**Chapter 7: Post-Existentialist Theology**

I have described Rabbi Hutner as a theologian searching for meaning with existentialist tendencies and his thought as post-existentialist. In this chapter, I will demonstrate these claims through an examination of the presence in his thought of a central Heideggerian theme and its adaptation. Was Rabbi Hutner familiar with Heidegger’s thought? Rabbi Hutner spent the greater part of 1929, and possibly also 1930, in Berlin.[[1]](#footnote-2) Two years earlier, Heidegger had shocked the philosophical community by publishing *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)* and had become a prominent figure in the philosophical circles in Germany. Based on what we know of that period, Rabbi Hutner probably was attentive to philosophical trends during his stay in Berlin, and therefore would have been exposed to these ideas. We have also seen that Rabbi Hutner’s early publications from the 1930s reflect prevailing contemporary themes, including the fragmentation of science and the public opinion industry in the age of mass media, both subjects to which Heidegger made a prominent contribution.[[2]](#footnote-3) It is therefore definitely possible, if not probable, that Rabbi Hutner was exposed to Heidegger’s ideas to some degree.[[3]](#footnote-4) This possibility becomes even more likely in light of the thematic similarity between the thinkers, to which this chapter is devoted:[[4]](#footnote-5) the Heideggerian idea of “being-towards-death” and what I refer to as “being-towards-eternity” in Rabbi Hutner’s thought.

**7.1 Being-Towards-Death: Death and Authenticity in Heidegger’s Early Thought**

In his discussions of authenticity, Heidegger determines that man has two aspects, or two modes of existence: authentic and unauthentic. Unauthentic existence is lacking in singularity, conforming, and indistinct from the surrounding masses. Authentic existence, in contrast, is the choice to exist directed not by the possibilities given to a person in advance and from the outside, but rather by his own individual potentialities emanating from within himself.[[5]](#footnote-6) Our interest now is in how, according to Heidegger, the transition between the two states of existence, from the unauthentic to the authentic, occurs, and the idea that makes authentic existence possible: being-towards-death (*Sein Zum Tode).*[[6]](#footnote-7)

Heidegger uses a specific term to denote man: *Dasein.* This is a compound formed by two words: “da” which denotes a place and depending on the context can mean “there”, “here”, or even “within”, but also the essence of being somewhere, and “sein” which means “there is”, “being”, or “existing”. In recent translations of Heidegger’s writings, this term is translated by the use of the compound “being-there”. Heidegger’s use of this term has many meanings which correspond with many ways in which he describes man. The most important for our purposes is the idea that the being-there is a unique entity because of his transience (*Zeitlichkeit).* It is not only that he exists in time (like any other entity), but his existence relates to time: he is aware of time and he communicates with his environment in light of time and under its influence. At any given moment, he existentially is also present “there”, at a different time; the being-there functions in the present, but he is guided by the past that he remembers and adapts himself to the future that he anticipates.

In the unauthentic existential default position, the range of possibilities available to the being-there – the future to which he adapts himself – are pre-existing and not his own, but rather determined by “them”. However, there is one future eventuality, a necessity, which is always available to the individual alone: death. It is impossible to die like “them”. One cannot learn from others how to die or what the experience of death is like because there is no one who can describe the experience; it is impossible to copy the way one dies by watching the deaths of others. Death is also the only future eventuality in which, even if one desires, no one can replace you and die in your place. In one’s death, the being-there is of necessity himself.

Death, therefore, represents the certainty of authenticity, unique distinction from “them”, as a possibility for the being-there. However, the function of death as an enabler of authenticity is obscured by its simpler function as the indication of the finitude of existence and with it the nakedness of existence itself. This fact arouses in man existential anxiety or angst. Anxiety, in contrast to fear, is not directed towards a specific object. A person fears something but is anxious about nothingness. In this sense, he is anxious about his mortality, but even more so about that which it implies: the lack of meaning in existence, and, as a result, man’s complete freedom, in the sense that he is detached, without an anchor, and without direction in his life. This realization causes a person’s whole world to collapse upon him and he is overwhelmed by feelings of terror, horror, and profound alienation from his world. His immediate response will be to quiet this anxiety, when it intrudes into daily life, to repress the thought of death, to immerse oneself again in the “chatter” of the crowd, in Heidegger’s language, and to derive comfort in “their” inauthentic existence.

However, there is the possibility that a person will refrain from repressing his anxiety and the fact of his death. This process, as described by Heidegger, is quite picturesque. From the moment when a person discovers that he is distinct from “them”, he finds within himself an impulse, referred to by Heidegger as the “voice of conscience” (*Gewissensruf)*,which both derives from within him and “lands” upon him from the outside. It calls him to disconnect from the existence of the masses and the connections and meanings that the masses create and apply to the world; it calls him to give his existence its own meaning, to exist not by adapting himself to predetermined extrinsic possibilities but rather to individual potentialities unique to himself and emanating from him. This is how the transition from inauthentic to authentic existence takes place.

Authentic existence, therefore, entails persistent awareness of the fact of inevitable death and, consequently, an existence involving constant anxiety. Heidegger refers to this state of consciousness by the term being-towards-death. He wrote:

הלך הרוח היכול להכיל את האיום המוחלט והתמידי לעצמי העולה מתוך הקיום האינדיבידואלי שלו, הוא החרדה. בהלך רוח זה, הקיים-כאן מוצא את עצמו פנים אל פנים עם ה"לא-כלום" שבאפשרות שהיא חוסר-אפשרות קיומו [...] ההיות-לקראת-המוות הוא במהותו חרדה.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Being-towards-death is a state of consciousness in which death in its various meanings is present in the choices made by the being-there. The man anxious about his death functions by virtue of what the fact of his death teaches him: authenticity is feasible, and, as long as he lives, he must take responsibility for the realization of his potential.

I will make a few observations before moving to our discussion of Rabbi Hutner’s thought. First and foremost, it must be emphasized how the dimension of time functions in Heideggerian thinking. Authentic existence in the present is made possible because of an event that has not yet occurred but will certainly occur in the future. Authentic choices occur in what Heidegger calls “a moment of vision” in which the three dimensions of existential time merge: the perspective of life drawn from the past, lived in the present, and guided by the future, in light of the constant presence of the ultimate future -- death. For our purposes, it is important that in the framework of his treatment of the issue of time, the “moment of vision” should not be understood in the framework of the conventional quantitative perception of time: a series of consecutive moments, in which the past is the total of the moments that have passed since time began, and the future is the total of the moments that will come until infinity or until time “ends”, and the present lies between them. To understand the existential moment, one must think of time as a quality: how it is experienced. In the framework of unauthentic existence, a person’s life is an accumulation of fragments, experiences, and behaviors whose source is not within himself; he moves from one to the other, fragmented, and half-passive, without continuity, connection, or internal order between them, along the surface of time. Authentic existence leaves a person’s unique mark on every aspect of his life, his choices, his past, future, and present, and constructs his life anew in unity, wholeness, and totality.

Second, authentic existence is individual but not atomistic; it is not an existence that is separate or alienated from society. Heidegger does not recognize existence that is not part of its surroundings, including the human context, communal, cultural, and national, into which he was born (or into which he was thrust in Heideggerian terms) and in which he was shaped. Authentic existence according to Heidegger is not as radical as it may seem, but rather the realization of a person’s unique potential within his given framework.

Third, it must be emphasized that Heidegger does not suggest or believe in the possibility of overcoming angst. The problems of mortality and meaninglessness are not solvable. The authentic person gives meaning to his life, yet this meaning remains contingent. Heidegger’s model of authenticity does not include the prospect of absolute meaning that can bring comfort or relief to a person suffering from angst.

