Jewish participation in the promotion of this worldview. As a newcomer to America, he took issue with Albert Einstein, whose abridged article “Religion of God or Religion of the Good” had appeared in Aufbau in September 1940. Heschel accused Einstein of propagating a “naturalist” philosophy that the Nazis would uphold approvingly, as it invariably leads to the “abolition of human dignity.” Once again, the sin-perspective (see P2) made this unlikely, or hidden, link visible: “The hubris, the tragic sin of our time, is the conviction that there are only laws of nature and technology, that one can be sufficient in everything alone and organize worldviews, human breeding, and faith movements.”

“Shaky logic” is how one might characterize Heschel’s linking of what Einstein—“America’s most prestigious Jew” of his time—was saying and what the Nazis were doing. But as we have seen in “repentant disagreement” (R8), the turners’ pronouncements are no mere sets of arguments conforming to the rules of logic, but first and foremost relational directives that seek to direct their respective audience to the acts of turning necessary in each particular situation of guilt. As Heschel himself explained in his Prophets, “The prophets were unfair to the people of Israel. Their sweeping allegations, overstatements, and generalizations defied standards of accuracy. Some of the exaggerations reach the unbelievable.”

Likewise, Picard’s Pan-European critique (at times also including the Americans), suggesting their implication in the “Nazi phenomenon,” could very well be played down as “unfair” to the subjects of this criticism, whether they were the Germans or Europe as a whole. On the other hand, like Hannah Arendt in “Organisierte

33. Picard, Hitler in uns selbst, 110.
Schuld” (see P1), Picard anonymized the good people, the “exceptions,” who, according to him in a rather “self-contradictory” way, were most numerous in Germany: “In no country are there so many of these individuals as in Germany. . . . [They are] more integral (vollkommener) than those with integrity (die Vollkommnenen) in other countries.”³⁴ Was Picard unfair to the victims of German-Nazi aggression? Or was he unfair to the Germans in accusing them of having mounted no opposition at all to “the monument of evil”?³⁵ By our “standards of accuracy,” he was probably both. But in centering his message on the possibility and necessity of repentance, that is, the enabled reconnection with God, and by directing this message toward his own (as European and Jew), he certainly belonged to the early turners in postwar Europe:

Before one such man can be taught, he must first return and be present (wieder da sein). And he can only do that if he is connected with the one who is himself Presentness (Daseinshaftigkeit), with God.³⁶

[The intervention by God] is a sign that men and earth do not belong only to themselves, but to the One who loves them, who gives a chance to all again and again—probably also to the Germans.³⁷

³⁴. Ibid., 241.
³⁵. Ibid., 250.
³⁶. Ibid., 255. A similar anchoring presence of God was also emphasized by Jaspers, as when he concluded with an exegesis of Jeremiah’s conversation with his servant Baruch (Jer 45): “What does it mean? It means, God is, that is enough. When everything disappears, God is, that is the only fixed point.” Karl Jaspers, Die Schuldfrage (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1946), 105. Elsewhere he further elaborated that this “reality” is “the only reality” for someone who has tried their best but “failed” and “lost everything.” Jaspers, Einführung in die Philosophie: Zwölf Radiovorträge (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 1989), 32. Without mentioning it, then, Jaspers and Picard were in fact reiterating the same affirmation that is also contained in the fifth Bußpsalm (Ps 102:27–28).
³⁷. Picard, Hitler in uns selbst, 278. It seems at an early point that Picard was negating the possibility of repentance, when he said that “the structure of the [Nazi] world” had made turning (Umkehr) and change (Wandlung) impossible (ibid., 67). Yet in light of his entire work and his concluding affirmations quoted above, it is clear that he was not negating repentance per se, but a shallow turning (e.g., by “books and teaching”) that overlooks the structural, societal, and even civilizational reach of disconnectedness.
This way of self-reflection in the face of wrongdoing against oneself was not a monopoly of one or two “exceptional” Jewish individuals. A brief review of the postwar decades reveals many others who took a similar path,\textsuperscript{38} that is, as victims or victimhood-bearers of German Nazism, seeing in the Holocaust their own guilt or a mirror for their guilt in their respective present situations. Already in the 1950s, Jewish historians such as Jon and David Kimche and Hans Günther Adler had written on aspects of Jewish culpability in Nazi atrocities against fellow Jews.\textsuperscript{39} These had in turn provided Arendt in the 1960s the arguments she needed to bring Israel to court in the trial of Eichmann (see P1).\textsuperscript{40} But perhaps the clearest echo of the early turners was provided by André Glucksmann, who, in 1989, published “Hitler bin ich” (I Am Hitler) in a compendium coinciding with the centenary of the birth of the dictator. Like Heschel and Picard, Glucksmann, whose antifascist Jewish family had suffered in Vichy France, wasted no time making the point that Hitler was an occasion for self-reflection, not others-blaming: “To ask oneself how Hitler was possible means to ask Europe how it has made him possible. That means, ourselves. . . . I am the possibility of Hitler, I am Hitler.”\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} The vast differences in terms of intellectual upbringing and political opinion of these individual voices, however, cannot be overlooked. See below.


