FOUNDATIONAL THOUGHTS IN JUDAISM

by

Andreas Simonsen

(translated from the Danish by Per Brask)

Translator's note:

Andreas Simonsen (1923-1991) was a Danish-Jewish thinker who published some twenty books in his lifetime, mostly in ethics and many of them explicating paradoxical phenomena in life that require a double view, seemingly contradictory terms necessitating each other. Niels Bohr had applied the term complementarity to the wave/particle phenomenon in physics. Simonsen learned a lot about Bohr's investigations from one of his collaborators, Oskar Klein, a cousin of Simonsen's[1] with whom Simonsen lodged while a refugee in Sweden from 1943 when the Germans began rounding up Danish Jews until his return to Denmark in 1945. Bohr's term is mainly applied in science, so Simonsen coined the term disconjuction to analogous occurrences in life. This sense of disconjunction also comes across in this book, his study of the fundamental thinking in Judaism; for example, in the manner in which he pays attention to two roles of God, as our father and as our Lord. These may seem as mutually exclusive roles, but Simonsen illustrates how both are necessary for the more complete view exhibited in the Jewish Bible. The same inextricable relationship between seemingly mutually exclusive concepts Simonsen discerns between a realistic understanding of the commandment to love our neighbor and an idealistic understanding, showing that each is necessary for a fuller life.

Andreas Simonsen was not a believer, though he reflected a lot on religion; his main work was entitled *Humanism and Christianity*, and his wife was reportedly a devout liberal Christian. Simonsen resigned his membership in the Synagogue in Copenhagen after the war, having declared himself years earlier as being unable to believe in a personal God. Out of solidarity with his fellow Jews, he did not want to resign until the

[1] Of Simonsen's mother.

war was over. He was, he said, a religious humanist, by which he meant that he was what we might call a secular humanist with a deep respect for and belief in the traditionally religious virtues of awe, humility and gratitude. Again, a disconjunction, this time of terms he thought were ruinous if not held together. Humanism would lead to arrogance over against the world if not tempered by those religious virtues, and religiosity ran the danger of become mere fantasy and feeling if not tempered by the realism and rationalism of humanism.

Foundational Thoughts in Judaism was first published in 1989 that is a couple of years before Simonsen's death and it was re-issued in 2001. The book was dedicated to "Marianne Olsen in gratitude for inspiration and friendship." Marianne Olsen is the executor of Simonsen's literary estate and is the president of the foundation that promotes his work.

I. On Monotheism

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6.4)

Most scholars believe that Deuteronomy, where these words appear, was not initially combined with the four previous books of the *Torah*. Originally it was part of a historical work that also included Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. This work is assumed to hail from the middle of the 6th Century BCE. That is, from the time of the Babylonian exile (587-539 BCE).

The reason Deuteronomy was subsequently added to the first four books of the *Torah*, that were also edited during the 6th Century, was that it just like the other four mainly proclaimed laws – in part the same ones, in part new ones; hence, its name Deuteronomy which means the second version of the laws (the name is made up of the Greek words deuteros, the second, and nomos, law). The resulting integration among the five books of Moses came to comprise the first and the holiest part of the Jewish Bible, under the name of *Torah*, commonly translated as "the Law." But this Hebrew word has a broader meaning. More generally, it means "teaching;" that is, the God given teaching of how the God given life should be lived. What the *Torah* presents is a totality of religious, moral and judicial subject matter.

That Deuteronomy at first was not connected with the previous books is felt not only in its repetitions of, for instance the Ten Commandments themselves, but is also glimpsed from some contradictions. The belief that the Lord punishes not only the sinner, but also his descendants can be found in Exodus (20.5 – in the Decalogue), as an expression of the apprehension, common among other archaic societies, that *kinship*

constitutes a totality. In Deuteronomy this belief is indeed found again in Chapter 5 (verse 9), where the Ten Commandments are repeated nearly word for word, which is natural in this especially tradition bound text. But 24.16 says, "… children [shall not] be put to death for parents." Here the notion of kinship as a totality is discarded for an emerging individualism. (See also 7.9 and on).