My fourth observation: Heidegger, at least in his early thought, insists that his aspirations are merely ontological. He does not claim to present a normative argument, and on the surface at least he does not give ethical preference to authentic existence over unauthentic existence (this is one of the central points that differentiate him from many other existentialist thinkers). However, he gives a clear impression that he prefers authentic existence. This is expressed, among other ways, in the term that he uses to describe his fundamental criticism of both western philosophy and unauthentic existence: forgetfulness. He argues that western philosophy, from the classical Greeks, is mired in the forgetfulness of being and is derelict in its duty by ignoring the most important philosophical question. To a similar degree, man ignores the fact of death and forgets his own existence by retreating into the existence of the masses. This is not the passive forgetfulness of not remembering but active forgetfulness or repression, the purpose of which is to enable this retreat.

For the sake of our discussion, I will summarize by saying that the idea of authenticity in being-towards-death is comprised of three principles: (1) Future consequence: the awareness of death, a future event that lies beyond the phenomenological experience, is the catalyst for a specific type of existence – authenticity. The future consequence is made possible by not repressing the fact of death. (2) Existential totality: man unifies his existence by connecting his entire life with one thread – his own unique and distinct self – and brings together the three dimensions of time by authentic choice, an action performed in the present, while remembering the past and adapting to future possibilities. (3) Singularity: authenticity and existential totality are feasible only when man recognizes himself as a distinct and unique individual and adapts and acts in accordance with his unique opportunities that derive from himself. Authenticity in Heidegger’s thought thus signifies the singularity and coherence of man who lives life in the face of death.

After briefly examining Heidegger’s idea of being-towards-death and the relevant points needed for the sake of a comparative analysis with Rabbi Hutner’s thought, let us now examine, based on the aforementioned three principles, a parallel conception that emerges and develops from an analysis of Rabbi Hutner’s writings, which I will call “being-towards-eternity”.

**7.2 Rabbi Hutner and Future Consequence**

According to Rabbi Hutner, the shadow of death hovers unbearably over life.[[8]](#footnote-9) The shadow is so dark that a constructive life cannot even be contemplated. In view of death, human existence seems to be a passing episode, lacking any permanence, consumed by the endless darkness surrounding it. As a result, according to Rabbi Hutner, there is no choice other than to forget death. He wrote:

כי היום הזה עצם מציאות החיים מחייב את השכחה. שהרי הדבר ברור שאילמלי היה האדם זוכר תמיד בבהירות מלאה ובכל חריפות עוקצו את מאורע המות, לא היה מוצא בקרבו משהו עוז להניע יד ורגל. ונמצא שעוז החיים ניזון הוא משכחת המות. ומתוך כך בשעה ובמצב שאור תחית המתים נהיר – הרי השכחה מפסידה את זכות קיומה [...] כלומר, על ידי גזירת המיתה נעשו החיים להשליה עצמית מאחר שאין בהם כח להתקיים אלא על ידי שכחת-המות שאינה אלא העלמת-עין מן המציאות. אמנם לאחר ליל ט"ו הראשון [פסח מצרים] שבו נתגלה אורו של אליהו, וטל של תחיית המתים מנשב בעולם, אז באה היא המצוה של זכירה.[[9]](#footnote-10) דהיינו שחרורו של האדם משעבודו אל כח השכחה שלו. והבן היטב.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Rabbi Hutner, like Heidegger, understands forgetfulness as an unauthentic response to death, a delusion, and an escape from reality. However, in contrast to the German philosopher, Rabbi Hutner does not recognize the possibility of life in the face of death, with an honest and consistent awareness of the finitude of existence that motivates a person to action. Freedom from the horror of death is vital for existence and prosperity, and therefore man must repress the thought of death to continue to live his life. Human existence is contingent upon the ability to forget. However, in the same breath, Rabbi Hutner recognizes that this necessary act of repression has a price: it produces ignorance about the truth of existence, ignores reality, and avoids a true confrontation with it.

In another place, Rabbi Hutner wrote that the phenomenon of forgetfulness itself is a divine decree that came to the world along with the decree of death, and without death it would have no right to exist at all: "והנה שרשה של תופעת השכחה בכלל היא בגזירת 'עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב'. כשם שנגזר אבדון וכליון על גופו של האדם, כך נגזר הפסק גם בכוחות דעתו. הפסק זה שכחה הוא. כך, שבעצם שכחה אינה אלא מיתת הדעת" (מאמרי Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach, סו/ו). Accordingly, only the people of Israel [“Knesset Yisrael”], whose essence is overcoming the decree of death, can be commanded to remember, specifically to remember the Exodus from Egypt, the moment of its birth, mentioned daily in the recitation of the *Shema* (Ibid).[[11]](#footnote-12) In this way, Rabbi Hutner connects overcoming death with man’s most essential characteristic – wisdom. One who possesses complete wisdom can remember, and not forget, death, something that is possible only with the help of belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Rabbi Hutner, as noted above, belongs to the group of the radically discontented (using the terminology of Parush) who believe that given death, life is nothing, a false existence. Only the prospect of a meaningful and eternal existence, continuing also after "חליפתו ומיתתו של האדם" (פחד יצחק, שבועות, כא/ח) can satisfy the longing for singularity – Rabbi Hutner’s version of authenticity.[[12]](#footnote-13) Being-towards-death in its Heideggerian version is perhaps courageous in the way in which it tries to confront death, but it is nonetheless unable to create authentic existence. This is because this type of confrontation with death, according to Rabbi Hutner, cannot become a source of motivation for existence in general, not to mention authentic existence. Death itself is actually the source of the nullification of all motivation. In contrast, eternal life, realized in the resurrection of the dead, testifies to the meaning of existence because it is rooted in the eternity that establishes true existence. "בשום 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." (שם). Not death, but overcoming death, is the key to authenticity. Moreover, as seen in the following passage, this is the root of the existence of the people of Israel (“Knesset Yisrael”):

מה שאומרים על כנסת ישראל שהיא מאמינה בתחיית המתים, אין זה מספיק. עיקר הנקודה במעלת כנסת ישראל היא בזה שאין היא יכולה לחיות בלי האמונה בתחיית המתים. אין היא יכולה למצוא לעצמה מנוחה בלי זה, וחייה אינם חיים בלי זה (מאמרי Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach, נב/ה).[[13]](#footnote-14)

In Rabbi Hutner’s thought, the resurrection functions as a future consequence that gives significance to life and meaning to the present. In this way, Rabbi Hutner echoes Heidegger’s model of the **historicization** of human existence, especially in relation to anticipation of the future. This Heideggerian model appears in different context in a discourse from *Pachad Yitzchak* on Rosh Hashanah, in which Rabbi Hutner discusses another concept that appears from time to time in his writings: “renewal”.[[14]](#footnote-15) He wrote:

כנסת ישראל קשורה היא בטבור נשמתה אל המגמה של חידוש העולם [...] וחכמים שונים: עתיד הקב"ה לחדש את עולמו. ושוב הם אומרים: אין לך מצווה שאין תחיית המתים תלויה בה [...] ולא רק לכלליות כנסת ישראל מורים הם הדברים של חידוש העולם. אלא שכל יחיד ויחיד בישראל חייב הוא להשתמש בכח-ההתחדשות הגנוז בנפש. כח-ההתחדשות הוא סוד מופלא בכוחות הנפש. בשעה שכח זה שולט הוא על האדם, נפשו של האדם לוחשת לעצמה דברים כגון אלו: אף על פי שמצד האיברים שלי והחושים שלי אין בעובדא זו שאני עושה, אלא חזרה של הרגל בעלמא; מכל מקום, מצד הרגשתי, הרי אני עושה את המעשה הזה בפעם הראשונה. עד כדי כך מגיעה היא יכלתו הרוחנית של אדם, להטביע את חותם הראשוניות על ענינים שחזר עליהם מאה פעמים ואחד. ואוחזים אנו באמונתנו, שהשורש אשר מתוכו יונק הוא האדם את כח-ההתחדשות שלו, הוא מפני שכח-ההתחדשות הזה גנוז הוא במהלכו של עולם. כי מכיון שעתיד הקב"ה לחדש את עולמו, הרי העולם מתנועע תמיד אל התחדשותו. והאדם שהוא עולם קטן [...] הרי נמצא בו משהו זעיר של אותו כח איתנים של התחדשות, המגלגל את כלליותו של העולם לקראת התחדשותו המוחלטת (פחד יצחק, ראש השנה, כז/ח).[[15]](#footnote-16)

Renewal, like singularity, echoes an existential search for authenticity and its various expressions, for example, openness, opportunity, vitality, vibrancy, and even a rather strong tendency to vitalism.[[16]](#footnote-17) In this passage, Rabbi Hutner connects the feeling of renewal, the ability to experience every deed and every choice in a completely new way, to the eschatological vision of a renewed world. Similar to Heidegger’s logical process in being-towards-death, and the process that evolves from what I call being-towards-eternity, Rabbi Hutner in this passage anchors the possibility of a certain way of life in the present to its future certainty: the continuous renewal in the present is made possible by the certainty of renewal in the future.

