**Chapter 5: Existence, Importance, and Singularity – The Core of Rabbi Hutner’s Thought**

The reconstruction and analysis of the intellectual infrastructure of Rabbi Hutner’s thought revealed its core concepts: existence and *chashivut*. These focal points are the central axis of his thought around which it turns, and they are the central problems that he attempts to solve. The issue that vexes Rabbi Hutner is the possibility of real, independent, and eternal existence, and the possibility of ascribing *chashivut* to reality. The objective of this chapter is to understand the meaning of these concepts. To that end, I will examine further examples of these focal points that diverge from the foundational level of the intellectual infrastructure. I will also examine an additional concept, *yechidut*, which also diverges from the foundational basis yet is revealed to be a third focal point of his thought that can be regarded as the primary one, in that it is connected to the first two, unifies them, and enables the solution of the problems associated with them. In contrast to the previous chapter in which I endeavored to rely exclusively upon Rabbi Hutner’s thought as he formulated and published it within the framework of the *Pachad Yitzchak* books (with a few exceptions), in this chapter I will make more extensive use of his apocryphal writings to reveal the intellectual currents within them.

**5.1 “For my Sake, the World Was Created”: The Fundamental Problems of the Individual as the Focal Points of Rabbi Hutner’s Thought**

Rabbi Hutner’s focus on the quality of existence – be it true, eternal and independent, or false, temporal and subordinate – and the direct relation in his thought between the quality of existence and the attribute of *oneg*, demonstrate that the desire for existence that he refers to reflects not only the will to live but also the need for existential certainty in the face of the angst that arises about death and the feeling of meaninglessness. This trend is most explicitly apparent in his apocryphal writings

For example, in a draft of an article published posthumously he wrote: “"איך אפשר שיאמר טוב מאד [בהתייחס לנאמר על יצירת האדם ביום השישי לבריאה] על גישה שכל החיים אינם אלא אותם של 'אם בגבורות שמונים שנה וגו'', גישה של 'אכול ושתה כי מחר נמות'. אתמהה!" (מאמרי Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach, נב/ז ) This sentiment is expressed saliently in another short passage that he penned:

לא המתים יהללו ק-ה, ואנחנו נברך וכו' [...] על זה הוא שנאמר 'לא המתים יהללו קה', ברואים בני תמותה (צו דער וואס א מענטש דרייט זיך דא ארום אויף דער וועלט זיבעציק יאר, איז אים מוציא מכלל מתים? [אז האדם הזה מסתובב כאן בעולם שבעים שנה, זה מוציא מכלל מתים?]) אין בידם להלל קה. אבל אנחנו – שיש לנו הבטחה וחלק במהלך תחיית המתים בעולם, אנו נברך 'מעתה ועד עולם' (מאמרי פחד יצחק, סוכות עא/א-ב).[[1]](#footnote-2)

Mortal creatures are like the dead. Existence that is not eternal is not existence at all. The problem of the temporality of existence, the ephemerality of life, is an acute problem for Rabbi Hutner. It must be noted that the matter disturbing him in this passage is not that life comes to an end, but rather that because of its terminality, life itself is nothing. If man is destined to live for several decades and no more, it is as if he never existed. In Rabbi Hutner’s thought, there is no greater divine *hessed* than being; but if his being is finite and frail –false existence –man has no reason to praise his Creator! In the shadow of mortality, existence is nothing.

Rabbi Hutner’s approach to the finitude of existence can be expressed using concepts coined by Adi Parush. In his article on the question of whether life without death is desirable, Parush identifies several positions on death, differing from each other on how the existence of death influences life. Some people are content, maintaining that life without death would be undesirable because it would become something of little value (these are the moderately content, in his words) or without any value (the extremely content). In contrast to them are the discontented, divided into moderately discontented and extremely discontented. The moderately discontented “do not deny that life has meaning, but they assume that its value is less than what it would be without death”. In contrast, the radically discontented believe that “death removes all value from our lives and makes every aspiration of man absurd”.[[2]](#footnote-3) Rabbi Hutner would seem to clearly belong to the camp of the extremely discontented, in that he reasons that given death, life is nothing. Death disturbs the anxious man because it signifies not only the end of his existence, but more importantly, the meaninglessness of his existence; for this reason, it disturbs Rabbi Hutner. We can therefore conclude that the fundamental problems in Rabbi Hutner’s thought revealed in our examination of his intellectual infrastructure -- existence and importance -- are not focused only on the general reality but also on the individual person.

This current of thought is most clearly expressed in the *Pachad Yitzchak* books in the development of the concept of singularity (“yechidut”), based on the rabbinic statement that man was created alone. The Mishnah in Masseket Sanhedrin (4:5) lists four reasons why man was created alone: (1) To emphasize the value of human life (“one who takes/saves one Jewish life is as one who destroys/saves the entire world”); (2) To establish basic equality between people (“so one person will not say to another, ‘My father is more important than yours’”); (3) To eliminate support for the claim of polytheism that each god created his own humans (“so the heretics will not say that there are many powers in the heavens”); (4) To demonstrate the greatness of God who created one man and yet none of his descendants is an exact copy of him, but rather each is a new and unique person (“man mints several coins with one seal and all are similar to each other, while the King of kings, the Holy One Blessed be He, mints each person with the seal of Adam, and no two are alike”). “Therefore”, the Mishnah concludes, “each person should say, ‘For my sake, the world was created’.”

However, the obligation to say, “for my sake the world was created” conflicts with reality which indicates that the opposite is true. Two crucial facts contradict the individual’s uniqueness and the idea that the world was created for his sake: (1) he is temporal and mortal; and (2) he is one of innumerable others like himself. The fact that they are not absolutely similar to each other (as the Mishnah points out) is not reason enough to ascribe to the individual a satisfactory level of individuality. Rabbi Hutner wrote:

יחידותו של אדם אומרת "בשבילי נברא עולם". והופעת המיתה [...] סותרת היא את ההכרה ש"בשבילי נברא עולם" שהרי העולם מתקיים ועומד גם לאחר מיתתו וחליפתו של אדם. ובשום אופן שבעולם אי אפשר לו לאדם להחיות בנפשו את ההכרה כי בשבילי נברא עולם, אלא על ידה של האמונה הפנימית בתחיית המתים, ובסילוק המות בעולם. (ורואים אנו לעינינו, שמכיון שאמונת תחיית המתים, איננה שולטת אצל אנשי-החול, שוב לא שקטו ולא נחו, עד שהורידו את ערכו של אדם, עד לידי השוואה עם שאר בעלי חיים). (פחד יצחק, שבועות, כא/ח).

This is one of the most unique passages in the *Pachad Yitzchak* books as it concludes with a highly uncharacteristic addition – a reference to the historical context of the text, something that Rabbi Hutner systematically refrained from doing.[[3]](#footnote-4) This is one of the few occasions in which Rabbi Hutner explicitly refers to what he perceived as the most urgent problem of his time: the negation of mankind’s worth, a position that he directly connected to the fact of death. Death nullifies man’s inherent worth, and certainly his uniqueness, as well as the idea that the world was created for his sake, in other words, the idea that he has *hashivut*. Because of the loss of belief in the resurrection of the dead, this fact is all that remains.

In another place he wrote:

יחידי נברא האדם. יחידות זו קיימת היא אפילו לאחר שכל העולם נתמלא אנשים. שהרי אפילו עכשיו חייב הוא לומר "בשבילי נברא העולם". אבל סוף סוף מציאותם של רבבות בני-אדם כמותו, מסתירה היא את יחידותו של האדם, אפילו בפני האדם עצמו. אלא שמתחתה של הסתרה זו, בפנים הנפש, בוער הוא הצמאון לטעום טעמה של יחידות זו. ועל כן, נמצא הוא האדם בחתירה תמידית להבקיע את ההסתרה של הריבוי בכדי לגלות לעצמו את תואר היחידות של אישיותו, בכדי לשובב את נפשו הצמאה לגילוי זה. (פחד יצחק, שבועות טז/י).

This passage addresses the same problem as the one cited above, the feeling that existence as we know it contradicts the principle that “for my sake, the world was created”. However, the factor that obfuscates this principle, in this case, is not death, but rather multiplicity. A person is merely another one of many. He does not feel that he is important unless he experiences himself as unique, singular, without whom something is missing, one who has particular *chashivut* within the context of reality and for its sake.

These passages reformulate the two focal points of the intellectual infrastructure as the fundamental problems of the individual, with an addition of a third nuance: the aspiration not only for existence and *chashivut* but also for singularity, as all three are interconnected. More precisely, one – *chashivut* – is dependent on the other two. Man is not important unless he is special; but being special does not give him *chashivut* unless his existence is one of truth, not overshadowed by death. We have set out to identify the fundamental question in Rabbi Hutner’s thought and this is it.

**5.2 Rabbi Hutner and Existentialism -- “Will Two Walk Together, Unless They Have Agreed?”**

Two factors contribute to the scholarly consensus that Rabbi Hutner’s thought has an affinity with existentialist thought. First, Rabbi Hutner made various statements, some of which were cited in the biographical chapter above, that reflect existentialist trends of thought. The second and principal reason why scholars identify Rabbi Hutner with existentialist thought is the appearance of existentialist themes in his writings. The aspiration for *yechidut* and the demand for *chashivut* -- although formulated here first -- support this premise because they echo the two principal themes at the heart of existentialist thought: the aspiration for authenticity and the search for meaning.