\textsuperscript{40} Arendt cited the Kimches, for example, to argue that “these Jews from Palestine spoke a language not totally different from that of Eichmann,” and that Jewish racketeers had unjustly profited from the plight of European Jews escaping Nazism. Hannah Arendt, \textit{Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil} (London: Faber, 1963), 55–56. But in view of the entire work of the Kimches, it is arguable whether the authors were critically assessing the Zionists per se, or merely making claims against different groups in and outside Zionism (i.e., the Revisionists, the religious Jews, etc.), so that some groups’ “pact with the devil” was understandable, and others’ passivity vis-à-vis atrocity was not (Kimche and Kimche, \textit{Secret Roads}, 26, 214). In any case, the objective facts unearthed and some perspectives developed in these studies do lend themselves readily to serving as materials for intra-Jewish self-reflection.

But unlike Picard, who considered the reconnection to God through Christianity as the turning needed for “the disconnected” in Europe, Glucksmann saw Christianity and humanism (at least the naive versions of these) as constitutive of the problem of Hitler: “This blindness vis-à-vis the evil outside us and in us, this incessant demonstration through our good feelings that devils do not exist, is this not exactly what made Hitler possible, because he was unforeseen by and unimaginable for the beautiful souls?”

The turning that Glucksmann advocated was instead rooted in classical philosophy. Quoting the Socratic dictum “Know thyself,” he blamed contemporary historians for lacking “the most elemental philosophical reflex of going into oneself (Insichgehen)”—hence their inability to see “the same intellectual horizon” shared by the Nazis and the Bolsheviks. Yet this going into oneself does not mean a simple identification with Hitler, or his exculpation:

That Hitler is my reflection (Abbild) does not mean that I concede that he had a sheep’s soul under his wolf’s skin. . . . To dig into the homogeneity between Hitler and me gives rise less to the better representation of him than he actually was, but more to the suspicion of myself, that I bear evil in me, which I don’t prefer to know.

For Glucksmann, philosophizing about Hitler does not mean to work out a philosophical system from Hitler as if he were a philosopher—which Picard had also warned against; rather, it means “challenging the philosophers and common citizens to discover the Hitlerian side in themselves.” As democrat, Communist revolutionary, and Jew, Glucksmann then went on to demonstrate how each in turn could discover a Hitler in himself.

If it is remarkable for someone like Glucksmann—who has only childhood memories of Nazi Europe (he was born in 1937)—to relate in such a way to the Nazi atrocities as if he had to repent

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42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 74.
44. Ibid., 73 (emphasis added).
45. Picard, Hitler in uns selbst, 195.
personally, then it is nothing short of extraordinary that even Jews born after the war should seek ways to relate to the Holocaust in the same spirit. In 2007, an Israeli from a German-Jewish family wanted to publish, in Hebrew, a book called “Hitler Won,” for he “felt that the wounds and scars were so deep that the modern Jewish nation had no chance to heal. Our Shoah-inflicted trauma seemed like an incurable disease.” The book came out, with a more hopeful title: “As it is Jewish custom to give the sick person a new name to facilitate his healing, I changed the book’s title in Hebrew to *Defeating Hitler*.”