In Rabbi Hutner’s thought, eternity replaces death in Heidegger’s thought as the focus of the future consequence and even fulfills a similar structural function. Like death in Heidegger’s thought, eternity transcends the experiential and phenomenological perspective and at the same time serves as a factor enabling a meaningful reality. As in Heidegger’s understanding, death’s existentialist gravitas rests upon it being the ultimate potentiality, which exists in reality when man plans for it and anticipates it.

We have therefore found in Rabbi Hutner’s thought something similar to the principle of the Heideggerian future consequence. However, for Heidegger the focus of the future consequence is death and the condition for its presence is the non-repression of death, while for Rabbi Hutner, eternity replaces death as the focus of the future consequence, and it enables the non-repression of death.

Before continuing our analysis, I would like to point out three questions that arise already at this stage regarding Rabbi Hutner’s para-Heideggerian formulation. The first question: Does he not express, in the end, a theological position that diminishes death’s intensity by denying its finitude and thus its actuality? Is this not an unauthentic, evasive response to death that demonstrates the difficulty in grappling with the threat posed by death? There is no doubt that Heidegger would have answered these questions in the affirmative. The recourse to eternity promised by religion would be a betrayal for him, who grappled with questions that have no answer. This is the failure to resist the temptation to escape to pleasant and comforting positions and avoid difficult truths. But here it must be noted: Rabbi Hutner himself insists that death must not be repressed. He does not argue that death is an illusion, the opposite in fact: life without awareness of death is a self-delusion. Why? Does not eternity nullify death? In what way does the awareness of death make life in the face of eternity more real?

The second question: The function of the future consequence is to propel man to authenticity. Rabbi Hutner’s formulation seems to distort the focus of man’s motivation in his encounter with the ultimate future eventuality. In Heidegger’s thought, authenticity is an end in itself; in the absence of the possibility of absolute meaning, the incentive to be authentic remains the only motivation in human life. However, in Rabbi Hutner’s thought, the incentive is to be eternal, and in consequence, to acquire absolute meaning. If we propose, in accordance with the traditional religious perspective, that religion’s capacity to determine man’s possibilities grants him access to eternal life, then authenticity as a way of life becomes redundant. It cannot be said that the motivation to be authentic is absent from Rabbi Hutner’s thought; it is clearly present.[[17]](#footnote-18) However, it is not clear what place remains for it in Rabbi Hutner’s formulation.

The third question: in general, it seems that life lived according to a halachic or dogmatic religion is a perfect example of unauthentic existence in which the possibilities open to a person and the meaning given to the world do not derive from the person himself but are determined for him by others.

At the end of our analysis, I will be able to suggest answers to these questions. For now, we will put them aside and return to reconstructing the idea of being-towards-eternity in Rabbi Hutner’s thought.

**7.3 Constancy, Eternity, and Truth: The Existential Totality and Singularity in Rabbi Hutner’s Thought**

Heidegger, inspired by Kierkegaard, discussed two concepts of time: quantitative time and existential time. Rabbi Hutner also discussed various concepts of time in the double meaning that he gave, as was his practice, to the concept “eternity”. In his words:

הנה אנחנו מעמידים שני ערכים, בעלי היפך קטבי, ואומרים: עולם עובר, ועולם קיים. העולם העובר שייך למציאות שהזמניות שולטת בו, ואילו העולם הקיים שייך למציאות שהנצחיות שולטת בו. אולם שגרת המחשבה המצויה תוספת גם את הנצחיות באספקלריא של הזמן, אלא שהזמן הוא בלתי-מוגבל. אבל זו היא שטחיות גסה שאין בה אלא שיבושה. והלא חכמים קוראים לעולם-הנצח יום **שכולו** ארוך. כלומר, גם בתחילתו הוא ארוך. הרי לנו שאין הנצח מציאות של זמן שאין לו קצבה. אלא שהנצח הוא מציאות מופקעת לחלוטין ממהות של זמן. ובכל הבריאה כולה אין למצוא אפילו נקודה אחת שיש לה יחס כל שהוא למציאות המופקעת ממהות של זמן. המקום היחיד שנמצא שם תחושת מציאות אחרת המופקעת ממציאות שלנו המתקיימת בשלטונה של ממשלת הזמן – הוא נשמתו של אדם, אשר בעצמיות מהותה, אצורה היא מאותה המציאות אחרת, המופקעת ממהות הזמנית (פחד יצחק, יום הכיפורים, כא/ה. ההדגשה במקור).

According to this passage, eternity is not an infinite temporal continuum but rather a reality removed from time, beyond time, in which time in its conventional sense has no role. According to Rabbi Hutner, this quality of timelessness does not characterize only the world to come but also the soul, in a way that tries to find expression also in the finite present life. Rabbi Hutner engages in this subject at length in the first discourse in *Pachad Yitzhak* on Pesach, where he discusses the characteristic known as “*z’rizut”* (alacrity) in performing commandments. Though this quality is required of the servant of God at all times, it is especially relevant to Passover, in which haste is of the essence of the holiday (both in the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt and the practice of baking matzos). Alacrity is therefore connected to the foundational moment of the formation of the nation of Israel, the same entity that holds a connection to eternity. Rabbi Hutner begins, as is his custom, with a description of the common, although superficial, understanding of the matter under discussion:

לפי התפיסה הרגילה ענינה של מצוות הזריזות היא מהירות התנועה של כוחות הנפש וכוחות הגוף הנולדת מחמת הלחץ זה הדחק שהרצון לוחץ על הכוחות הללו להשיג את חפצו בתכיפות. ובהתאם לתפיסה זו אין שום הבדל במהותה של מדת הזריזות בין כשהיא באה בעניני עבודה [עבודת ה'] בין כשהיא באה בעניני העולם, דעיקר ההבדל הוא ברצון, דלמקום שהרצון נמשך שם תכוון מדת הזריזות את דרכה (Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach, א/ב).

The common understanding of *z’rizut* is performing an action quickly, with zeal. However, this is not the case in the realm of the soul. To demonstrate this, Rabbi Hutner cites a well-known allegory from Midrash Rabba about a townsman who married the king’s daughter: “even if he gives her everything in the world it will mean nothing to her because she is the daughter of the king, so too the soul, even if you bring it all the delicacies of the world, they mean nothing to it because it is from the higher sphere” (Kohelet Rabba 86). According to the conventional understanding “the delicacies of the world”, which cannot satiate the soul, refer to worldly pleasures. This is the meaning of the allegory in Ramchal’s *Mesillat Yesharim*, and from there it spread to the participants of the Mussar movement.[[18]](#footnote-19) However, Rabbi Hutner interprets it differently. He attempts to identify the greatest delicacy that this world can provide by following the interpretation of the Vilna Gaon (in his commentary “Siach Yitzchak” on “Siddur Eshei Yisrael”) on the blessing “Baruch She’amar” (“Blessed is He Who Said”), about the creation of the world, which appears at the beginning of the morning prayers. This blessing contains a list of various praises, among them the expressions “blessed is he who says and does” and then “blessed is he who makes the creation”. According to the Vilna Gaon, the expression, “blessed is he who says and does” relates to the creation as a whole, while “blessed is he who makes the creation” refers to a specific creation, time, the most sublime creation. Because of its importance is not included in the general praise about the creation as a whole but is uniquely titled “the act of creation”. “And when the line is stretched further”, explains Rabbi Hutner,