To the extent that I have been able to verify, there is no definite proof that Rabbi Hutner studied the works of existentialist thinkers, and the exact level of his familiarity with general philosophy is difficult to determine. His period of stay in Berlin, described in the first chapter, coincided with the emerging awareness of Heideggerian phenomenology and the beginnings of existentialist philosophy. By his own testimony, Rabbi Hutner studied non-Jewish subjects autodidactically in his youth and early adulthood, and the possibility that this pattern continued into his mature life cannot be ruled out. Recollections of his students, which I was unable to verify, place him as a student in Berlin at the university or rabbinical seminary, which included studies in the nearby university. Many Jewish students in Berlin followed the current philosophical trends; there is evidence that Rabbi Hutner traveled in these circles and his connection to some of them is known.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Existentialism is a problematic concept. Even in the lifetime of the figure most identified with this philosophy, Jean-Paul Sartre, this term was used so broadly that its efficacy was called into question.[[5]](#footnote-6) This problem is very pertinent in general to terms used in the Humanities and Social Sciences, especially those that have entered popular parlance, and “Existentialism” is one of the most prominent of those to cross this divide. For the sake of this discussion, I will attempt here to provide a general working definition, suitable for the following analysis, and doing justice to the core of the thematic and historical characteristics of the phenomenon: Existentialism is a philosophical system that engages with a group of themes of cultural prominence from the late modern period and the relations between them, under the inspiration of the phenomenological method. Among these are (1) the temporality of human existence: both as existence that refers to time and operates in awareness of it and existence limited in time; (2) the question of the meaning of existence, given its temporality, and in the context of reality without intrinsic meaning; (3) The angst that death, meaninglessness, and freedom arouse in an individual; (4) authenticity: the possibility of individual existence that establishes meaning; (5) freedom and the centrality of choice and responsibility.[[6]](#footnote-7)

The existentialist title is often given anachronistically to figures who preceded this school of thought even by hundreds of years, or to figures from this time or later who expressed themselves in a way that is reminiscent of existential themes, even only slightly. However, for this to have validity, it is not enough to find evidence of the contemplation or analysis of themes such as death or meaninglessness; these are ancient themes that have troubled man from his earliest days and return and arise in the writings of thinkers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, throughout history. Even the discussion of authenticity – sometimes considered the central axis of existentialist philosophy – precedes the emergence of this specific philosophical movement.[[7]](#footnote-8) Discussion of the question of meaning (or the meaning of life or existence), specifically, is a salient characteristic of the last 250 years. Many processes, among them, secularization, disillusionment with the enlightenment’s idea of progress (which was intended to replace religion as the source of meaning), and technological and economic developments, turned the question of meaning into a very relevant subject both philosophically and culturally. Although this question is identified with the existentialist school, it also engaged thinkers who were not adherents of that school and those who preceded it, scholars who examined its meaning in various contexts, as well as writers and various other artists from all cultural spheres both in the Western world and outside it, such as the philosopher Bertrand Russel, the sociologists, Max Weber and Peter Berger, and writers such as Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Kundera.[[8]](#footnote-9) Thus, engagement with the question of meaning is a prominent characteristic of the period in which Rabbi Hutner was active.

Therefore, to complete the preliminary definition of Existentialism presented above, I will suggest that the defining characteristic of the existentialist school is the premise that the existence or non-existence of meaning is individual and dependent on man. In the past, the question that previous thinkers asked about meaning was usually less about what meaning is and more about whether the proposed meaning, usually originating in religion, is true or illusory. Alternatively, the question could be about the meaning of life, but not the meaning of an individual life. It is the integration and inter-dependence between these two -- the examination of both authenticity and meaning – that establishes Existentialism as a distinct philosophical movement.

The act of mapping and analyzing the intellectual infrastructure of Rabbi Hutner’s thought in the previous chapter was in part an attempt to extract a key with which to interpret it, an attempt that led to this point at which the question of his connection to existential themes has presented itself. In the following pages, I will examine whether the presumed connection between Rabbi Hutner and existentialist thought, if only thematic, is reasonable.

This premise is not obvious. First of all, we must establish Rabbi Hutner’s position as a thinker belonging to one of the schools concerned with the question of meaning. Although the question of meaning was very dominant in the late modern period, it was not common to everyone. Many thinkers considered it a pointless and tasteless question, perhaps deriving more from psychological factors than from a search for knowledge, and therefore were apt to criticize those engaging with it and the existentialist thinkers in particular.[[9]](#footnote-10) Although points that have been raised here in the course of this discussion indicate that Rabbi Hutner can be included among the thinkers disturbed by the question of meaning, there is nevertheless a need to examine further the basis of this assumption and to demonstrate that this issue not only disturbed Rabbi Hutner but also influenced his thought.

Second, even if we can define Rabbi Hutner as a thinker belonging to the age of meaning, it does not necessarily follow that we can connect him to Existentialism. As we have seen, discussion of the question of meaning is a prominent characteristic of the period. Moreover, it is not entirely foreign to Rabbi Hutner’s milieu – the Mussar movement. The imprint of the age of the search for meaning can be discerned, if only in general terms, in the thought of many figures and thinkers. Many yeshiva students whom we encountered in the biographical chapter expressed themselves in ways similar to the expressions of Rabbi Hutner. It can also be suggested that there is a general similarity between certain motifs that pervaded the second and third generations of the Mussar movement and existential themes, for example, the intensive engagement with the self and the development of the personality. The question is therefore whether it is correct to identify the focal points of Rabbi Hutner’s thought with the focal points of existentialist philosophy.

I will begin with a basic characterization of these subjects as they are expressed within the context of existentialist philosophy. Afterward, I will present in greater detail these focal points within the thought of Rabbi Hutner, through expressions and statements taken from his apocryphal writings, as well as other sources, to assess the scope of the similarity between them and their existentialist counterparts.

**5.3. Authenticity and Meaning: Existential Focal Points**

Although the existentialist philosophers share points of interest and the themes that engage them, they differ from each other in how they understand the problems with which they grapple and how they explain and develop the concepts they formulate. In the following overview, I will attempt to delineate the major or prominent approaches to two key issues under discussion: authenticity and meaning. To this end, I will make use of three representative examples: Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, pivotal figures in this school, and to a large extent representative of its principal currents: religious (Kierkegaard), and atheist (Heidegger and Sartre). This choice has been made from an awareness that our ultimate purpose here is to compare these ideas to Rabbi Hutner’s thought. If we can assume that he was familiar with existentialist thought, whether directly or indirectly, these are the figures that it is reasonable to assume that he was familiar with.[[10]](#footnote-11) For the sake of brevity, I cannot avoid simplifying these thinkers’ ideas and limiting the discussion to a presentation of those aspects which are relevant to the subject of our discussion -- Rabbi Hutner’s thought.

The concept of authenticity in the existentialist tradition defies clear definition. Early thinkers who discussed authenticity insisted that it could not be defined, quantified, or characterized. Authenticity is inherently undogmatic and never means the same thing to different people. Any conceptualization of authenticity inevitably entails its distortion or falsification because of its reduction to a fixed format. For this reason, these thinkers tended to characterize it only by negation, express it through literary devices, and refrain from formulating it in a systematic philosophical manner.[[11]](#footnote-12) Later thinkers such as Heidegger and Sartre sought to formulate the ontology of authenticity (an effort that for others involved an inherent self-contradiction) by adapting the phenomenological method developed by Edmund Husserl, thereby clarifying it somewhat and making it easier to comprehend.[[12]](#footnote-13) The meaning of the search for authenticity within this group was variegated, although in general, it tended to be associated with the following two concepts: selfhood, the aspiration to be one’s self, and singularity, the aspiration to exist as only you can exist. The concept of authenticity always includes both concepts, although the various thinkers differ from each other in the aspect of authenticity that they emphasized or preferred.

The concept of meaning, similar to the concept of authenticity, is elusive and difficult to define. However, the search for meaning is usually connected to the following two concepts: understanding, the desire to understand existence and man’s place in the world, and value, the yearning to be something worthwhile, rather than a “nothing”.[[13]](#footnote-14) Here, the thinkers are more clearly distinct from one another, as some are more deeply disturbed by the absurd and yearn for understanding, while others are more deeply disturbed by nothingness and yearn for value.

The emergence of authenticity in its existential sense is usually attributed to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, and he is therefore generally regarded as the father of Existentialism. Kierkegaard wrote many books which he published under a string of pen names. His fake identities contradict each other and there is a multi-faceted argument among his commentators as to how to read his writings, to what extent they should be interpreted in light of the events of his life history, and, consequently, how to understand his ideas.[[14]](#footnote-15) In the following lines, I will attempt to describe, according to the outline above, the attributes of authenticity and meaning in Kierkegaard’s thought.

Kierkegaard’s journey toward authenticity is the attempt to solve his existential problem, alienation, the profound feeling that he is disconnected from himself, cut off from his own existence, which he cannot understand: "כל הקיום ממלא אותי חרדה" כתב, "כל דבר בלתי מוסבר עבורי, אני עצמי יותר מכול... סבלי הוא עצום, ללא גבול." ובמקום אחר: "לבד באימה עד מוות, לבדי לנוכח חוסר המשמעות של הקיום." [[15]](#footnote-16) The feeling of alienation and meaninglessness overcomes a person because his existence is experienced as coincidental, a series of atomistic events for which there is nothing to bind them together into a cohesive, meaningful unit. Man does not understand why he exists, what he is meant to do, or what it all means. Kierkegaard’s investigations bring him to the conclusion that the feeling of alienation and those feelings accompanying it – despair, terror, and anxiety – derive from man’s inability to actualize the synthesis ingrained within him by virtue of his humanity, sometimes called the ontological dichotomy: the synthesis between finitude and infinity. Finitude is a necessary dimension of man: his objective limitations, circumstances, condition, nature, and so forth are not in his control. In a basic sense, this is his existence. Infinity is a possibility -- his capacity to imagine things differently, to want to be different, and to change. This existential alienation derives from an inability to unify himself as a consciousness with the concrete facts of his life. Nonetheless, the authentic man is at peace with himself and lives a life filled with meaning by virtue of his decision to live that way. Kierkegaard’s commentators, as well as his writings themselves, disagree on the description of the meaning of selfhood and the consolidation of the self. Sometimes it is formulated in terms of self-discovery or self-acceptance and other times in terms of self-creation, or something in between the two, self-creation within a given existing space, but usually as a continual process of self-creation. Common to all is the statement that here there is an aspiration to selfhood and unity and that this is achieved by choosing an idea to which a person devotes himself entirely. In this authentic endeavor, man finds the meaning of his life. The idea for which he lives and according to which he chooses how to be and what to do, unifies all his experiences and grants them meaning and clarity. Kierkegaard, it must be noted, concludes that the only idea in whose context it is possible to unite existence is Christianity, and he connects and even identifies self-fulfillment with the actualization of the will of God by the individual person. In any case, for our purposes, for Kierkegaard the primary emphasis in the aspiration for authenticity is selfhood and the primary emphasis in the search for meaning is finding the intent of one’s individual existence.[[16]](#footnote-17)

Heidegger was profoundly influenced by Kierkegaard, in many ways, despite a tendency to conceal this influence.[[17]](#footnote-18) Nonetheless, in his thought, the yearning for authenticity receives a different emphasis. It must be pointed out that although the tendency to include Heidegger within the existentialist tradition, and even to regard him as one of its founders, is widespread, is not necessarily correct. Heidegger himself publicly denied that he was an existentialist and rejected any such association. One of his works, *Letter on Humanism,*[[18]](#footnote-19)written as a polemical response to the essay “Existentialism is Humanism” was devoted to disassociating himself from Sartre and his ideas. To validate his identification with the existentialist school, at least within the context of our discussion, let us return to the definition of Existentialism as formulated above: a philosophical system whose primary subject of investigation is authenticity and meaning, against the backdrop of the existential angst of the late modern period, and inspired by the phenomenological method. Heidegger was perhaps not an existentialist by intention or from within his philosophical motivations,[[19]](#footnote-20) but the formulation that constituted the basis of the existentialist school derived from his thought.