The author, Avraham Burg, was no fringe personality in modern Israel. Aside from being a former speaker of the Knesset and a former chairman of the Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization, he was also, in the words of a bitter critic, “the scion of one of Israel’s most renowned religious Zionist families, a son of the late revered Dr. Yosef Burg, who headed the National Religious Party for many years.” With such a curriculum vitae, it is no wonder that Burg’s book was loathed by many for delivering weapons of delegitimization to the foes of the State of Israel.

But what exactly can “defeating Hitler” mean for present-day Jews and Israelis? As one reads through Burg’s book, two interrelated yet distinct issues become clear as Burg’s deepest concerns: a certain way of remembering the Shoah that is ailing Israel’s relationships with the peoples of the world, and the injustice committed by Israelis against the Palestinians. Hence like Glucksmann and Picard, Burg saw this necessary fight against Hitler *within* rather than without.

Deploying caustic language, Burg lamented the phenomenon of the “Holocaustic soul,” or a traumatized collective mentality

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49. Ibid.
that seeks self-justification in the traumas: “We cling to the tragedy and the tragedy becomes our justification for everything.” 52 “All is compared to the Shoah, dwarfed by the Shoah, and therefore all is allowed—be it fences, sieges, crowns, curfews, food and water deprivation, or unexplained killings.” 53 And although he explicitly rejected the comparison of modern Israel with Nazi Germany, 54 the time dimension was gradually loosened when names of peoples were used in a timeless manner:

Israeli Arabs are like the German Jews of the Second Reich. 55

Arabs [are made to be] the heirs of the Jews. 56

Are the writings on the wall “Arabs Out” and “Transfer Now” different in any way from Juden raus [Jews out]? . . . When a radio newsreader says, “An Arab has found death,” what does it mean? That he lost death and IDF [Israel Defense Forces] soldiers helped him find it? What does it mean, “Soldiers fired in the air and two boys were killed”? That Palestinian children fly in the air like Marc Chagall creatures, and are hit by our innocent bullets? The dozens of cases of unidentified, unaccounted-for killings, to whom do they belong? 57

Burg did not only see an image of the self, the Jew, in the other, the Arab, hence transferring the “victim-title” to the latter. He also attributed their victimization to the traumatic experience of having been victimized itself. Thus the message of turning from the reaction of hate within was Burg’s special contribution. He used the psychoanalytical idea of transference to account for this, that is, the displacement of “our anger and revenge from one people to another, from an old foe to a new adversary.” 58

53. Ibid., 78. A “crown,” Burg explained, is Israeli military lingo, meaning “a stifling siege that leads to hunger, thirst, and desperation.” Ibid., 61.
55. Ibid., 55.
56. Ibid., 59.
57. Ibid., 64. See, for example, Chagall’s White Crucifixion (1938).
It is chiefly in this *reaction* that Burg saw the “Hitler inside” who needs “defeating.” For example, following Arendt, he castigated the Israeli Law of Return, the origins of which were allegedly a reaction against the race laws of Nuremberg: “Until the link between Israeli citizenship and the Nuremberg Laws is severed, Hitler will in effect continue to decide who is Jewish.” He also criticized American Jews for their “obsession of exaggerated securitism” created by the “guilt complex over the Shoah,” or the posthumous “influence” by Hitler.

In the foreword to the German translation of his book, which appeared in 2009, Burg brought this theme of comparative spiritual warfare, from Germany to Israel, to the forefront, which was only briefly mentioned in the 2008 English translation:

> It was a spirit (*Geist*) that fed on a national trauma, on humiliation, which was inflicted on Germany by the victors of the First World War. . . . In this way, Germany became Europe’s most deeply wounded and humiliated nation. . . . At the same time, a current of equality, freedom, creativity, brotherliness, and original thinking was under way. There was a contest . . . and at the end shame won the upper hand and national trauma defeated the current of hope. . . . In present-day Israel, such a contest between a gory national trauma and a new spirit of Jewish hope and Israeli spirituality is taking place. The outcome of this competition is not yet decided.

Critics of Burg have called him a “self-hating Jew,” or worse, an “opportunist.” Yet for two reasons, the charges of self-hatred and

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62. Ibid., 42–43.
opportunism seem unfounded. First and most important, a litmus test to distinguish a call to repentance from a definitive condemnation is the possibility of turning. Self-hatred (and other-hatred, too, in this limited sense) is precisely characterized by the nonrecognition of this possibility. In this regard, Burg’s *Defeating Hitler* is suffused with suggestions of turning; the quotation above is but one of many examples. Elsewhere, arguing from a religious standpoint, he called on his fellow Israelis to reflect on *Abraham’s call to God to be a just judge* and their own present situation. He then went on to use the biblical story of Jacob and Esau to present concrete choices to his Israeli readers, imploring them to *return* to being more authentically Jewish rather than becoming more like the Gentiles. “We can defeat Hitler,” Burg reaffirmed in conclusion.