Moreover, in all the books in *Torah* what is before us comprises the definitive editing of materials that went back several centuries, in some instances quite likely all the way back to Moses, who by most scholars is recognized as a historical person living around 1200 BCE.

The passage that is our subject is found in Deuteronomy, Chapter 6; that is, in the chapter that follows the repetition of the Ten Commandments. While some of these – and many other precepts that are promulgated – are rules of law for Israelite society, and hence of judicial character, this is clearly not the case for the fundamental proclamation we are confronting here.

This passage has indeed attained a distinctive place in Judaism as a *profession of faith*. It stands as the support beam in the life of a faithful Jew. It begins and ends each of his days – and of his life. It is the first prayer he learns from his mother and (if possible) the last one he utters before his death. The Austrian-Jewish psychiatrist and thinker, Viktor Frankl, describes how it made a deep impression on him during his time in Auschwitz when so many Jews entered the gas chamber pronouncing, "Shema Yisrael" ("Hear, O Israel.") – together with Christian victims who went to their death with "Our Father" on their lips.

In the complete version the Shema is followed by five verses (5-9), and Chapter 11.13-21, as well as Numbers 15.37-41. The first of these verses contains the main commandment to love God with all one's heart. In the subsequent verses the Lord directs the people to obey the commandments and pledges that if they do so He will grant them a blessed life in the Promised Land. In particular, a number of ceremonies are prescribed in order for the people to keep the commandments in daily remembrance. Hence in verse 9, "inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates;" this precept Jews comply with by putting a small parchment with the first two sections of the Shema into a little capsule, a Mezuzah, which is attached to the right door post of their home.

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Let's now take a closer look at the cited passage. A modern non-Jewish person would naturally be puzzled by how it could have attained its most holy status. Does it really mean something *that* remarkable.

Indeed, it does, by its injunction of monotheism. But since for an eternity we have lived in a culture of monotheism, we find it easy to view monotheism as something not requiring closer consideration, and so we miss out on the possibility of rediscovering *the decisive apprehension it implies*, and the history making event it was when it was proclaimed for the first time.

When I say for the first time, I naturally do not dare to suggest anything about any original form that may historically be attributed to Moses. We cannot know what this first assertion of monotheism implied in the context of contemporary polytheistic religions, because its formulations in the *Torah* in all probability have been influenced by

conceptions of it in much later times, especially during the time of its final edit. That is, in the 6th Century BCE when monotheism had reached a mature form. Hence it is possible and probable that monotheism at first had the character of *monolatri*, that is, a form of religion which on one hand does not reject the *existence* of several gods, but on the other hand insists that the people in question must relate to a single god as theirs – must only *worship* a single god. (The designation "-latri" comes from the Greek "latreia," serving, cultivating). Presumably, one can trace an original monolatri in a statement such as, " You shall have no other gods beside Me." (Exodus, 20.3). Hence, I assume that the last word of our passage originally was interpreted as "our only God," and that only later this word was taken to mean "the only existing God" and yet later on "being in itself a unity."

The form of monotheism under consideration here is its mature expression, which Judaism since the definitive wording of the Shema has professed, "All the gods of the peoples are mere nothingness,/ but the Lord made the heavens" (Psalms 96.5. "Nothingness" is a literal rendering that to my mind is preferable to the authorized "idols.") and "Thus said the Lord:/ What wrong did your fathers find in Me/ That they abandoned Me/ And went after delusion and were deluded?" (Jeremiah 2.5) [Simonsen in accordance with the authorized Danish version of 1931 has "emptiness" for "delusion," and reads it as those gods being non-existent, and he has "empty" for "deluded" and reads it as perishing of the fathers]. It can be established with certainty that this pure form of monotheism was already presented in the oldest writings by the Prophets. Such is the case of Amos (8th Century BCE), when he considers Yahweh not only as belonging to Israel, rather as the god of all humanity. That is, as the only existent god, "To Me, O

Israelites, you are/ Just like the Ethiopians/ - declares the Lord./ True, I brought Israel up/ From the Land of Egypt,/ But also the Philistines from Caphtor/ And the Arameans from Kir." (Amos, 9.7) Those other peoples are placed side by side with Israel under God's care. Remember also that the Book of Job, the jewel of the *Tanakh* concerns a man who was not an Israelite. Job was from the land of Uz (south-east of the Dead Sea). This *universalism* (the belief in God as belonging to the whole world) testifies to a fully developed monotheism. So does the second typical trait of the Prophets' view of God that suggests the greatest possible *extrication from anthropomorphism*. That is, from those representations of God suggesting a human likeness, for example, as having a human-like appearance.