Heidegger’s engagement with the question of authenticity derived from a motivation different than that of his predecessors.[[20]](#footnote-21) In his work, Heidegger seeks to return to what was in his opinion the most important philosophical question and, at the same time, the most neglected, the question that precedes any other philosophical inquiry: to explain the meaning of “being” in general. However, very quickly, his attention passes to a question of another order, for Heidegger declares that being itself has no articulation; it can be found everywhere and is hidden everywhere, and it is therefore impossible to precisely define, understand, or conceptualize it, but only to reveal it or allow it to be revealed. [[21]](#footnote-22) Therefore, to explain, in so far as possible, the meaning of being, one must examine the phenomenon by which being is revealed and made accessible. This phenomenon is a specific “entity” (in Heidegger’s jargon one distinguishes between “entity” a comprehensive term for being as such, and “entities”, distinct individual beings that have an entity) – man. Man is unique in that he exists and makes contact with being from a unique awareness and consciousness, by virtue of which being should be uncovered or revealed to him. The premise of Heidegger’s work was that if the ways in which being is revealed by man are clarified, it will be possible to learn something about it. Actually, in contrast to his declared intention, instead of an ontological investigation of “being”, most of Heidegger’s early work, *Being and Time*, deals with phenomenological inquiry about man (for which he received some criticism).[[22]](#footnote-23) Nonetheless, at least according to his stated opinion, man and his existence were not the subjects of his inquiry. Heidegger lay the foundation for the development of an existentialist discussion yet claimed to have no intention of participating in it.

In the context of this inquiry, Heidegger establishes that the manner of the revelation of being before man is not fixed but rather dependent on his manner of existence. Man has two natures or modes of existence: authentic and unauthentic. Authenticity enables the revelation of being in unique ways that have yet to be revealed and therein lies its importance. The development of Heidegger’s ontological argument is complex and saturated with idiosyncratic and inaccessible language. As further elaboration is not needed for our discussion, we will confine ourselves to this schematic presentation and turn to the subject relevant to us, the phenomenological inquiry about man’s states of existence – the authentic and unauthentic.

Heidegger’s basic characterization of both these states of existence is similar to that of his predecessors. Unauthentic existence is devoid of singularity, conformist, and indistinct from the surrounding multitudes. The values, outlooks, and to a large extent, choices of the unauthentic man are instilled within him from the outside, not established by himself. The unauthentic man lives the existence belonging to “them” (*das Man*). As he wrote:

We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see and judge about literature as they see and judge; […] The “they” [das Man], which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.[[23]](#footnote-24)

In the existential default, the unauthentic, the range of possibilities in which man exists with being and facing it, lie before him from the beginning and are not his. These are the possibilities dictated by “them”. Authentic existence, in contrast, is the choice to exist not in reference to the possibilities given to man initially and externally, but rather in reference to his own individual possibilities deriving from himself. The essence of the concept of authenticity for Heidegger, therefore, is in its emphasis on singularity.

According to Heidegger, the exposure, passive or active, of being is inherently connected to the meaning of being. In his opinion, being is concealed in a network of connections formed between the different “entities”, and every formation of a new unique connection constitutes the appearance of new meaning that in turn influences the fabric of being in general. The concept of meaning for Heidegger, like Kierkegaard, is connected to purpose. [[24]](#footnote-25) Heidegger aspires to understand being, as much as it is possible to understand that which is, by definition, incomprehensible, from his point of view. This is a desire for meaning. Two comments must be made here. First, in the context of Heidegger’s thought, meaning is not something that one discovers, but rather something one gives or establishes. It is not that meaning is concealed, but in the act of actualizing a completely new possibility, there is a simultaneous revelation and the bestowal of meaning to being. Second, in authentic existence, man gives meaning not only to that which surrounds him but also to himself, by creating his “self” as distinct from others.[[25]](#footnote-26) I will get ahead of myself here and note that this pattern of man giving meaning to reality and at the same time giving meaning to himself is identical in form to the way in which Rabbi Hutner explains the expression, “who is honored? one who honors others” as meaning that when someone ascribes importance to reality, he thereby grants importance to himself.[[26]](#footnote-27) For Heidegger, therefore, the primary emphasis in striving for authenticity is singularity, and the primary emphasis in the search for meaning is to discover the purpose of existence in general, through discovering the purpose of individual existence.

Sartre, at first glance, seems to follow in Kierkegaard’s footsteps, in his declaration that the aspiration for authenticity is the aspiration to be oneself. However, for Sartre, man cannot be himself. This aspiration is tantamount to an aspiration to become God, who is identical with Himself, the reason for Himself, and is therefore absolutely authentic. [[27]](#footnote-28) Sartre tends to develop his understanding of man around the concept of God (which he rejects), who in his eyes represents the composite of all human aspirations. According to Sartre, “man fundamentally is the desire to be God”,[[28]](#footnote-29) although man is not God.

The infeasibility of authenticity is rooted in the internal contradiction within man. Sartre distinguishes between two types of existence within reality, which I translate as “being-for-itself” and an “entity-in-itself”.[[29]](#footnote-30) The existence of “entity-in-itself” is the way in which objects exist, a fixed existence, actualized and full. The “entity-in-itself” is identical to itself and to its essence. The tree is. “Being-for-itself” is a more obscure concept. It is empty, the “nothing” in Sartre’s terminology, by which he calls that which is supposed to be but is not. It is not identical to itself because it has no self, no essence. However, it is not as though there are types of things in reality that can be divided up according to their type of existence, some entities-in-themselves and others beings-for-themselves. Rather, all existing things are entities-in-themselves with one exception – human consciousness, which is being-for-itself. Man as a composite is an internal contradiction comprised of these two types of existence: he has one aspect in which he is an object within the world, like any other object, and as such he is an entity-in-itself, but he has another side free of content or definition that is a vessel for constantly changing content, and as such he is a being-for-itself. The self-contradiction within man does not allow him to be anything. He cannot be an entity-in-itself because he never has a permanent foundation. He cannot be a being-for-itself because he always possesses an objective aspect. Man can never be what he is, and therefore cannot be authentic. What possibility, then, lies before him? Sartre’s answer is that man cannot be authentic, but he can act authentically when he adopts the sole characteristic that can be regarded as his defining attribute: freedom. Man’s internal contradiction, which prevents authentic being, is the source of human freedom. Sartre does not identify freedom, as might be expected, with consciousness or being-for-itself. Freedom is impossible without limitations. Choice always involves a choice of some type of finality; it always includes the negation of certain things and the affirmation of one thing and not another. In a complete absence of limitations, there would be no negation or affirmation at all; only nothing would remain.[[30]](#footnote-31) The thing most true to himself that a person can do therefore is to refuse to listen to voices, internal and external, telling him that he is not free in any sense and to embrace his radical freedom.[[31]](#footnote-32)

Another way in which man is defined in light of the concept of God, or inspired by it, in Sartre’s system of thought, is the question of meaning. In the pre-atheist world, God filled the role of granting meaning, justification, and value. However, without God, there is no one to fulfill this function, except man himself. As he wrote:

If, however, God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct. Thus, we have neither behind us, nor before us, in the luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse.[[32]](#footnote-33)

Man did not create himself, however, now that he is here, he has to create himself. Not a one-time creation, but recreation at every moment, even if this reinforces that which already exists. This creation is expressed by choice, in particular, the choice of meaning that man gives to his life. As he expressed it:

If I l have eliminated God the Father, there has to be someone to invent values. Things must be accepted as they are. What is more, to say that we invent values means neither more nor less than this: life has no meaning a priori. Life itself is nothing until it is lived, it is we who give it meaning, and value is nothing more than the meaning that we give it.[[33]](#footnote-34)

The act of choice is the combination of the acts of inventing and granting, and the values that man creates for himself to justify his actions are the meaning of his life. Like Heidegger, only more so, for Sartre, meaning is not something one discovers, but rather something that one gives or establishes. However, in contrast to Heidegger and Kierkegaard, for Sartre, the search for meaning is not expressed by understanding, but rather by value. Meaning is what justifies existence, transforming it into something that is not nothing, something important.

This position is clearly apparent in Sartre’s attitude to determinism, which for him was not a philosophical error, but rather an injustice. He referred to determinists as “cowards” and “bastards”,[[34]](#footnote-35) because for him the meaning of determinism is the negation of man’s value.[[35]](#footnote-36)

Existence according to Sartre lacks meaning in itself. If man’s life has any value, it is the direct result of his freedom. Choice for him is not only a technical characteristic of man distinguishing him from the animals, or a condition for the existence of a coherent moral or religious framework (because without the capacity to choose it is impossible to attribute justice or injustice to man’s actions) as it is widely used in Western philosophy and theology. Choice is the source of meaning and the negation of freedom is the negation of meaning. Thus, a deterministic outlook entails the negation of man’s value.

In summary, for Kierkegaard, authenticity means selfhood and meaning signifies the purpose of existence. For Heidegger, authenticity means singularity, and meaning signifies the bestowal of purpose to existence. For Sartre, authenticity means the adoption of radical freedom – the closest thing to selfhood possible for man while meaning signifies the granting of value to existence.

**5.4 Singularity: Authenticity in Rabbi Hutner’s Thought**

If we can identify the concept of singularity in Rabbi Hutner’s thought with the concept of authenticity, then Rabbi Hutner’s aspiration for authenticity is of the type related to the search for singularity. This emerges from the passages cited at the beginning of this chapter, especially the second, in which he declares that "נמצא הוא האדם בחתירה תמידית להבקיע את ההסתרה של הריבוי בכדי לגלות לעצמו את תואר היחידות של אישיותו" (פחד יצחק, שבועות טז/י).. We encountered the theme of the development of personality above, and as noted there, this theme was popular among the thinkers of the Mussar movement of the time.[[36]](#footnote-37) The connection between the aspiration for *yechidut* and the development of the personality should impact how we understand Rabbi Hutner when he discusses this theme, upon which he loads existential meanings beyond their original context or meaning. An examination of other appearances of the concept of *yechidut* in Rabbi Hutner’s thought strengthens this conclusion, and at the same time reveals how he integrated a current intellectual trend into the Orthodox Jewish sphere.

In a sequence of four discourses in *Pachad Yitzchak* on Shavuot, 15 -- 18, Rabbi Hutner discusses the concept of *yechidut*, relating it to three subjects: man, wisdom, and Torah. In our discussion of the relationship between the Torah and *divrei reshut*, we saw how he developed a particular conception of *yechidut* as the totality of “"אין עוד מלבדה [של תורה], as the attribute of something to extend everywhere and amalgamate everything into one essence connected to itself.[[37]](#footnote-38) We will now discuss the second meaning of *yechidut,* which we encountered at the beginning of this chapter, as an attribute expressing singularity and the yearning for singularity.