נמצא שאותה התכונה המציינת בייחוד את "עליונותה" של הנפש, אשר מפני שהיא מן העליונים לכן אפילו אם הביא לה כל עניני עולם לא תמלא, מטפסת היא ועולה עד מרום הפסגה של בריאת בראשית ואפילו אותה ההוויה הנאצלה אשר אנו קוראים לה "זמן" נכסי כפר הם אצלה. ובשעה שהיא ממאסת כל מעדני עולם גם הווית הזמן בכלל המיאוס היא. וכשהיא באה לקיים מצות ומעשים טובים אשר אז היא מקשיבה ומאזינה את "עליוניותה" מתעורר הסער הנפשי העומד להסתער על החומה של זמן ולהבקיעה. אדיר חפצה היא לקיים את המצוה שהיא עוסקת בה מעבר למחיצת הזמן, אלא שמכיון שנשואה היא הבת מלך לכפרי אין הדבר עולה בידה והמצוה מתקיימת בעל כרחה בין החומות של זמן. וכתוצאה מן הנסיון הבלתי מוצלח הזה של הנפש לפרוץ פרצה במחיצת הזמן באה מהירות התנועה בעבודת השם אשר על ידה מתמעטת כמות הזמן וה"בכדי שיעשה" של המעשה. באופן אשר המאמץ הנפשי בזה להשיג את העבר השני של החציצין והמחיצין של זמן הוא המקור העליון של מדת הזריזות (Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach, א/ה).

According to Rabbi Hutner, the soul’s nature is to yearn for timelessness. This statement becomes especially acute when we read it in contrast to the expressions of anxiety about mortality at the basis of Rabbi Hutner’s thought, about the world that continues after man ceases to be, about the seventy or eighty years of sojourn in this world that are so negligible that they do not “excluded from [being regarded as] dead”. The person who is aware of his mortality would appear to desire nothing more than more time, the deferral of extinction. It would seem that there is nothing like eternity in its appearance as temporal infinity to satisfy the yearnings of the anxious person. However, Rabbi Hutner does not agree: it is not an infinity of time that is desired, but existence removed from time.

It is possible that here Rabbi Hutner is echoing the paradox of immortal life. I mentioned above, in relation to the question of death, the group of those who are contented, in the terminology of Parush, who reason that without death life becomes less valuable or even worthless. Various philosophers maintain this position and it is expressed effectively in several literary works, some of which have become classics. The key point is that eternal life, of necessity, sooner or later, becomes boring, pointless, or to put it simply, meaningless. In Parush’s terminology, the contented reason that “life without death is not desirable because without death every person will arrive at a state of unbearable boredom” and “life without death is not desirable because without death all the basic, accepted values will lose all of the importance that we ascribe to them.”[[19]](#footnote-20) The endless expansion of the existence known to us is likely to leave us in existential distress no less than the finitude of the existence known to us. The contented understand that there is no way out of this predicament and therefore perceive death as something positive. Theology with its willingness to become accustomed to paradoxical arguments offers a way out of this quandary. One can maintain the coherence of belief in life in the world to come, which relieves the distress of life in this world by presenting an apocalyptic dimension that makes life in the world to come essentially different in some way from the existence familiar to us, a dimension that necessarily remains unexplained because it exists outside the range of human experience. Existence there will be different in some way, and this difference will explain what appears to us, because of our limited perception, to be a paradox, even if we cannot imagine how. This is what I have coined the “apocalyptic escape”.[[20]](#footnote-21) Perhaps this is one of the functions of timeless existence. Whatever it means, it is not infinite time that, from the other side, inevitably produces boredom and nihilism, as the contended think, but something else. Thus, Rabbi Hutner summarizes, we must understand the connection between the people of Israel and eternity:

המושג "נצח ישראל" אין עניינו רק קביעות עובדה של תמידיות ההמשך של קיום כנסת ישראל, אלא שהוא בא גם לקבוע יחס נפשי, לנצח ולזמן, המיוחד רק לכנסת ישראל. כלומר: הקשר המיוחד בין ישראל ונצח קובע בנפשה של כנסת ישראל הלחץ להבקיע את מסגרת הזמן, ומביא מתוך כך למדת הזריזות בעבודת השם (Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach, א/ז).

There are thus two meanings of “eternity”: an infinite temporal continuum and a reality removed from temporality. Evidence of the existence of timeless eternity is expressed in the life of man in the soul’s need for alacrity in the performance of commandments. On second thought, this formulation is liable to arouse additional questions, and for a religious person even unease, because on the face of it, it could imply a desire to reduce, as much as possible, the amount of time in God’s service, while, presumably, it is to be expected that a servant of God aspires to increase to the fullest extent the time spent engaging in God’s service.

This question would seem to be answered by Rabbi Hutner in a parallel and complementary discussion in which he again develops the two concepts of eternity. The first, as stated above, is an infinite temporal continuum. However, according to Rabbi Hutner there is another perception of eternity, which relates to every person on an individual basis. He wrote:

הנה האדם שלנו החי בעולם של גזרת המיתה, בודאי שאין הוא נצחי. אבל יש כאן עמקות אצילית. הלא, לא הרי נצח כהרי נצח. יש בטבע נצח מוחלט, דוגמת תנועת השמש ומהלכה [...] אבל יש עוד נצח יחסי. וכמו שבתוך מסגרת הגבולית של חיי האדם תנועת הלב היא נצחית [...] אצל האדם החי את חייו המוגבלים, הרי כלליות החיים שלו, הוא הנצח שלו. [...] בשעה שאנו אומרים שדבר זה נוהג אצל אדם **בתמידיות**, פירושו של דבר הוא, כי הדבר הזה הנה הוא מזדהה עם הנצח של האדם. כי ביחסי האדם אל עצמו, הרי **התמידיות** שלו היא כלליות הסכום של חייו, וסכום חייו הרי הוא הנצח שלו (פחד יצחק, יום הכיפורים, לב/ה. ההדגשות במקור).

Rabbi Hutner clearly echoes the distinction between the two understandings of time that we saw in the thought of Heidegger and Kierkegaard – quantitative time and experiential time. Like them, Rabbi Hutner argues that, in contrast to the quantitative conception of eternity as infinity, from an existential perspective, which is the dominant one “for a person who lives his limited life,” eternity is not the absence of mortality; eternity is “*t’midiut*” (constancy) or totality. He therefore states in the continuation of the discourse that “eternity in the principles of holiness does not refer to an endless straight line with many points standing individually, but rather in the principles of holiness, eternity relates to the completeness of a uniform tier having a certain visage” (Ibid, section 11) Rabbi Hutner begins with the problem of human mortality, his lack of eternity in the conventional sense of the word. However, he goes on to state that there is an appearance of eternity available also to mortal man: the totality of his life, all the time that he exists within it. In this framework, not everything that comprises a human life is connected to eternity; only what is done in *t’midiut* (constancy) can be identified with existential eternity.

By contrasting eternity as infinite time and eternity as the quality of totality, Rabbi Hutner points to a type of eternity that constitutes a possibility for mortals even in their terminal existence. However, in contrast to Heidegger, the existential eternity in Rabbi Hutner’s thought does not replace quantitative eternity but is parallel to it and integrated within it. While holding on to the existential perception of temporality and eternity, Rabbi Hutner continues to speak of eternal life as infinite time in the world to come.[[21]](#footnote-22) The world to come is eternal in all senses of the word: temporal infinity, timelessness in the sense of removed from time, and totality -- “a day that is completely long”. Man has before him the prospect of eternity in the absolute sense. The key to this, for Rabbi Hutner, is to identify the relative existential eternity with the eternity of the world to come. In his words:

ועלינו לדעת כי אותו חוק של מדה כנגד מדה אומר לנו, כי המדות העליונות אשר בודאי הן בנות בלי-גבול מתעוררות הן על ידי הנהגות האדם על פי מדותיו הגבוליים, ואשר על כן, יש בכחה של היגיעה בתורה **תמיד**, סגולת-כפרה מיוחדת, כי על ידי **תמידיות** היגיעה הוא משלב את **הנצח** שלו היחסי עם הנצח של התורה המחלט. ועל ידי זה הוא יוצר-פועל בעצמו מהות של נצח (פחד יצחק, יום הכיפורים, לב/ה. ההדגשות במקור).