Second, a hallmark of “representative repentance” is self-inclusivity, that is, a social/collective critique that is simultaneously self-blaming (see R10). Though again the ubiquitous “we” should suffice to bear this out, in several places in his book, Burg’s admission of personal guilt was made even more explicit. For instance, in a section where he recounted an encounter with three Lebanese in which he felt “naked like Adam” as he realized his own guilt in their suffering, he wrote:

> How could it be that I never thought of my responsibility for their suffering? I am responsible, and I have an arsenal of excuses and arguments. . . . Except that when I am alone, as I was with [the Lebanese] in Jordan, I cannot and must not escape the bitter truth. *I must admit*

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67. Genesis 25–33. On the significance of this story in collective reconciliation, see R14.

it. . . We have to admit that, post-Shoah, we valued our lives because we wanted to live after so much death. We were not sufficiently sensitive to the lives of others and to the price that they paid for our salvation. Please forgive us, and together we will put an end to the unhealthy refugee mindset that torments us all.  

Burg also took personal responsibility for the killings of innocent Palestinians, which “belong to us, to you and me.” This self-inclusivity is all the more authentic when one takes into account that Burg was not somebody who had no personal attachments to the region, hence imposing moral burdens he could not jointly bear: aside from being an Israeli Jew himself, his mother’s family had fallen victim to the Hebron massacre of 1929, a point that was not lost on his critics. And when he complained of the problem of transference, he blamed himself for having contributed to prematurely forgiving the Germans, which had allegedly led to this problem. Hence all in all, Burg’s critique of Israel was very much a self-critique, not just finger-pointing or utilizing the “Holocaust club” to hit political opponents.

Because of this bond with his people, Burg was simultaneously “written off” and upheld by fellow Jews, so that even among those critics who found his book “exaggerating,” some still recommended it as material for soul searching. From the German-speaking world, Burg remarked that some Germans were amazed by the fact that such a debate in such a conflict situation could take place at all, and thus were impressed by the degree of openness in Israeli society.

69. Ibid., 83–84 (emphasis added).
70. Ibid., 64.
71. See Leibler, “Avraham Burg.”
72. Burg, The Holocaust Is Over, 78–79. It is clear, though, that Burg resented not the forgiving of the Germans per se—or else it would have run counter to his lavish praise in the book for German repentance efforts—but rather its unintended consequence of transference of emotional negativities to the Arabs.
While it is still too early to gauge the full impact of Burg’s confession in Germany, there are reasons to hope that such an act of self-turning on the part of the victims (or victimhood-bearers) will generate further repentant responses. After all, Heschel’s speech in Frankfurt was able to inspire his German listeners to spread the message—despite the personal risks entailed. It is further to be expected that, given the idea that even God could and did repent in the biblical narrative, the use of the Holocaust or Hitler as a mirror for one’s own reflection or that of one’s own society will continue to be a recurring theme in intra-Jewish and intra-Israeli dialogues. Although the individual turners’ proposals for reform—especially in the political dimension—can be diametrically different at times, their common point of departure in self-turning is unmistakable.


76. The State of Israel and the geopolitical problems besetting it is one example: whereas Heschel saw its creation in general as a “concrete repudiation of Hitler’s blasphemy” (Kaplan), Burg saw its own “re-creation” in a critical light, almost blasphemous because of its purported failure to fulfill the divine calling to become a “light unto the nations” in critical moments such as during the Eichmann trial. Glucksmann, on the other hand, was of the opinion that Israel’s problems were not entirely in the hands of Israelis alone, and that the West should take a more active role in dealing with the authoritarian regimes in the region. Cf. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words*, 130; Burg, *The Holocaust Is Over*, 119, 139, 144; “Sehnsucht nach Entscheidungen: Interview mit André Glucksmann,” *Der Standard*, 17 Apr. 2007.