Rabbi Hutner narrows the concept of *yechidut* to a specific human activity: wisdom. According to Rabbi Hutner, wisdom is “the man inside man” and there lies the place of his true singularity: "הנה החכמה שבו היא כתר-היחידות שלו, והיא היא המסלקת ממנו כל רמז וכל כינוי של תואר 'סוג' ו'מין', והיא היא אשר נר-היחידות דולק על ראשה" (פחד יצחק, שבועות, טז/ח).. In another place he wrote:

עיקר מהותו של השכל הוא בהיותו מחודש בהחלט [...] עצם האפשרות של היחידות בשכלו של אדם, באה היא לו רק מפני שיש בכל שכל ושכל דבר מחודש, מה שאין בשכל חברו [...] החידוש במהלך פעולתו של השכל הוא בגדר פסיק רישא, על כדי כך שאמרו "אין בית המדרש בלא חידוש". אין השכל מוצא את עצמו במילוי ענינו, אלא בשעת יצירה. עיקרו של כח השכל, כח הולדה הוא" (פחד יצחק, שבועות, יז/ז-ח).[[38]](#footnote-39)

Man, therefore, is singular and his *yechidut* lies in his wisdom-intellect. The essence of the intellect is its renewal, not found in any other intellect. The centrality of the aspiration for *yechidut* for Rabbi Hutner can be distinguished in the way in which he connects, to the point of identification, the concept of “insight” (“*bina*”) with the focus of the yeshiva experience -- Torah study. This connection finds clear expression in a discourse from *Pachad Yitzchak* on Hanukkah, in which Rabbi Hutner endeavors to explain the Talmudic saying, “a person should always study Torah in a place that his heart desires” (Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zara 19a). The phrase “a person should always study” introduces a homiletic, not halachic, saying, and is usually read as a pedagogical recommendation, according to which there is an advantage to a person studying according to his personal preferences. However, Rabbi Hutner, as usual, reads this saying literally as a platform for a philosophical argument and relates to it as a normative instruction. In his words:

מצינו בענינו של תלמוד תורה, כי לעולם ילמד אדם מה שלבו חפץ. והלא פשוט שאין מקומה של הכרעה זו אלא בלימוד התורה. אם יהיו לפניו שני חולים שקולים לקיים בהם מצות ביקור חולים, בודאי שילך למקום שלבו חפץ, אבל זו תהיה הכרעה של רשות, דדוקא מפני שאין הדין מכריע, הרי הוא הולך למקום שלבו חפץ; שאני לימוד התורה, אשר בו ההתעסקות במקום שלבו חפץ הוא הכרעתו של הדין עצמו (פחד יצחק, חנוכה, ו/יא).

This passage is one example of many in which Rabbi Hutner distinguishes between the commandments and the Torah, in a way that indicates the superiority of Torah study. In everything relating to mitzvot, man is supposed to be permitted to do as his heart desires, on the assumption that this is a case of equivalent possibilities from the perspective of halachic obligation. However, regarding Torah study, following one's heart is not voluntary but a halachic requirement: a person is required to study precisely what interests him. The reason that there is an obligation to study specifically in the place that a person’s heart desires is connected to Rabbi Hutner’s idea that "חבור זה של השכל עם ענינו של המושג נעשה הוא בכחו של התענוג הטמון בהשגה." [[39]](#footnote-40) In observing commandments, pleasure is a collateral advantage, but regarding Torah study, it is a necessary and crucial condition, because the level of achievement is dependent on the degree of pleasure. As he wrote

חפץ הלב הכרעה היא רק בתלמוד תורה. משום דמצות תלמודה של תורה מתקיימת היא בכחה של ההשגה וההשכלה. וכל תוספת תענוג בשעת השגה – הרי היא ממילא תוספת השגה. ולא עוד אלא שרואים אנו כי רק ביחס לתלמוד תורה נתקנה ברכת תחנונים על עריבות הדברים, שהרי לא מצינו דוגמתה של ברכת "והערב נא" בנוגע לשום מצווה [...] כי התענוג בהשגת דברי תורה נכנס הוא בכלל גוף המצוה, ואלו בשאר מצות אינו אלא עטרה על ראשם (שם).

The singular personal dimension in Torah study, is, therefore, critical. The quality of Torah study is a function of the level of originality and the degree to which the study is directed by the personality of the student. If we continue this line of reasoning further, the similarity to existentialist ideas and the concept of authenticity becomes more salient. The concept of existentialist authenticity is always developed as a contrast to the conformity and the unexamined existence of the masses. To be unauthentic means to be like all the others, like “them”. To act the way everyone else acts, to tread the path they have laid, instead of acting in a way that is true to oneself, unique, or spontaneous. Rabbi Hutner’s insistence on individual Torah study in the place where a person desires and from a necessary striving for original insights that only his singular intellect is capable of producing conveys a similar message. A person must not study Torah the way “they” study it or what “they” study. The glorification of originality in Torah study is not the innovation of Rabbi Hutner but rather rooted in the experience of the Lithuanian yeshiva world. However, it can be said that what Rabbi Hutner did for originality in Torah study is similar to what Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin did for Torah study itself: taking an important component within a given framework and upgrading it to the most important component that then holds a decisive and supreme status within the hierarchy of values. Rabbi Chaim raised the status of Torah study from one of the important components of Judaism to the status of primary value to which all others are dependent and without which the rest of the system loses its value. Similarly, Rabbi Hutner raised the status of the original insight from an indicator of the talent and quality of the learning of a Torah scholar to the status of the essence of learning, without which Torah study loses its value. Study without originality, in a place or a way determined by an agent other than the student himself, is inauthentic study. Study that reveals the singularity of the student is authentic and is of normative preference. In this sense, *yechidut* is an expression of authenticity. Within Rabbi Hutner’s thought, *yechidut*, in its connection to the related concepts of wisdom and Torah, fulfills a function similar to that of authenticity in its aspect of singularity.

**5.5 *Chashivut*: Meaning in Rabbi Hutner’s Thought**

We will turn now to the concept of *chashivut* in Rabbi Hutner’s thought, which echoes the concept of meaning central to existentialist philosophy. If it is possible to identify the concept of *chashivut* with the concept of meaning, Rabbi Hutner’s desire for meaning is of the type that desires value. We have seen an indication of this above, in one of the passages from *Pachad Yitzhak* that discusses *yechidut*. In this passage, Rabbi Hutner connects *yechidut* with the resurrection of the dead, because the finitude of existence contradicts *yechidut*: "יחידותו של אדם אומרת 'בשבילי נברא עולם'. והופעת המיתה [...] סותרת היא את ההכרה ש"בשבילי נברא עולם" שהרי העולם מתקיים ועומד גם לאחר מיתתו וחליפתו של אדם" (פחד יצחק, שבועות, כא/ח). As we have seen, this passage from *Pachad Yitzchak* is unique in that it relates to the text’s historical context: "(ורואים אנו לעינינו, שמכיון שאמונת תחיית המתים, איננה שולטת אצל אנשי-החול, שוב לא שקטו ולא נחו, עד שהורידו את ערכו של אדם, עד לידי השוואה עם שאר בעלי חיים)" (Ibid). A consequence of the lack of belief in the resurrection of the dead is the negation of *yechidut* and with it the negation of man’s value.

Evidence of the centrality of the question of man’s worth in Rabbi Hutner’s thought can be found in the exegetical discussion appearing in the eighth discourse of *Pachad Yitzhak* on Shavuot, one of the longest and most systematic discourses in the *Pachad Yitzchak* series. The discourse is divided into five chapters; we discussed the second chapter in the course of our analysis of the intellectual infrastructure, where we saw Rabbi Hutner’s specific conceptualization of *kavod* -- recognizing *chashivut*. From this, we discerned that the attribution and the bestowal of *chashivut* to the creation, and to man, is one of the purposes of creation, and one of the two central focal points of Rabbi Hutner’s thought. I would like now to examine the next argument in this discourse, developed in its third chapter. Rabbi Hutner begins with a discussion of the rabbinic saying “he who humiliates his fellow man in public, it is as though he spilled blood”. This appears to be a pedagogical statement intended to ascribe severe moral opprobrium to shaming another person. Rabbi Hutner follows the approach of the Tosafot and Rabbi Jonah Gerondi, according to which the Sages “ascribe to him actual bloodshed, and he is obligated to die rather than transgressing”. In other words, he understands this saying literally.[[40]](#footnote-41) He begins his exegetical argument with a question about the explanation appearing in the Talmud as to why embarrassing someone publicly is equivalent to bloodshed: “blood goes out and pallor come in” – when a person has been shamed the blood leaves his face and he grows pale, therefore there is a loss or shedding of blood. However, Rabbi Hutner observes that the infliction of physical pain (“*tza’ar*” in Rabbinic language) also causes a person to grow pale, yet it is not considered bloodshed. What then is the difference between pallor caused by embarrassment and that caused by physical pain, that one is considered bloodshed and the other not? This is his first question (*Pachad Yitzhak*, Shavuot 8/12). Rabbi Hutner then asks a second question, about the meaning of the expression “bloodshed”. First, he points out that in Hebrew there is a distinction between killing people, called “murder” (“*retzach/retzicha*”), and killing animals, called slaughter (“*harigah*”) (ibid). Second, he points out that the expression “bloodshed” refers only to killing people, although in killing an animal its blood is also spilled. He further points out that there are “הרבה אופנים של רציחה מבלי הוצאת דם" (שם, יד), and nonetheless, these types of killing are also referred to as “bloodshed”.

As usual, Rabbi Hutner answers these questions in the opposite order, beginning with the second question. Following Maharal, he determines that the meaning of the expression “bloodshed” is not literally the shedding of blood but rather the separation of the soul from the body. In his words:

כי הדם הוא הנפש. אין אנו יודעים את סוד הקשור של נפש וגוף, אבל לשון הכותב כי הדם הוא הנפש, משמע שההתחברות היא בענין דם. ובסמיכות זו מביא המהר"ל את דברי הגמרא בגיטין כי טיטוס תקע חרבו את הפרוכת ויצא ממנה דם. הכונה היא מכיוון שנתחללה קדושת הפרכת, על כן יש כאן לשון של יציאת דם. סילוק הצורה מן החומר זו היא שפיכת דמים. וכל הרציחות אף על פי שלמעשה אינן שפיכות דמים, אבל ענינן הוא ענין של שפיכות דמים (שם, טו)

This brief passage develops rapidly in three stages: the connection between body and soul is in the “matter of the blood”, in other words, the blood is the metaphor for the connection of the body and soul; similarly, bloodshed is not just a metaphor for the disconnection of man’s body from his soul, in other words, his murder, but also for the desecration of the holy, as in the case of Titus who stuck his sword into the curtain of the ark and thereby desecrated the Temple. The common denominator between the desecration of the holy and the severance of the body and soul is the removal of the “form” – when a man is killed his “form” is lost, and when a holy thing is desecrated, its form is lost. In the context of the characterization of Rabbi Hutner’s written oeuvre, attention must be called to the aesthetic dimension of his exegetical argument: Rabbi Hutner, through a hyper-literal reading of the expression “he who humiliates his fellow man is as if he spilled his blood”, creates the difficulty requiring explanation, and then solves it by a hyper-metaphorical reading and a reconceptualization of the term “bloodshed”.