In another place he wrote:

לגבי תורה, מושג ה"תמידיות" בא הוא לסמן את אופיה של תורה, שאין שלימות-של-תורה מופיעה עד שהיא מסגלת לעצמה את מדת ה"תמידיות". ולגבי תורה אין ה"תמידיות" מושג כמותי, אלא מושג איכותי טהור. אין ה"תמידיות" לגבי תורה, באה לענות על השאלה, כמה זמן עסק בתורה? אלא שהיא באה לענות על השאלה, כיצד עסק בתורה (פחד יצחק, שבועות, מאמר כד/ז).

In this passage, Rabbi Hutner connects the concept of existential eternity with the theological-traditional understanding of eternity; moreover, he conditions one upon the other: by constant exertion in Torah study, a person connects his existential eternity with absolute eternity. Alacrity in observing the commandments brings man closer to the appearance of eternity as timelessness in this world, while the Torah, which has no fixed measure in time or limitation of any kind, enables the appearance of *t’midiut*, which is connected to absolute eternity. Thus, a person creates for himself not only the occurrence of eternity – the totality of his contingent life -- but also the essence of eternity, the totality pertaining to the Torah.

The Torah is the key to eternal life. This statement itself of course adds nothing to Jewish theology. The innovation in Rabbi Hutner’s claim lies in the way in which he explains the mechanism behind the Torah’s function as the key to eternal life. Like every thinker from the Lithuanian-Orthodox movement, Rabbi Hutner put Torah study in the center of a Jew’s world and gave it precedence above every other value. However, there is significant innovation here regarding the reason the Torah is so central: it has a stronger connection to *t’midiut* than any other feature of the Jewish religion. In his words:

מושג ה"תמידיות" הבא ביחס למצוות, חלוק הוא בהחלט ממושג ה"תמידיות" הבא ביחס לתורה. החילוק הזה מוסבר לנו יפה בדרך משל. בשעה שאנו אומרים שפלוני ניגן שעתיים על הכינור, תיבת **שעתיים** מתיחסת היא אל פעולת הנגינה. והיא באה לומר שפעולה הנגינה ארכה שעתיים. אבל בשעה שאנו אומרים שהניגון הזה הוא **בן-שעתיים**, אין הכמות של שעתיים מתיחסת לפעולה הנגינה, אלא שהיא מתיחסת אל החפצא של הניגון. באופן הראשון, יתכן שפלוני ניגן הרבה מיני ניגונים, במשך שעתיים. אבל באופן השני, אדרבה, עיקר הכונה להורות על תכונתו של הניגון. כלומר, זקוקים אנו לכמות זמן של שעתיים, בכדי שנוכל לנגן את כל הניגון מתחילתו ועד סופו [...] מושג ה"תמידיות" בתלמוד תורה, מובנו הוא, שהניגון הוא הוא בן **תמידיות**. כאן, ה**תמידיות** מתיחסת היא **לחפצא של תלמוד-תורה** [...] כאן, **התמידיות** היא מדת-גודל, ולא הודעה של משך זמן (פחד יצחק, יום הכיפורים, לב/ז).

The advantage of Torah study over the other commandments is that it allows the constancy of the “measure of size”. Rabbi Hutner interprets a verse from the “Hear O Israel”, the fundamental text about the Jewish commitment to God: "'ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך, בלכתך בדרך, בשכבך ובקומך' מיוחד הוא בתלמוד תורה דווקא. מפני שהכוונה היא בכאן לצירופם של כל המצבים הללו ליצירת קומה שלמה אחידה של תלמוד-תורה, עד שכל הגורע מהמשכם ומרציפותם של המצבים האלה, בכלליות הקומה הוא פוגם" (פחד יצחק, שבועות, כד/ג). The Torah has a unifying potential that establishes a totality: it is capable of turning man’s life from a collection of fragments, situations, actions, and experiences into a comprehensive unity that includes the sum of its parts, into a totality, a whole.

There are thus two conceptions of eternity: infinity, eternity in relation to quantitative time, and *t’midiut* (constancy), also characterized by timelessness, which is eternity in relation to qualitative time, which means the existence of unity and wholeness in which all appearances of existence in the past, present, and future are connected to one thing that they identify with. Eternity in its quantitative meaning pertains only to that which is necessary, and so man in this world is not eternal in the qualitative sense; however, eternity in its existential meaning is available to him, if he lives in a state of constancy. Eternity as infinity becomes available for man also when his constancy pertains to absolute eternity, a connection that he can acquire if the *t’midiut* in his life is Torah study. Later in the same discourse, Rabbi Hutner wrote:

ברית התורה קרוי הוא **ברית יומם ולילה**. ופשוט הוא, כי יומם ולילה הוא כינוי לתמידיות. ולמדנו מכאן, כי ה"תמידיות" נכללת היא בעצם "ברית התורה". ודעת לנבון נקל, כי אם היתה ה"תמידיות" מושג של כמות-הזמן, כי אז היה מן הנמנע שתשמש גורם בתוכה ובגופה של ברית התורה. באופן, שאם גרעת שעה מיראת שמים, הרי חסרון שעה בידיך. אבל אם גרעת שעה מתורתך, הרי רצחת את אופי **התמידיות** של תורתך. ותורתך קטועה היא בידיך (פחד יצחק, יום הכיפורים, לב/ח. ההדגשות במקור).

When a person takes off an hour from his Torah study, he “murders” its *t’midiut*. The use of the verb “murder” here lends a catastrophic connotation, equal to death, to the absence of *t’midiut*. Like many other texts of Rabbi Hutner, when read outside the general perspective of his thought, this passage is liable to be read as simply a “Mussar” text, a rhetorical exaggeration for the sake of emphasizing an educational message. However, in the context of the argument in which it is integrated and based on the meaning of the concept of murder as damage to the possibility of the *chashivut*-meaning of human existence that Rabbi Hutner developed,[[22]](#footnote-23) it appears that this must be read in accordance with the way in which he himself describes his writing: on the one hand, great precision regarding the written word out of “a feeling of responsibility regarding that which is written”, and on the other hand, his method of writing content with double meanings, one very lofty meaning for the learned reader, and another, very simple meaning for the average reader.[[23]](#footnote-24) Damage to the *t’midiut* of Torah study is an act of murder, the extraction of meaning from existence.