But what is so valuable in this monotheism? On the face of it seems that its advance over the surrounding polytheism and idolatry was merely *intellectual,* the liberation from primitive superstitious images of the divine. E.g., the belief that each of the powerful – life promoting and life threatening – natural forces (the sun and other heavenly bodies, the fertility of the fields and the animals, etc) was or held mighty beings whose image had to be worshipped. That is, they had to be sought, partly forced through certain rituals (magic), partly by propitiating sacrifices.

If monotheism merely had been an intellectual vanquishing of such imaginings it clearly would no longer hold anything particularly remarkable for us today. It would only stand as a remarkable feat from a historical perspective.

But the monotheism that arose with singular zeal and forcefulness against the prevailing forms of religion contained – or developed into containing – *ethical* values. We are talking about loadstars for attitudes towards life, ideas that could *not* – and never

will – lose their relevance, because each generation must yet again struggle in order to appropriate them, if only in some small way. In our own age especially it must be stated that these ideas to a large extent have been forgotten or repressed while at the same time, more than ever, they have become crucial.

The central aspect of this monotheism in its fully developed form was not simply that it was able to observe how the various powerful phenomena of nature manifested the one and only almighty power, but that it in addition recognized that humans too were subsumed under it and therefore unable to grasp it in any way, whether through understanding or influence, but had to relate to it with *humility*. And with *gratitude* towards this hidden giver of life, a gratitude that was to be expressed by obeying His revealed precepts, first and foremost the ethical ones, centering on the commandment to love one's neighbor, only secondarily the ceremonial ones. "For I desire goodness, not sacrifice;/ Obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings." (Hosea, 6.6). "To do what is right and just/ Is more desired by the Lord than sacrifice." (Proverbs, 21.3). "No, this is the fast I desire:/ To unlock fetters of wickedness,/ And untie the cords of the yoke/ To let the oppressed go free;/ To break off every yoke./ It is to share your bread with the hungry,/ And to take the wretched poor into your home;/ When you see the naked to clothe him,/ And not to ignore your own kin." (Isaiah, 58.6-7).

The question we must now consider is, how did the *theological* foundation of monotheism – the experience of the divine as one – lead to such a thoroughgoing *ethical* outlook? Or rather, what is the connection between its religious and its ethical intuitions? Because they were reciprocal, the new ethical understanding was just as determining for the religious understanding. Indeed, in reality there now existed – and this trait has been

kept as a characteristic of Judaism - a *totality of the religious and the ethical* (see further in Chapter VII), concepts that were later generally kept apart, unfortunately so much so – with a sharp division between theology and morality – that they lost their life blood or simply became perverted. Therefore we need to proceed from these two customary concepts in our investigation, our analysis (this Greek word which means untying a totality).

First and foremost there is a decisive connection between the experience of the divine as one and the recognition of *humanity as one*. Here is a break with an earlier understanding when a people saw themselves as the only real people – with the right gods (or in the case of monolatri, the right god) – while the inhabitants of neighboring lands were seen as beings of a lower order, with accompanying idolatry. The idea of God as the creator and lord of *all* humans naturally came to imply that all peoples have the same basic status, are of the same order and have the same worth. It is, thus, worth noticing that the Jewish story of creation tells of the creation of the first *human*, not of the first *Jew*, and proclaims that the human, that is, humans of all places and times are created in the image of God. In the Babylonian epos of creation, on the other hand, strangers to the tribe are called "scorpion-people," "fish-people," etc.

The utmost consequence of this universalism grows to imply not only a rejection of every form of discrimination and all aggressiveness, but also a positive exhortation toward friendly behavior and disposition between people – in the recognition of all people as sisters and brothers, "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?" (Malachi, 2.10).