Based on this insight, Rabbi Hutner explains why the expression “bloodshed” is unique to the murder of people and not applied to killing animals, even though that act also involves the spilling of blood.

כל מציאות חיותו של הבעל חי הוא בגופו. אין מציאות לחיות זו מחוץ לגוף. ועל כן אי אפשר לומר בהריגתו שפיכת דמים. הריגה היא השחתת החיות, ושפיכת דמים היא הפסקת הקשר בין החיות לבין הגוף, ועל כן לא תתכן רק באדם אשר יש מציאות לחיותו גם מחוץ לגופו. שפך דם האדם, באדם דמו ישפך כי בצלם אלקים עשה את האדם. מפני שהאדם הוא צלם אלקים ויש לו לחיות זו הנמצאת עכשיו בגופו מציאות לעצמה, לכן שייך בנטילת נשמתו ענין של שפיכות דמים (שם, טז).[[41]](#footnote-42)

In his conclusion to his answer to the second question, Rabbi Hutner introduces to the discussion the concept of “the image of God”. The severance of the connection between the body and soul is the loss of this image, and this is the meaning of the expression bloodshed; from the association of the expression “bloodshed” both with the description of the loss of the divine image and the desecration of the holy, we learn that both actions are in essence equivalent. We saw in our discussion of the intellectual infrastructure that Rabbi Hutner placed the granting of *chashivut* -- the purpose of man in the framework of the theocentric purpose – within the system of the opposites sacred and profane, while ascribing the concept of the divine image to *imitatio Dei* and *da’at* -- on which depends the granting of *chashivut* to the world.[[42]](#footnote-43) From here it can be concluded that an object’s loss of holiness is equivalent in value to the loss of both its *chashivut* and its divine image.

After answering the second question, Rabbi Hutner returns to the first, and attempts to explain the essence of the difference between causing pain and causing humiliation: although both cause facial pallor and neither causes actual death, only one is considered to be bloodshed. Rabbi Hutner explains that bloodshed is the loss of connection between the body and the soul and that there are two ways to sever this connection: "או שמחלישים את המקשר, ונעשה החיבור יותר רפה, או שמכלים צד אחד של הקשר וממילא בטל הקשר באין דבר מקושר" (שם, יח). In the context of the connection between body and soul, causing pain and causing injury to *kavod* are distinguished from each other in the matter upon which they act. Causing pain is an injury to one side of the connection, the body, while an injury to *kavod* strikes at the connection itself: "מיעוט החיות על ידי צער, היא מיעוט חיותה של הנפש הטבעית [...] שאני מיעוט החיות של ביזיון, שהיא התרופפות הקשר בין חיות נשמתו של אדם עם גופו. הביזיון פוגע לא בנפש הטבעית שלו, כי אם בצלם אלקים שלו" (שם, יט). Causing pain, relevant also to animals, injures the body; humiliation damages the connection between body and soul. Accordingly. Rabbi Hutner comments here that although there is a prohibition of causing pain to animals, there is no concept of “animal dignity”. The concept of the dignity of created beings refers only to people. Humiliation, it must be emphasized, is described by Rabbi Hutner as a kind of diminution of vitality. Biological life constitutes the vitality of the human body, but the vitality of man’s divine image is his *chashivut*.

From this we can understand why there is a qualitative difference between causing physical pain and shaming. As he wrote:

ההבדל בין שפיכת דמים על ידי שריפת הגוף וכדומה, ובין שפיכת דמים על ידי הלבנת פנים הוא בזה שאף על פי דתרווייהו [שניהם] שפיכת דמים הם, דזה וזה הוה הפסקת הקשר בין חיותו של אדם ובין גופו של אדם, ושניהם ממעטים הם את דמות, ומסלקים את הצלם; מכל מקום שריפת הגוף היא הפסקת הקשר על ידי שהיא מכלה ומאבדת את הדבר המקושר, עד אשר ממילא מתבטל הקשר; מה שאין כן הלבנת פנים, שהיא הפסקת הקשר על ידי שהיא עושה מעשה של רפיון במקום הקשר ממש [...] ואשר על כן מובן הוא היטב, דרק לענין הפסקת הקשר על ידי מעשה בגופו של קשר, הוא דיתכן לומר דגם התרופפות הפסקה-במקצת הויא [...] והוה אבזרייהו של שפיכות דמים. אבל לעניין הפסקת הקשר על ידי כליונו של הדבר המקושר, הרי כל שאין הדבר הנקשר נכלה לגמרי, וכל שאינו פועל על התחברות הנפש עם הגוף אינו משתייך כלל לשפיכת דמים (שם, כ).

Bodily injury is considered bloodshed only if it is absolute because only a total injury of one side of the connection affects the connection itself. However, if the injury is partial or temporary, and does not affect the connection itself, there is no bloodshed. In contrast, an injury to the connection itself, even if it is minor and does not sever the connection, is still an injury and is therefore a type of bloodshed. We must consider what emerges from these words: ending the physical life of a person is not murder, but the consequence of this, the severance of the connection between body and soul, is indeed murder. The shutting down of the body, in itself, is killing, but like the killing of an animal, whom by definition one cannot murder because they have no body-soul connection, no character to be subdued, nor divine image to be removed. The message that emerges from these words is profoundly anti-materialistic: without the dimension that is outside the physical body, man is no more than an animal. At the opening of this section, we saw that the result of the lack of faith of “secular people” in the resurrection of the dead reduces the value of man until it is equal to that of an animal. However, what is defined as the focus of man’s essence, that which is murdered, is not the soul; the soul, on the face of it, has a similar status to that of the body. It is one of the two connected items from both sides of the connection, a means, not an end. The end goal is the connection.

Here is an appropriate place to comment on the divine image in Rabbi Hutner’s thought, which has a unique quality. The concept of the image of God, according to its many interpretations, always represents that which is understood by the exegete to be the most essential quality of man and thus, by extension, also of God.[[43]](#footnote-44) For example, Maimonides defines the divine image as intellectual attainment,[[44]](#footnote-45) which corresponds to the idea that God studies himself. Other thinkers, including Maharal of Prague, for whom Rabbi Hutner had a special affinity, identified the divine image with freedom or free will, corresponding to the freedom or free will of God.[[45]](#footnote-46) Rabbi Hutner here identifies an affront to a person’s dignity, that is his *chashivut*, with injury to the divine image within him. In the previous chapter, we saw several places in which Rabbi Hutner discusses the divine image. First, he declares that lovingkindness is connected to the self-creation of “the inner world of the personality”. We saw in this chapter that Rabbi Hutner connects the concept of personality development to *yechidut* and existential questions that deviate from the usual “Mussar” meaning of the term.[[46]](#footnote-47) Second, he declares that the aspiration and obligation of *imitatio Dei* is a consequence of the divine image, which signifies the aspiration to exist as God exists.[[47]](#footnote-48) Third, he determines that "המקום המיוחד לשאת בתוכו את הדמות ואת הצלם" is man’s capacity for *da’at*.[[48]](#footnote-49) Common to all the elements that Rabbi Hutner connects to the concept of the divine image are the two focal points of his thought identified above: existence and *chashivut*. God is an entity possessing true existence and absolute value, which grants existence and value to humanity. Man was created in the image of God, in a way that enables him to have existence and value and give them to himself and the world.

Let us, therefore, reconstruct the argument in this chapter of discourse 8 of *Pachad Yitzhak* on Shavuot, and integrate it with the argument appearing in the preceding chapter, which we examined in the discussion of the intellectual framework. Murder, also known as “bloodshed”, is an injury to the connection between the body and the soul. Humiliation is also an injury to the connection between body and soul; it is an injury to man’s *kavod,* which means his *chashivut*. When a person’s *kavod* is injured, he grows pale, and his blood is shed because the embarrassment makes him lose his feeling that he has *chashivut*; reducing a person’s feeling of *chashivut* is a type of murder. A dead man is a man without *chashivut*; a man without *chashivut* is as if he were dead. Life without *chashivut*, without value, in existentialist language, without meaning, is not life.[[49]](#footnote-50)

Between the lines, a non-intuitive process is revealed. Intuitively, we tend to place murder at the extreme end of the scale of physical harm: hitting is a low form of injury, wounding a medium form of injury, and murder a severe injury. However, from Rabbi Hutner’s words, it emerges that physical injury and murder are not on the same spectrum but belong to two completely separate categories. In contrast, an injury to a person’s *kavod* does pertain to the same category as murder and both belong on the same spectrum.

The dynamic emerging from Rabbi Hutner’s words is interesting in light of the distinction made by Peter Berger between cultures based on honor and cultures based on dignity.[[50]](#footnote-51) Berger’s famous essay is dedicated to the elimination of the idea of honor in modern society and its replacement with the idea of dignity, and the implications of this change. This transition is connected to the disappearance of institutions and social backgrounds as the source of a person’s identity and the meaning of his life. It should be noted that Landau included Berger on his list of important figures concerned with the question of meaning and engaging with it. [[51]](#footnote-52) The pre-modern honor (vestiges of which survive in modern societies) is not a matter of hierarchy alone, but rather of correlation: a person’s social and institutional frameworks determined the attitude shown to him by other members of his class or other classes as well as the behaviors that were compulsory for him and those actions and situations which were shameful for him. A person was the roles he filled and the things he did, without which he lost his selfhood. In this culture, insult, an affront to one’s honor, was a serious wrong for which one could demand revenge or reparations, and at times it was even necessary to sacrifice one’s life itself to defend one’s honor. In contrast, dignity is not connected to anything, but rather is unconditional; every person deserves it by virtue of being human. In societies based on dignity, all the defining parameters in honor-based societies are regarded as masks and illusions; a person is what he is. In his natural state, without anything, lies his true situation, and therein lies his honor, his dignity. In dignity-based societies, an insult, which is an injury to one’s status, is nothing. On the contrary, a person who cares about his honor is considered despicable and primitive. The matter is clearest in the legal context: in dignity-based societies, it is impossible to sue a person for an insult, unless it can be proven that it has caused material damage or serious injury to the person’s human rights, derivatives of dignity. In dignity-based societies, like the United States, home of both Berger and Rabbi Hutner, an insult in itself is nothing.