To complete this discussion, we must return to one of the concepts from Rabbi Hutner’s intellectual infrastructure: truth. We saw that Rabbi Hutner develops two concepts of truth: fidelity to the original and eternity.[[24]](#footnote-25) A third conceptualization of the concept of truth, connected to the unification of the three dimensions of time, appears in Rabbi Hutner’s writings. In his words:

[אמרו חז"ל] כי תיבת אמת בנינה היא משלשת האותיות, שהראשונה היא התחלת האותיות, השניה היא אמצע האותיות, והשלישית היא סיום האותיות. ומבואר מזה שבנין זה מגלה הוא תכונה המיוחדת למדת האמת. והצעת הדבר כך היא: אמת והיפוכה מתיחסות הן לדעתו של אדם. אם ציור המציאות בדעתו של אדם מתאים למציאות, הרי זו דעת אמת; אם ציור המציאות בדעתו של אדם אינו מתאים למציאות, הרי זו דעת שקר או דעת מוטעית. השתלשלותה של הדעת בתוך במציאות באה היא בתלתא בבי [בשלושה שערים]. היא נפעלת מן המציאות, פועלת על המציאות, ובאופן זה מקשרת את המציאות הפועלת עם המציאות הנפעלת. כשהדעת היא דעת אמת, כלומר שהמציאות הפועלת מתאימה עם ציור המציאות של הדעת, אז יעלה הקשר יפה והמציאות הנפעלת תתחבר ותתלכד עם המציאות הפועלת. ולהיפך, שכשהדעת היא דעת מוטעית, וציור המציאות של הדעת לא תתאים לעצם המציאות, הרי זה ניתוק השרשרת, והמציאות הנפעלת על ידי הדעת תהיה בודדה, שאין לה הזדווגות עם עצם המציאות הפועלת. ועל כן בנינה של תיבת אמת הבנויה משלש האותיות, אשר השלישית שבהן היא סיום האותיות המחזיר ושב אל ההתחלה, הרי בנין זה מורה על אמיתיות האמצע. כי רק אם האמצע מתאים אל ההתחלה, יש לו כח לקשר את ההתחלה עם הסוף (פחד יצחק, סוכות, טו/ב).

This passage is one of the most obscure in the *Pachad Yitzchak* books. Rabbi Hutner writes that the relationship between the mind and reality is manifest in three ways: (1) the mind is activated by reality; (2) the mind acts upon reality; (3) the mind connects the active reality with the activated reality. Rabbi Hutner does not explain here the meaning of these manifestations. From a simple reading, it is not clear how there are three manifestations because it is not clear why the third, the connection between the activated and active reality, is itself a manifestations. What is the meaning of this connection? Is not the reality acting upon man and the reality upon which he acts the same reality? Is there a need to connect it to itself? Matters become clearer in view of things that we saw in the previous chapters, and in light of the continuation of the passage. Let us first look at the continuation of the passage, and afterward I will explain it. Rabbi Hutner wrote:

הדברים ההלו אמורים הם במדת הדעת כפי שמופיעה היא בעולמנו. וגם במדת האמת של הקב"ה נתפרש לנו ענין זה. והם הם הדברים שכתב רש"י במס' שבת דמדת האמת של הקב"ה פירושה: אני ראשון ואני אחרון ואני הוא. אני ראשון – א, ואני אחרון – ת, ואני הוא – מ. כלומר, ההוה של העולם מקשר את תכנית העולם עם מטרתו [...] מכיון שמדת האמת ענינה הוא התקשרות הסוף אל ההתחלה, הרי של הויה שפירושו היה הוה ויהיה, המקשר את העבר ואת העתיד בברירות של הוה, הוא הוא גילוי מדת האמת של הקב"ה (שם).

God’s truth is that He connects the three temporal dimensions of reality: the present, the past, which is reality’s blueprint, the telos concealed within it, and the future, the purpose of reality, and the realization of the telos. God connects the past and the future in the choices of the present -- this is the revelation of truth. Rabbi Hutner, therefore, presents a third conception of “truth”: truth as unity, as the totality in which the appearances of reality within it are connected to each other through one unifying principle.

Let us return to the three appearances of *da’at* [wisdom]that are connected to various concepts of wisdom in Rabbi Hutner’s thought. The first two appearances are connected to the distinction between, on the one hand, affirming wisdom, which is familiarity with natural reality, the will of God that is revealed in creation, and, on the other hand, creative wisdom which is concerned with the creation of a new reality, a world that will have no dualistic gap between the lower natural reality and the higher worlds.[[25]](#footnote-26) The wisdom activated upon by reality is affirming wisdom. The wisdom that acts upon reality is creative wisdom. The third appearance is connected to the type of wisdom that bridges the dualistic gap by presenting the body of the world as secondary to its purpose. The creation is reality’s past; the renewed world is its future; the connection between them at the present moment is made by bringing together the higher and lower spheres by the power of *da’at,* just as God connects the present, past, and future by virtue of his existence. The creation resembles the creator. "לזה באה היא פעולתה של מדת ואמת," כתב הרב הוטנר במקום אחר, "המאחדת את חילוקי הזמנים בנקודה אחת, וממילא שופעים הם אורות העתיד בתוך זרם החיים של ההוה." (פחד יצחק, יום הכיפורים, ו/ט). Truth means therefore existential totality in the present moment through its unity with the past and future. It is an attribute of God as well as of man, who is created in the image of God, an image contained within his intellectual capacity. [[26]](#footnote-27)

We have therefore found that the Heideggerian principle of existential totality appears also in Rabbi Hutner’s thought. For Heidegger, man unifies his existence in that he connects all aspects of his life with a single thread – his unique and distinct self – and connects his three dimensions of time with an authentic choice, action in the present, based upon memory of the past and adaptation to future possibilities unique to him. Rabbi Hutner presents *t’midiut* as man’s eternity in this world, as his totality of time. He suggests that man brings truth to reality in that he unites the three dimensions of time through three appearances of the encounter between wisdom and reality. Nonetheless, and in contrast to Heidegger, Rabbi Hutner, along with contingent existential eternity, preserves the concept of infinite, absolute eternity and establishes that man can unify his relative eternity with absolute eternity when his constancy is connected to the appearance of absolute eternity -- the Torah.

I will take this opportunity to comment on the double meanings that Rabbi Hutner ascribes to his concepts. In the fourth chapter, we encountered two conceptions of truth: truth as fidelity to the original and eternal truth. On the face of it, these appear to be two different concepts. However, we have seen that they coalesce into one identical meaning: the truth of man in the sense of resemblance to the original means semblance to the existence of God, which is eternal existence. Here we encountered a third conception of truth that also seems to be radically different from the others: truth as the unity of time, similar to that aspect of authenticity in Heidegger’s thought. However, this meaning also coalesces with the other two and merges with them into a shared theme at the heart of Rabbi Hutner’s thought: existence. The totality that unites man’s temporal dimensions is that which enables *t’midiut* in Torah study, which is the key to eternal existence and semblance to the original. All three conceptualizations of truth in Rabbi Hutner’s thought are thus aspects of the same concept.

The same can be said about the key concept in Rabbi Hutner’s thought in the context of authenticity – *yechidut.* In the framework of the intellectual infrastructure, we saw how he uses the concept of *yechidut* to express the power of the Torah to extend over everything else that is liable to be connected to it, with an emphasis on *divrei reshut*. [[27]](#footnote-28) In our discussion of the core of Rabbi Hutner’s thought, we saw how he loads the concept of *yechidut* with a meaning of singularity as an expression of the aspiration for authenticity.[[28]](#footnote-29) On the surface, these are two very different meanings. However, they meet and merge in the context of *t’midiut,* in the sense of authenticity as a totality dependent upon singularity. I will now list all the claims that we have encountered thus far about the Torah, *divrei reshut,* singularity, and *t’midiut* in Rabbi Hutner’s thought:[[29]](#footnote-30)

1. *Divrei reshut* control every aspect of life, without exception. They enable the fulfillment of “In all thy ways acknowledge Him” (Prov. 3:6) and constant submission to the Lord.
2. The fulfillment of *divrei reshut* for the sake of heaven is dependent upon the Torah study, through which *da’at-reshut* is acquired, and this enables man to determine how to accomplish his *divrei reshut* for the sake of heaven.
3. The singularity of Torah study: Every act that Torah study inspires is also considered Torah study. The consequence of this is that every act of *divrei reshut* for the sake of heaven is considered Torah study, and every aspect of life and every moment of life, without exception, could be considered as time spent in Torah study. In effect, without this idea, it is not possible to ascribe real meaning to the idea of *t’midiut* in Torah study. It is impossible to study Torah “all the time”. Without the idea of the singularity of Torah, the requirement for *t’midiut* in Torah study could be understood as “Mussar”, a homiletical exhortation to study the Torah. However, based on the construct of singularity as a totality, the idea of constancy in Torah study acquires real meaning, as something that man does in a state of eternity.
4. Torah study reaches its essential and highest form when it is unique to the individual, a source of original insights that only he can produce because no mind is exactly like another. This, according to Rabbi Hutner, is the most meaningful appearance of *yechidut* in its sense of singularity.

