THE “THINKING HEART”
In this paper, I will explore some issues that arise from the study of the diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum, from the perspective of philosophy and philosophical practice. Although we have begun this exploration in recent years, the argument that I will present here is far from conclusive. I will offer a panoramic yet summarized account of a process of investigation that is still in progress.

1. A Philosophical Requirement

In current studies of Etty Hillesum, there are two contrasting schools of thought as to whether ‘Etty Hillesum was a philosopher.’ Some interpreters accept this statement, others deny it, and all with a varying degree of decisiveness or certainty. It may be that the answer depends on what the interpreter thinks about philosophy and philosophizing. However, in my opinion, it is also intriguing to explore what Hillesum herself thought about philosophy, and to see if any evidence of her possible ‘philosophical practices’ can be found in her writing. I will try to address that issue in this article.

To illustrate the complexity of such an inquiry, I refer to the well-known metaphor described by Walter Benjamin in the first pages of his famous essay on Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften* (‘Elective Affinities’). Benjamin suggests an interesting distinction between the interests of philology and those of critique, and at the same time an inevitable and difficult connection between the two. He offers a vivid metaphor: Let us imagine a work of art, or a philosophical work, or your life, “as burning funeral pyre.” The philologist or commentator’s task is compared to that of the chemist, whose objects of analysis are simply “wood and ashes.” The critic, on the other hand, is compared to an