According to Berger, there are significant advantages to the transition to a dignity-based society. Human rights, applicable to every person, as a person, are an important and valuable institution. However, the consequent loss of honor has a price. The modern condition, in which institutions and social frameworks have lost their place as determinants of a person’s identity, is characterized by an identity crisis, a feeling of alienation from society, and a lack of selfhood. In Berger’s words:

The conceptualizations of man and society of, for instance, Marxism and existentialism are equally rooted in this experience […] Marx's "alienation" and "false consciousness," Heidegger's "authenticity" and Sartre's "bad faith," […] could only arise and claim credibility in a situation in which the identity-defining power of institutions has been greatly weakened.[[52]](#footnote-53)

The absence of honor is a component of the crisis of meaninglessness, to which there have been many modern responses, among them existentialist.

Where does Rabbi Hutner fit in within these developments? Rabbi Hutner is resolute in his desire to return to the world the concept of *kavod*. An injury to a person’s feeling of *chashivut* is like an injury to his life and more severe than an injury to his body. But things are not so simple: Rabbi Hutner does not want to establish *kavod* on the basis of institutional and social contexts, but rather upon man himself. "בספרי העבודה," כתב הרב הוטנר, "מצוי הוא הביטוי: כבוד מדומה, פירושו של ביטוי זה הוא כי הדימיון מזייף ומעמיד את הסכמת הבריות במקום עצם הרגשת החשיבות. והזיוף הזה מצליח הוא עד כדי כך שאי אפשר לו לאדם לקיים בעצמו את הרגשת חשיבות עצמו אם לא תמצא ידו להוכיח את זה מהסכמתם של אחרים." [[53]](#footnote-54) From the existentialist perspective of the type we are discussing in this chapter, *kavod* obtained from others is unauthentic, it is *kavod* from “them”. When Rabbi Hutner discusses humiliation, he does not mean insult in the sense that Berger meant, presumably situations in which a person disrespects another person from his social class or the class above him. Rather, humiliation as conceptualized by Rabbi Hutner is an injury to the divine image, the bond connecting the body and soul; it is not similar to legal or social discrimination, or any other blow to human dignity, whose essence is legal status and a collection of rights that define how society must treat him. Rabbi Hutner, for example, would not consider the restriction of the number of Jewish students, the *numerus clausus* still practiced at certain elite universities in America in his day and an obvious violation of dignity, to be the type of humiliation that he was discussing, in other words, not an injury to *chashivut*. *Chashivut* is not a social or legal status, but rather something else altogether – the possibility that existence has value. Man’s value is not a default, like dignity. The possibility to have *chashivut* lies within man in potential but he must give it to himself in practice. However, *chashivut* is not given externally, from the potential inherent in the way in which the individual is positioned, or even positions himself, in the social fabric. There is therefore a third concept of honor which combines the sensitivities of human dignity, a person’s absolute value in his most primal state, and the sensitivities of *kavod*, the value a person acquires for himself. Either way, the rehabilitation of the concept of honor undertaken by Rabbi Hutner is very interesting in light of the strong dignity-based culture in which he lived and acted.

Above, we encountered Sartre as a representative of the approach in which the request for meaning is the search for value, and we saw there how the matter influenced his harshly negative approach toward determinism and materialism: without choice, the granting of meaning is impossible and there can be no value to human existence. This co-dependency between freedom or free choice and the meaning of existence is reflected in the perspective of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. An identical approach can be found in Rabbi Hutner’s thought. In one of his letters, Rabbi Hutner directly connects the negation of choice to the abrogation of man’s value. In his words:

כי אבי אבות הטומאה של תקופתנו הוא הזלזול בצורת אדם [...] הנה עומק-ייחודה של צורת אדם, הוא בכח-הבחירה הטבוע בצורה זו [...] הכפירה היותר סמוכה לאחרית הימים היא הכפירה בסגולת-הבחירה של האדם, אשר מכפירה זו נובע כל הזלזול בצורת-אדם של תקופתנו. ואשר על כן כל כח המצטרף לפעולת הוקרת צורת אדם להעלאת ערך חיי האדם ברוך הוא לנו.[[54]](#footnote-55)

In another place, in one of his notes, Rabbi Hutner wrote the following in reference to deterministic philosophical ideas: "דארווין הכניס מטרליזם[!] לטבע; מארקס הכניס מטרליזם להיסטוריה; ופרויד הכניס מטרליזם לתוך נשמת האדם עצמו. כל המטרליזיס'טן גורמים חורבן לקדושה; אמנם פרויד תקע חרבו לתוך הפרוכת." [[55]](#footnote-56) Rabbi Hutner characterizes the modern age, the last time period before the end of days, as an age of the diffusion of materialistic ideas. All materialism is destructive, but Freud’s approach, which applies a materialistic reductionism to man’s soul, is the absolute nadir "אבי אבות הטומאה", "תקע חרבו לתוך הפרוכת" –. These are harsh terms in the Jewish lexicon, of the type that one does not find Rabbi Hutner using in other contexts. Attention should be called to the recurrence of the expression "תקע חרבו לתוך הפרוכת", here, in reference to materialism, and above in reference to humiliation, that is bloodshed, the desecration of God’s name, and the desecration of man’s *kavod* and *chashivut*. Even in his discussion of the heresy regarding the resurrection of the dead, clearly of cardinal importance to his thought, as will be explained in depth below, we do not find him using such terminology.[[56]](#footnote-57) Only in the context of the denial of free choice do we find expressions indicating moral-ethical revulsion on such a scale.

In light of this, an important point should be made here about Rabbi Hutner’s approach to the negation of choice. The degree of revulsion that Rabbi Hutner expresses toward determinism and the degree to which he understands it as negating human value, contrasts with his perception of the world to come, which should reflect his understanding of the ideal human existence, and indeed includes the negation of choice in the future. Moreover, at the end of my analysis of his eschatological outlook, I concluded that for Rabbi Hutner this world and the world to come differ only in the abrogation of the dualistic chasm and the obligation of man in his world can be formulated as the duty to endeavor that each moment of his life will be a taste of the world to come, a flickering of the connection between the worlds and the traversal of the dualistic chasm.[[57]](#footnote-58) The logical conclusion from this is that in Rabbi Hutner’s thought, man aspires to rise above choice or to abolish it and to be coerced in his behavior. To this it must be added that Rabbi Hutner wrote based on and parallel to a series of thinkers from his own background that made this aspiration pivotal to their thought, for example, Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (the author of *Meshech Chochma)*, Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz of Mir, and Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler.[[58]](#footnote-59)

A discussion of the question of choice in Rabbi Hutner’s thought, which, despite the studies that have been devoted to it, still requires further attention, is outside the scope of this book. However, it is impossible to ignore the subject altogether, The *Pachad Yitzchak* books include discussions about the feasibility of a degree of coercion or a limited choice under certain conditions.[[59]](#footnote-60) However, an examination of his apocryphal writings reveals that he was perplexed by this matter. By means of a conceptual argument appearing in different versions, none of which are very well developed, within his apocryphal writings, Rabbi Hutner attempts to grapple with the difficulty arising from the possibility of abolishing choice in the world to come and from the concept of the lack of choice as an ideal. "נתקלים אנו בשאלה גדולה," הוא כותב, "שהרי, יהיה איך שיהיה, ולא נבין איך, הלוא תגיע תקופה בעולם שבה תתבטל הבחירה, ותהיה תקופה הנקראת זמן של 'מילת ערלת הלב'. ובאם תתבטל הבחירה, הלוא שוב אין מקום לקבלת מלכות [...] ובהבטל קבלת מלכות מכנסת ישראל, הלוא מתבטל סוד מציאותה, וכאילו פסה ואפסה מציאותה בעולם" (מאמרי Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach, סט/ו). ובמקום אחר כתב: "מתעוררת כאן תמיהה עצומה: מה תהיה בתקופת אחרית הימים ומילת ערלת הלב, שאז תהיה עשיית הטוב כטבע? הלא כשאין ברירה אם לקבל או לא לקבל, אין מקום לדבר על מונחים של "דעת" ו"רצון", וכי תהיה ירידה לעתיד לבא?! מה יהיה עם כל יחוד מעלתם של ישראל, שהם המכירים ומקבלים מלכות שמים? בודאי יש להשתדל להשקיט סערת הלב שבשאלה זו" (מאמרי פחד יצחק, סוכות, קכח/ה). It is apparent from the phrases chosen by Rabbi Hutner that the idea of the negation of free choice upsets and even disturbs him. זוהי "שאלה גדולה" ו"תמיהה עצומה", המעוררת "סערת נפש", שכן משתמעת ממנה "ירידה לעתיד לבא" המבטלת את יחוד מעלתה של כנסת ישראל "וכאילו פסה ואפסה מציאותה". Free choice and value are connected to each other. Rabbi Hutner attempts to solve this difficulty by declaring that because *Knesset Yisrael* (the People of Israel) will bring the world to the period of “his kingdom rules over all”, in other words, a situation in which man is coerced in his work and his freedom is abrogated, this is "מלכות שהביאה לממשלה [... ה]נזקפת על חשבון **עבודתם** של ישראל. הבדל עצום קיים בין ממשלה לכתחילה, ובין ממשלה שנבנית על יסוד שנות עבודה [...] ובאותה תקופה עתידה, לא רק שלא איכפת להם, לישראל, על התמורה הזו, אלא עוד ישמחו בה" (מאמרי פחד יצחק, סוכות, קכח/ה. ההדגשה במקור). In other words, *Knesset Yisrael* will be coerced by choice, because its choice brought it to this situation. This fact removes the sting from the coercion and contradicts the scenario in which it is coerced against its will. Here, Rabbi Hutner has recourse to the apocalyptic “escape hatch”: in the world to come the nature of man will change so that not only will the coercion not bother him, it will actually gladden him. (His only other recourse to such a tactic is in a discussion of the abrogation of free choice in the world to come in *Pachad Yitzchak.*[[60]](#footnote-61)) However, it must be emphasized that nothing of this discussion, scattered in various places in his apocryphal writings, found its way into the *Pachad Yitzhak* books. Similarly, we find in his apocryphal writings discussions about questions of omniscience and free choice that quite blatantly are not mentioned at all in the *Pachad Yitzchak* books,[[61]](#footnote-62) as well as references to “*batei midrash*” (study halls) in which they speak of the endeavor to be “coerced” in the service of God (and it is clear that the reference is to the aforementioned figures).[[62]](#footnote-63) The common denominator to all these discussions, clumsy in comparison to Rabbi Hutner’s usually well-ordered ideas, is that they reflect his perplexity and were abandoned in the process of the formulation of his systematized thought that was collected into the *Pachad Yitzchak* books. This is a case of thunderous silence in which the positive is inferred from the negative: Rabbi Hutner identifies determinism with the absence of value and meaning in man, the issue that vexed him more than any other.