Therefore, in Rabbi Hutner’s thought, both meanings of *yechidut* consolidate in a concept of authenticity similar to Heidegger’s: singularity that creates existential totality. Both meanings are connected to Torah study: the uniqueness of the individual mind can be realized in Torah study and the study of Torah for the sake of observing it can establish within the student a totality that extends to all aspects of his life that emanate from it.

**7.4 Being-Towards-Eternity: Rabbi Hutner’s Adaptation of the Heideggerian Principle**

The three principles that comprise the idea of being-towards-death in Heidegger’s philosophy -- the future consequence, the existential totality, and singularity – are all present in some way in Rabbi Hutner’s thought and developed in connection with his basic concepts regarding the subject that lies at the heart of every Lithuanian-Orthodox outlook: Torah study. This is accomplished through a new presentation of the religious principle rejected by Heidegger: the idea of eternal life. Can we then discuss a theme similar to that of being-towards-death in Rabbi Hutner’s thought, something that could be called being-towards-eternity?

It is possible to do so because the principal elements of this idea are present in his thought. However, honesty requires that we admit that compiling them into a structured theme, requires developing his ideas to a significant extent and a lot of speculation. In the following pages, I will cautiously suggest how such a theme could be reconstructed from Rabbi Hutner’s thought. In doing so I will address the questions I raised at the beginning of our discussion: Does Rabbi Hutner not express, after all, a theological position that diminishes the intensity of death by denying its finitude, and is this not, in the end, an unauthentic reaction to death, which allows man to re-immerse himself in the numbing tranquility that stifles the drive for authenticity? Second, does Rabbi Hutner’s formulation not divert the focus of the future consequence from death to eternity in a way that quells the motivation to be authentic, inspired by the awareness of death? Third, is the very striving for authenticity compatible with Orthodox Jewish religiosity, which is based upon a predetermined value system as well as, on the face of it, an all-encompassing system of predetermined deeds and choices in the framework of halacha?

I would like to suggest the following: In Rabbi Hutner’s thought, as in Heidegger’s, there are two states of existence: existence of *yechidut* and existence lacking *yechidut*. These are parallel, with the necessary differences, to authentic and unauthentic existence. *Yechidut*, like authenticity, imprints all a person’s actions and aspects of his life with his individual singularity, joins them to *t’midiut* and establishes existential totality.

The similarity between these modal pairs also exists in their relationship to meaning. From an existential perspective, as developed by Heidegger, who was in turn influenced by Kierkegaard, existence can be meaningful, even if only contingently, when existence is authentic. Similarly, in the thought of Rabbi Hutner, existence can be meaningful contingently when existence is unique. However, existence can also be meaningful absolutely when *yechidut* and *t’midiut* are directed to Torah study, which is possible because of the Torah’s power to turn everything deriving from it into the entity of Torah itself, as it expands to encompass all aspects of life and joins them into a unity and totality belonging to eternity. In this point, we find an important similarity between Rabbi Hutner and another existentialist thinker, Kierkegaard. According to Heidegger, for existence to be authentic it is enough for man to commit to his own singularity. Kierkegaard, however, believes that authenticity is contingent upon man’s absolute commitment to an idea, and he concludes that this idea must be Christianity. Rabbi Hutner here, in a certain way, takes an intermediary position between the two. Authenticity is possible, in principle, on the basis of human singularity alone; however, for there to be true authenticity, connected to eternity and establishing absolute meaning, it must be connected to a specific idea: the Torah.

According to both thinkers, the movement between the two modes of existence is dependent upon a future consequence in an experience outside man’s existential horizon. In the Heideggerian paradigm, the awareness of the inevitable occurrence of death reveals, on one hand, the finitude of existence and its intrinsic meaninglessness, and on the other hand, the possibility of unique existence, existential eternity, and the meaning that it establishes. Death arouses anxiety which is liable to lead to one of two reactions: repression, forgetfulness, and escape back to a dormant, inauthentic existence, or the arousal of a drive to live as fully and uniquely as possible, while it is still possible. The desire for a meaningful life, even if contingent, drives a person to live authentically. This is being-towards-death.

Here we encounter the crucial difference between the two thinkers. In the Hutnerian paradigm, the future consequence is two-fold, and herein lies the possible solution to two of the questions I have raised. The first consequence is death. In Heidegger’s thought, death both arouses man to his distinctiveness and singularity and delineates man’s existence in a way that allows for existential totality. In Rabbi Hutner’s thought also, man’s ability to identify himself with eternity is dependent on the singularity that is a condition for *t’midiut*: the *t’midiut* of eternity is possible only through constancy in Torah study, and constancy in Torah study is possible only through unique study, which leads to unique action – the performance of his *ma’aasei reshut* [voluntary deeds] for the sake of heaven. However, in contrast to Heidegger, for Rabbi Hutner, the awareness of death alone cannot arouse man to authenticity, because the inevitable finitude leads to complete nihilistic despair, of the kind that he considered the most serious heresy of his time. The possibility of authenticity and contingent meaning, which Rabbi Hutner, apparently recognizes, cannot inspire action.[[30]](#footnote-31)

At this point, we encounter the second future consequence, derived from Jewish theological dogma – eternity as the prospect of the eternal existence of the individual. The awareness of resurrection functions analogously to the awareness of death: death is necessary and inevitable, but its finitude is not unavoidable. Man is thus confronted with, in addition to the certainty of death and the possibility of existential eternity, the possibility of absolute eternity and meaning that is not contingent. But it is only a possibility; just as finitude is not inevitable, neither is eternity. For the individual, only death is certain. The possibility of absolute nullifying termination in the shadow of death is certainly a very real possibility; in effect, this is man’s default position. Resurrection and eternity are not givens. Just like existential meaning, they are acquired by man in a Sisyphean effort to live authentically. The possibility of eternity preserves existential anxiety, or at least a significant part of it, in a way that can instigate the drive propelling authenticity. For without authenticity, without the unifying and cohesive imprint of singularity, the totality of Torah study, which extends itself to all human experiences, from the intellect within man to the unique incidental possibilities that he chances upon in *divrei reshut*, is not viable and neither is eternity. The resurrection of the dead, and the absolute eternity that it heralds, do not eliminate the sting of death, they place at its side hope for a new possibility following it, in a way that is sufficient to dull the sting and urgently incentivize authentic existence. For Heidegger, the theological idea of eternal life is a comforting illusion. For Rabbi Hutner, the certainty of death is a depressing fact and no more. On the contrary, the idea of contingent meaning can be understood, in light of Rabbi Hutner’s thought, as a comforting illusion because there is no difference at all between it and nothingness. Eternity, in contrast, for Rabbi Hutner, is not comforting but stressful, perhaps even more than death, because much more is at stake: to be authentic and give your life an eternal prospect and absolute meaning or sink into false existence and vanish as if you never were.

This is an appropriate place to point to the unique way in which the concept of eternal life and the world to come function in Rabbi Hutner’s thought. In light of the being-towards-eternity argument, the difference between this world and the next can be summarized as follows: this world is certainly not eternal in the sense of infinite time. It had a beginning, and it will have an end. Aspects of eternity are available within it in the form of existential totality, the realization of which is conditional. The world to come, in contrast, is eternal both as infinite time and as a totality. Accordingly, man in this world is not eternal in the usual sense of the word; he does not exist for an infinity of time, but rather is of necessity limited by his finitude. However, he has the potential to be eternal in another sense, through *t’midiut.* Eternity is subjective and contingent. However, beyond the existential contingent eternity, there is the absolute eternity of the world to come. In the world to come, a person who, in his lifetime, lived in the *t’midiut* of Torah study, will be of necessity eternal, both endless and a totality. In light of this, we must note an innovation in Rabbi Hutner’s use of the concept of eternal life. In classical Jewish theology, the concept of eternal life is presented as a response to the problem of theodicy, as the motivation for observing the commandments, or as a utopian vision. Here, in contrast, Rabbi Hutner uses the concepts of resurrection and eternity as a response to a specific existential problem: to confirm and maintain the possibility of an authentic and meaningful life in the face of death. In light of this, it is easy to understand why Nachmanides’ eschatological outlook, which Rabbi Hutner prefers to that of Maimonides, can be understood as preferable from an existential perspective. When we speak of the eternal existence of the soul in the purely spiritual world to come, do we mean that a person exists there as himself, as the individual that he was in his life? The eternal existence of the soul does not provide a response to existential anxiety because the soul is not the self. The fact that a part of man is not destroyed does not ameliorate the expiration awaiting him as a subject nor grant meaning to his personal life as an individual.