In a further indication of its centrality, the concept of *chashivut* in Rabbi Hutner’s thought is reflected in the meanings which he ascribes to the concept of Amalek – the archetype of evil in the Jewish tradition. In our discussion of the intellectual infrastructure, we saw that Amalek symbolizes for Rabbi Hutner pure *leitzanut* [cynicism]: the power of desecration and contempt, the contradiction to the concept of *chashivut*.[[63]](#footnote-64) Criticism of cynicism was not unusual in the Mussar circles, especially not those surrounding Slobodka.[[64]](#footnote-65) Thus, it would be possible to attribute Rabbi Hutner’s identification of Amalek with the power of desecration and pure cynicism to the use of a common “Mussar” trope. However, the *leizanut* attacked by the Mussar writers is something similar to sarcasm, or frivolity, whereas, for Rabbi Hutner, it means something else. This is apparent in his refocus and reconceptualization of *leizanut* as the power of desecration, something unnecessary unless it is needed to express a specific idea. Indeed, the apocryphal writings help us to understand his true intent in this matter. The following was written in his name:

התפיסה השגורה בעולם, היא שבזה"ז [בזמן הזה] העכו"ם הם בדרגה גבוהה כלפי העכו"ם שבדורות הראשונים, שהיו pagans, שהיו עובדים לכוכבים ומזלות. והאמת אינו כן. ומה שהעכו"ם בדורות הראשונים היו נכשלים בתאוה לקבלת עול, היינו משום שהמחשבה שלהם חשובה, ועבדו מה שהחשיבו במחשבתם. ומשא"כ בזמננו, שהתאוה היא לפריקת עול, פי' שאין שום דבר שחשוב, ואפי' של מחשבתו. ולכן פורקים עול מכל וכל.[[65]](#footnote-66)

Nothing is important – not even one’s thoughts. The cynicism against which Rabbi Hutner rails, which "ענינה הוא למצוא את הפרצה בכל בנין של חשיבות על מנת לסתור את כל הבנין" (פחד יצחק, פורים א/ד),, is nihilism that negates all values. As he expressed this idea in another place: "יחוד בית מדרשנו ומטרת דיבורינו היא לקראת אור התפיסה של גדלות ורוממות בחיים. מזה נובעות התביעות המתמידות שלנו ל'קוק פון כבוד' [=מבט של כבוד] ו'חשיבות', בפרט בתקופתנו שקולות הזלזול והקלות עולים בראש חוצות וקריות, ועבודה קשה היא בזמננו." [[66]](#footnote-67)

An examination of the various appearances of Amalek in Rabbi Hutner’s thought reinforces this conclusion. One such appearance can be found in discourse 29 of *Pachad Yitzchak* on Purim. Rabbi Hutner began this discourse by presenting two interpretations of a difficult verse. In the book of Samuel, after the story of King Saul’s war against Amalek, there appears the story of the execution of Agag, king of Amalek, who according to the midrash, was one of the forefathers of the wicked Haman. In the context of the execution there appears the following description, “And Agag came unto him in chains [*ma’adanot*]” (I Sam. 15:32). Rabbi Hutner offers two interpretations that have been suggested for the obscure Hebrew word “*ma’adanot*”. The first interpretation, according to the Targum Yehonatan, suggests that the meaning of the word is “indulgences”, in the words of Rabbi Hutner, "שאגג היה מעדן את עצמו ומפנק את עצמו בשעת הליכתו אצל שמואל". The second interpretation suggests that the meaning of the word is “chains”, according to which Agag was chained as he walked.[[67]](#footnote-68) Rabbi Hutner, in a creative exegetical argument, maintains that both interpretations are correct and actually constitute one meaning. In his words:

מהלך הדברים כך הוא: כשם שבסידורי עיקרי האמונה, העיקר האחרון הוא בסילוק כח הבחירה, שהוא מילת ערלת הלב דאחרית הימים; כמו כן, בדרך זה לעומת זה, הכפירה האחרונה היא הכפירה בכח הבחירה של האדם. "האדם מוכרח הוא בכל עניניו", זה הוא קול המונה וקול שאונה של המיית הכפירה **המשתלטת לעינינו** [...] כפירה זו בבחירה, היא הכפירה האחרונה בהשתלשלות מהלכי הכפירה מדור לדור. ועלינו לדעת, כי בין כל סוגי הכפירה, חולקת היא כפירה זו רשות לעצמה. כי על כן יש בידה של הכפירה הזו לחפות על פניה בשקר של גוון מיופה. שהרי כל עצם-עצמו של כח-הבחירה, מוגדר הוא בזה שהכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים, ממילא נמצא כי יש בידה של כפירה בבחירה חיפוי-שקר של כבוד-שמים מדומה, כי על ידי הכפירה בבחירה מתבטל ה"חוץ" הזה, והכל חוזר לידי שמים. והרי שקר זה הוא הסתירה הכי תהומית לתוקף קדושת האמונה של כנסת ישראל, **כי כבוד שמים עולה הוא דוקא מתוך האדם הבוחר, בעל החירות של צלם אלקים**. והיינו שהליכתו האחרונה של אגג אצל שמואל היתה מעדנות. מעדנות בשני הפירושים גם יחד. היה מעדן את עצמו ומפנק את עצמו כשהוא קשור בשלשלאות ובכבלים. כלומר, הרגשת שלילת חירותו על ידי הכבלים והשלשלאות העושים אותו למוכרח, היא היא המשמשת לו הרגשת תפנוק ועידון בכבוד שמים מדומה (פחד יצחק, פורים, כט/ב. ההדגשות אינן במקור).[[68]](#footnote-69)

Several elements of this passage are worthy of note. First, we see again, in an exceptional manner, an allusion to the current historical context of a discourse appearing in *Pachad Yitzhak*: determinism is the “heresy taking over before our eyes”. This passage and the previous one cited above are the sole examples of references to historical context in the *Pachad Yitzhak* books (in contrast to the apocryphal writings which contain a variety of such references).[[69]](#footnote-70) Second, the negation of free choice is ascribed to Amalek. In the first discourse in *Pachad Yitzhak* on Purim, Rabbi Hutner attributes to Amalek the elimination of *chashivut* from the world; here in one of the last discourses in the book, he attributes to Amalek the negation of free choice and freedom. The progenitor of impurity is contempt for man’s form, deriving from a denial of free choice. The essence of Amalek is, on one side, the power of desecration and contempt, the elimination of all value and *chashivut* from the world, and on another side, the negation of free choice, while in effect, these are two sides of the same coin: the negation of free choice is equivalent to the abrogation of man’s worth.

In the next consecutive discourse from *Pachad Yitzchak* on Purim, Rabbi Hutner conceptualizes Amalek in another way, in the context of the concept of joy. As he wrote:

משל למה הדבר דומה, לחולה שנתרפא והרי הוא עושה סעודת הודאה לשמחת הבראתו. שבודאי משקלה של השמחה הוא כפי ערך סכנת המחלה ותועלת הרפואה. אבל אדם שחלה במחלת ה"מרה-שחורה", וכשנתרפא הוא עושה סעודה לשמחת הודאתו – אז אי אפשר לשקול את השמחה במאזני הצרה והישועה. שבסעודה זו, הרי עצם השמחה היא כופה היא הישועה. שהלא הצרה היתה שהפסיד את הכשרון להרגיש שמחה, וממילא, כל גילוי של כשרון שמחה, הרי הוא עצמו גוף ההבראה. סעודת הודאה של סתם חולה שנתרפא, הרי הבראתו עומדת היא מחוץ לגוף השמחה אלא שהוא שמח מזה שהבריא. אבל כשבעל ה"מרה-שחורה" עושה סעודה להבראתו הרי הבראתו היא גוף השמחה, והשמחה היא גוף ההבראה [...] וממילא אין קצבה לשמחה זו (פחד יצחק, פורים, ל).

In this passage, we again encounter Rabbi Hutner’s exegetical approach that distinguishes between an attribute that is a component of something and the same attribute when it is the essence of the thing. There is a type of disease that causes a person pain and thus reduces his happiness and when he recovers from it, he is happy. However, there is another disease for which the loss of happiness is not a symptom of the disease but is the disease itself. Melancholy, or depression, is a disease that does not strike a bodily organ but rather impairs the ability to be happy. In this case, recovery and happiness are one and the same: the patient recovers in that he regains the capacity to feel happiness. In contrast to the happiness that comes as a result of the freedom from disease, which corresponds to the degree of pain and unhappiness caused by the disease, the happiness that follows recovery from depression is unquantifiable. Similar to what we saw above, that "אדם הניצול מטביעה בנהר" whose happiness is unquantifiable and is not נמדדת באמת המדה של הכרח ומותרות. כי היותו קרוב לאפיסתו מחדשת עליו את הרגשת העובדה של קיומו, וכל התענוגים שבעולם בטלים הם לגבי תענוג זה של זכי'[ה] חדשה בעצם הקיום" (פחד יצחק, שבועות ד/י). The happiness following recovery from depression is equivalent to the joy of regaining one’s very existence.

This metaphor is intended to explain the difference between the joy of a holiday in general and the specific joy of Purim. The happiness of a Jewish festival is defined in halacha as the pleasure of enjoying meat and wine, in other words, a meal, and for festival meals, the halacha establishes fixed amounts required for fulfilling this obligation. In contrast, the festive Purim meal is characterized as “until he does not know” – a meal that has no fixed amount. This is because the joy of Purim is like the joy of recovery from a melancholy that cannot be measured. Rabbi Hutner continues to explain that the joy of Purim is the joy of obliterating Amalek who “met you by the way” and "הביא בליבך צונן והפשירך [...] הצונן הזה והפושרין הללו קטלנים הם ממש [...] ונמצא, ששמחת מחית עמלק, היא היא השמחה של רכישת הכשרון לשמחה של מצוה" (שם). Here we meet Amalek again, now as the symbol of depression, and in conjunction with his previous appearances, we infer that this is nihilistic depression. Amalek who denies *chashivut* is the same Amalek who introduces melancholy into Israel’s heart and the Amalek who denies free choice, and consequently, also man’s worth. Amalek, the archetype of evil within Jewish culture, symbolizes for Rabbi Hutner despairing materialistic nihilism, the most severe heresy of all, which was gaining control in his time. In contrast, the purpose of the individual Jew is to bestow *chashivut* to reality through his choices. At this point, we have reached a strong basis for the conclusion that the concept of *chashivut* in Rabbi Hutner’s thought can definitely be identified with the existentialist understanding of meaning, in the sense of the worth of the individual and of existence.

**5.6 Conclusion: Rabbi Hutner as a Theologian Searching for Meaning, with Existentialist Tendencies**

The recreation and analysis of Rabbi Hutner’s intellectual infrastructure indicated two primary axes in his thought, existence and *chashivut,* which when integrated with the related concept of *yechidut*, raised associations to existentialist philosophy, which developed and became more established during his lifetime, as previous scholars have pointed out.[[70]](#footnote-71) In this chapter, I have endeavored to determine if it is possible to substantiate this theory. To this end, I formulated a working definition of Existentialism as a philosophical system including an engagement with a group of themes inspired by the phenomenological method, including: (1) The temporality of human existence; (2) the meaning of existence; (3) angst; (4) authenticity; and (5) freedom. Moreover, the existentialist treatment of the subjects of authenticity and meaning is defined by the integration and co-dependency between them.

The examination of Rabbi Hutner’s three principal concepts as they function in his thought revealed that they fulfill the conditions set forth by the working definition. Rabbi Hutner’s approach to the finality of existence is one of angst, as it symbolized for him the meaninglessness of existence, whereas the stability of existence signified for him existential certainty. The concept of *chashivut* functions in Rabbi Hutner’s thought in a similar way to that of the desire for meaning in the sense of the desire for worth, when the possibility of meaning is dependent upon the possibility of free choice, as in existentialist thought. The concept of *yechidut* functions similarly to the aspiration for authenticity in the sense of striving for singularity. All three concepts are co-dependent: if existence is not stable it cannot be endowed with *chashivut*, and without *yechidut*, existence also cannot be granted *chashivut*. The hypothesis of a connection between Rabbi Hutner and existentialist thought, therefore, is possible, reasonable, and even necessary.

Nonetheless, we must make several clarifications, First, on the basis of the definition given above, we can identify a dimension missing from Rabbi Hutner’s Existentialism. Rabbi Hutner, in so far as one may call him an existentialist, is still not a philosopher. He is engaged with the peripheral points of existentialist thought, its conclusions, and derivatives, but his investigations are not phenomenological or philosophical. Second, Rabbi Hutner’s theology rejects to a large extent basic characteristics of existentialist thought. The existentialists harshly criticized the Western intellectual tradition and culture for its pretension to solve the problem of existence, a solution which they considered to be nothing but avoidance and evasion. These critics embraced a sober, unforgiving, and even heroic-tragic perspective on the absurdity of existence and man’s intrinsic lack of meaning. The problems revealed by the existentialists, according to their own admission, are unsolvable. All that remains is to find ways of contending with them, means by which a person can give to his life a degree of meaning. Rabbi Hutner, in contrast, does not settle for contending, but rather attempts to solve the existential problems by presenting a theological-metaphysical dimension not included within the existential apparatus. Moreover, Rabbi Hutner’s placement of authenticity, in particular, within the intellectual sphere and the intellectual center of his thought constitutes a kind of return to the centrality of the intellect and intellectual activity as the essence of man, in contrast to the emphasis on the dimension of action in the existentialist school. Third, the very framework in which Rabbi Hutner operated, Orthodox Jewish theology and its corresponding lifestyle, was incompatible, in several aspects, with important existentialist principles. Although it is possible to suggest a limited solution to this incompatibility within the framework of Rabbi Hutner’s thought,[[71]](#footnote-72) it must be assumed that, in the eyes of the existentialists, these would have been considered very partial, insufficient, or paradoxical, in ways that only theology can allow itself. For these reasons, I choose to characterize Rabbi Hutner as a theologian searching for meaning, with existentialist tendencies, and his thought as post-existentialist theology: it revolves around existential problems as they are developed within an existential framework, yet deviates from this framework in its method, its pretensions, and the degree of courage in its conclusions.

1. This sentiment appears several times in the apocryphic writings. See for example, Hutner, *Reshimot Lev* Vol. 2, 55. See also *Pachad Yitzchak: Igrot Uketavim,* 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Parush, "Life Without Death", 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See p. 89 Fn?. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism,* 20: "the word is being so loosely applied to so many things that it has come to mean nothing at all." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See Cooper, *Existentialism,* 1-20. And see Flynn, *Existentialism,* 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, 15-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Landau, "The question of the meaning of life", 263-264. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. An example of a vocal critic of the search for meaning is a contemporary of R. Hutner's, the Jewish-American philosopher Sydney Hook. See Hook, *The Quest for Being*, 145-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. R. Hutner's sojourn in Germany in the early 1930s coincided with the rise of Heidegger and his early philosophy, to whom many students – and Jewish students in particular – were drawn. The interwar period also saw a surge in the popularity of Kirkegaard, whose thought only came into prominence in Germany in the early 20th century, some 60 years after his death. When Sartre came to the fore R. Hutner was already serving as *Rosh Yeshivah* in New York. Sartre's writing begun appearing in English in the late 1940s and early 50s, the same period in which R. Hutner was forming his own thought. Sartre's earliest and best-known work, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, first appeared in America in 1947, simply titled – *Existentialism*. His magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness,* would appear in English a decade later, in 1956. Until then, and to a great extent still after, his earlier work (together with some promiment literary works, particularly *Nausea,* which also appear in the late 40s) represented Sartre's thought and existentialism in general. See Poole, "The unknown Kierkegaard"; Fulton, "Apostles of Sartre". [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Golomb, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Landau, "The question of the meaning of life", 263-264. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. ראה אבי שגיא, **קירקגור - דת ואקסיסטנציה: המסע של האני**, ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק, תשנ"ב, עמ' 69–109; וראה גולומב, אביר, עמ' 95–98. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. מצוטט אצל שגיא, קירקגור, עמ' 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. שגיא, קירקגור, 28–30, 139–150. גולומב, אביר, עמ' 99–126 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. See McCarthy, "Martin Heidegger: Kierkegaard’s influence". [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism.* [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. ראה אברהם מנסבך, **קיום ומשמעות: מרטין היידגר על האדם, הלשון והאמנות**, ירושלים: הוצאת הספרים ע"ש י"ל מאגנס, תשנ"ח, עמ' 40. לדעות חולקות, לפיהן הדיון של היידגר הוא בעל השלכות אתיות, ראה שם, הערה 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Hershkowitz and Shalev, "Being towards Eternity", 260-264; וראה מנסבך, קיום ומשמעות, 40–56. והשווה גולומב, אביר האמונה, עמ' 166–186. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. See, for example, Grossmann, *Phenomenology and Existentialism,* 149–198, particularly 149-152, 196-198.. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. מנסבך, קיום ומשמעות, עמ' 58–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. שם, עמ' 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. See p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. גולומב, אביר האמונה, עמ' 227. וראה גם שם, 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* 566. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. McCulloch, *Using Sartre,* 56-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. The origin of man's freedon in Sartre's thought bares an interesting resemblence to that of R. Hutner, according to which "סגולת החרות של כח הבחירה אינו נמצא בנפש האלוקית כשהיא לעצמה וגם לא בנפש הטבעית כשהיא לעצמה אלא שנמצא הוא דוקא במזיגתן (*Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach* טו/ה)." However, it must be stressed that the dual nature of man in Sartre differs significantly, in the sences that they aren't a Cartesian-like dualism, a spiritual element on one hand and a physical element on the other; rather, they are both abstractions from the same unified being. See McCulloch, *Using Sartre,* 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. ראה גולומב, אביר האמונה, 215–236 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism,* 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Sartre, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Sartre, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Sartre, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. See p.? Fn? [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. See p. 128–134. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. See *Pachad Yitzchak: Shavuot,* 16/8. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. See p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. See Tosafot, Bavli, Sota 10b, "*noach*"; R' Yona, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, part 3, ch. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Later in the discourse R. Hutner notes, following a comment by one of his students, that there is one exception where the expression *shefichut damim* is used with regards to animals – the slaughter of *kodashim,* holy sacrifices, outside of the temple grounds. R. Hutner explains that this is appropriate since such an act desecrates the holiness of the sacrifice. There are a few occasions where such comments by his listeners are worked into the discourses, leaving evidence of the original oral format in which they were delivered. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. See p. 104–105, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Lorberbaum, *In God's Image*, 50-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Lorberbaum, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. See Jacobson, *Tzelem Elohim*". [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. See **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. See p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. See p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. And see *Ma'amarei Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach,* 87/4: "מלבין פני חברו פוגע בכבודו של אדם. ופגיעה בחוש הכבוד של האדם היא פגיעה במרכז שמים וארץ, בתמצית מטרת העולם." [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Berger, "On the obsolescence of the concept of honor". [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Landau, "The question of the meaning of life", 263-264. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Berger, "On the obsolescence of the concept of honor", 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. David, "Zikhronot", 95. See also *Ma'amarei Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach,* 65/5; Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol 1., 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. *Pachad Yitzchak: Igrot Uketavim*, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. David, "Zikhronot", 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. On the contrary, R. Hutner's attitude towards denying ressurections is more akin to a tragedy rather than a moral flaw. See p.? 218. The only other context in which we can find expressions as sevwere as these in R. Hutner's writings is with regards to "turning words of Torah into heresy". See p.? 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. See p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. See Steiner, *Bechira VeHechrach.* [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. See also Kaplan, "Implicit Theology", 108 Fn 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. See p. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. See for example Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol. 1, 44, 185, 205, 243; Vol. 2, 6, 99, 250, 357; *Ma'amarei Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach,* 33/4, 53/9, 107/8, 109/8; *Ma'amarei Pachad Yitzchak: Succot,* 99/16. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol. 1, 185-186; Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol. 2, 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. See p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. And see Ramhal, *Mesillat Yesharim*, ch. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol. 1, 125. See also Hutner, *Reshimot Lev,* Vol. 1, 214. And see *Ma'amarei Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach*, 111/4. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. See David, "Zikhronot", 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. See commentary by Rashi and Metzudat David to Samuel I, 15/32. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. See also Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol. 2, 364. The publishers of *Reshimot Lev* refers on site to R. Mordechai Yosef Leiner's ("the Ishbitzer", 1801-1854) *Mei Hashiloach* on Beshalakh, "Hashem Yilachem Lachem". The Ishbitzer is often seen as the quintessential Jewish theological determinist, this text being a prime example. See Finkelstein, "Determinism", for an analysis of R. Hutner's attitude towards theological-determinism and in particular his selective use of this text from *Mei Hashiloach.* In any case, R. Hutner'sm clraely isn't referring to this type of theological-determinism – which except for this particular Hassidic sect was entirely marginal in his day – when he refers to "המיית הכפירה [בבחירה] המשתלטת לעינינו" which is prominent amongst"אנשי-החול [...] שהורידו את ערכו של אדם, עד לידי השוואה עם שאר בעלי חיים." Rather, he is referring to philosophic and scientific deterministic views which were gaining prominence during his time. See further, ch. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. See p. 89 Fn 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. See p. 89 Fn 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. See Ch. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)