I will now address the last question, on the subject of the apparent incompatibility between striving for authenticity and Orthodox Jewish religiosity, which is based upon a predetermined system of values as well as, on the face of it, an all-encompassing system of predetermined actions and choices in the halachic framework. An examination of Rabbi Hutner’s thought reveals that he worked hard to create room for authenticity even in an Orthodox religious framework. He creates this space in two ways. First, in his approach to Torah study, by raising originality in Torah study from an indicator of an individual student’s talent and the quality of his learning, to the supreme value, to the status of the essence of learning, without which the Torah loses its apogee: the renewal of being, and the *yechidut* and *t’midiut* that it enables. In effect, Rabbi Hutner does for originality in Torah study what Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin did for Torah study itself. Second, Rabbi Hutner changes the status of *divrei reshut.* He grants a more pivotal status to amorphous *divrei reshut* than to clearly defined commandments, similar to how he formulates the Torah’s superiority, and thereby specifically elevates the arena of activity in which the unique personality and particular modes of behavior of the religious person can be expressed.

Does this proposal answer the questions raised above? It is abundantly clear that the atheist existentialist thinkers would answer in the negative and it is doubtful that Rabbi Hutner’s version of authenticity could withstand philosophical scrutiny. However, even if we concede that it is not possible to offer satisfying solutions to these problems within Rabbi Hutner’s thought, his efforts in this context are fascinating in themselves. Rabbi Hutner attempts to construct an outlook that rather than dulling the sting of death, allows one to look it straight in the face. In this context, I believe that he succeeds in dulling the sting of criticism leveled against the idea of life after death within existentialist thought, in the way in which there emerges from his thought an interdependence between authentic existence and the merit of life in the world to come, through a connection between the two types of eternity. In issues relating to authentic life, the challenge is greater. First, it must be argued against Rabbi Hutner that there is an element of coercion, and therefore lack of authenticity, in the choice of a religious framework because the theological principles do not allow this to be presented as a choice between two things of equal value. Only the “right” choice establishes authenticity that in turn creates absolute eternity. Second, although Rabbi Hutner emphasizes and develops in his thought the spaces in which one can discuss authenticity in the Orthodox Jewish framework, if we were asked to name, theoretically, the spaces that contain the greatest potential for unique individual expression in the framework of this environment, the two most natural candidates would be Torah study and *divrei reshut*. Rabbi Hutner raises the status of *divrei reshut* and grants them a pivotal place, and in his thought in general emphasizes the Torah in its theoretical aspects and in the educational sphere, where he anchors unique human singularity. But in the end, there remains the basic dimension of the Torah and Orthodox life: the system of laws that tells a person what to believe and how to behave, which in the Lithuanian-Orthodox framework is embodied in the halachic system pertaining to almost every context of a person’s life. It cannot be denied that the Orthodox halachic framework does not correlate with authentic existence in the way in which the existentialists spoke of it – as non-conformist (perhaps even impudently so), as open as possible, and free of any limitation that can be disposed of by human agency. On the contrary, Rabbi Hutner’s own life and the level of conformity that he forced upon himself may testify to this. However, it is apparent from Rabbi Hutner’s efforts that he wanted to bring Orthodox life closer to authenticity and the search for individual meaning, to the extent permitted within the framework to which he was committed. For Rabbi Hutner, authenticity is not foreign to religious life, on the contrary, it is the aspiration of every religious person. Specifically, faith in the resurrection of the dead and the Torah enable authentic life, and, likewise, the authenticity necessary for *t’midiut* in Torah study is the condition for eternal life.

This is what is meant by the term “post-existentialist thought”: the internalization of existential problems and aspirations as they were developed in the existentialist framework and the need for its ideas, along with, however, deviation from its method and its pretensions by introducing the theological element and a more restricted adoption of its conclusions. This correlates with Rabbi Hutner’s approach to the relationship between Torah and external wisdom: a lower floor built from the study of physical reality and upon this a complementary (and sometimes restricting) floor emanating from the Torah.

Before concluding, I would like to repay an old debt: at the beginning of the discussion, when we arrived at the conclusion regarding the theocentric purpose, we encountered the paradox of individuation contingent upon submission: complete submission to God is the highest level of recompense to God for man’s very existence, and thus, paradoxically, it is the highest level of true existence, independence, and autonomy to which man can aspire.[[31]](#footnote-32) This is the formal argument to which our analysis of the intellectual infrastructure led. After examining the concept of authenticity in Rabbi Hutner’s thought, the paradox is revealed to be solvable: complete submission is the totality connected to the idea of Torah, which fills all of man’s existence, unites it, and is inextricably intertwined in his singular and distinct existence.

1. See p. 21–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See p. 25–26, 53–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This chapter expands upon previous work I've done on this topic. See Herskowitz and Shalev, "Being-towards-Eternity". For other studies of R. Hutner which reference Heidegger, see p.? Fn. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Insofar as R. Hutner is an existentialist, he is a religious one. As such, one might think that a more fitting comparison would be to a religious existentialist, namely – Kierkegaard. However, I concur with previous scholarship that Heidegger is the more appropriate choice. First, R. Hutner's model of authenticity resembles that of Heidegger's more than it does Kierkegaard's. Second, insofar as there are similarities between R. Hutner's and Kierkegaard's thought, it is anecdotal, and in many cases in matters where Heidegger resembles the latter as well; while I found no trace of the most central themes in Kierkegaards thought, such as the leap of faith or the three stages on life's way, in R. Hutner's writings. In contrast, as shall be demonstrated, there are some striking similarities between Heidegger's thought and important themes in R. Hutner's. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See p. 147–150. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. ראה הרשקוביץ ושלו, "היות-לקראת-הנצח", עמ' 260–264; וראה מנסבך, קיום ומשמעות, 40–56. והשווה גולומב, אביר האמונה, עמ' 166–186; סיגד, אקזיסטנציאליזם, עמ' 135–174, ובמיוחד עמ' 167–174. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 310–311 (266). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See p.–143. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See Exodus, 13/3. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. *Sefer Hazikaron,* 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. See also Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol 1. 42; *Ma'amarei Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach,* 52/14, 21/9, *Ma'amarei Pachad Yitzchak: Succot*, 100/6. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See Ch. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. See also Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol 1, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. In this context it is worth mentioning that the "renewel" is a promionant theme in the thought of Gerr Hasidism. For studies which consider R. Hutner's relationship to Gerr thought, see p.? Fn? [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. See also *Pachad Yitzchak: Pesach,* 76/10-11; Hutner, *Reshimot Lev*, Vol 2, 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. See also Goldberg, "Biography", 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. See p. 152–154. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Ramhal, *The Path of the Just,* Ch. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Parush, "Life Without Death", 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. See p. 114 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. See p. 134–137. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. See p. 154–157. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. See p. 86–87. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. See p. 102–103. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. See p. 170–174; 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. See also Wolfson, "Esotericism", 26-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. See p. 130–134. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. See p. 152–154 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. See p.? [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. It bears mentioning that one criticism levelled as Heidegger has been that his philosophy, ultimately, is nihilistic. See Hemming and Bogdan, *The Movement of Nihilism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. See p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)