Of course, I'm not claiming that *every* form of monotheism will point towards tolerance and love of neighbor. After all, it is impossible to overlook the numerous horrifying examples of how Islamic and Christian monotheism at times have assumed the form of ideological fanaticism with matching cruel violence. One only needs to think of Khomeini and on the infamous actions committed by crusaders and in particular by colonizers like Pizarro. Jewish religious fanaticism is also known, such as the disastrous example of Kahane's wing in today's Israel. But what I am addressing is the universalism that emerged in ancient Israel, which ever since has been the seed of all healthy forms of Judaism and Christianity. My only claim is that the ethical ideas of this universalism was in no way a separate, more or less accidentally added trait, but that it developed naturally in consort with the very idea of the unity of the divine.

This recognition of unity, in addition to the recognition of the unity of humanity, is also connected to the notion of *the human being as a unity* – in contradistinction to a dualistic view of the human, differentiating sharply between a valuable (possibly divine) soul and a worthless or bad body. We must be alert to the fact that the word "flesh" in the Jewish Bible is not used to describe the body as such, but it suggests the whole of the human being. It is used as a counter concept not to the soul but to God.

This assertion of connection between a monistic view of the human and monotheism is clearly expressed in the creation story. It proclaims that *everything* is created by God, thus also the whole of the human being, not only its soul.

But why do I speak about this monotheistic view of the human as a exceedingly valuable ethical realization and not merely as a more sensible psychological view? It is because the opposite view of humans has caused innumerable instances of harm with its

unnatural devaluation of our corporality. Judaism distinguishes itself by a healthy valuation of the pleasures of life in their sensual forms. In contradistinction to many other religions it is completely foreign to the degradation, or rather, the demonization of sensual pleasures. It is far from it to impoverish our god given lives by commanding unnecessary or unreasonable renunciations. Anti-sensual asceticism is foreign it to. Talmud even has this wonderful statement, "In the world to come each person will have to give an accounting on every permissible pleasure with which Hashem presented him during his lifetime and of which he did not partake." (Yerushalmi Kiddusin, 4, [after Danish version]) Thus Judaism stays clear of the three moral defects that inevitably like poisonous weeds shoot from every puritanical ground - because humans commonly are not able to follow through on difficult, meaningless renunciations - that is, bad conscience and censoriousness concerning one's own failings as well as those of others, and hypocritical double-morality.

We also find in the view of life expounded in the Jewish Bible a clear connection between monotheism and the understanding of *the good as one*, not as a series of separate duties or several particular virtues, but in one foundational attitude, manifested according to circumstances in honesty, courage, self-control, tolerance, helpfulness, empathy, etc., etc.

But doesn't Mosaic Law determine the good as obeying a long list of commandments? Yes, but in the *Torah* there is *also* a synthesis of these partly in the commandment to love one's neighbor (Leviticus, 19.18), partly in the commandment to love God (Deuteronomy, 6.5) – a synthesis that probably doesn't go all the way back to Moses's own time, but that was understood already by the 8th Century BCE, in Micah,

"He has told you, O man, what is good,/ And what the Lord requires of you;/ Only to do justice/ And to love goodness,/ And to walk modestly with God" (6.8)

This understanding of right behavior emanating from a single basic orientation implies first of all recognizing that *the moral qualities are inextricably connected* in such a way that with close inspection one could not really possess one of them without also possessing the others. This apprehension is like that of Socrates, when he showed that real courage presupposes level-headedness (or it becomes foolhardiness) - or vice versa, that level-headed behavior that is unable to change into daring in a different situation does not represent the virtue level-headedness but rather flaccid caution. In this way he torpedoed the common understanding of courage and level-headedness as two separate cardinal virtues. With this understanding of the unity of morality he also approached a form of monotheism. Behind his tradition-bound polytheistic ideas one finds as his own personal lifeblood a new monotheistic experience of god, seen clearly in his Apology. Athena and Ares, for example, were no longer two separate divine powers for him. Likewise, he no longer saw prudent level-headedness and powerful courage as separate virtues.

Secondly, the idea of the unity of right living means that *morality and the religious is recognized as a totality*, no longer seen as two separate realms. This understanding of right relationship to God and right relationship to the neighbor hanging indivisibly together – in the development of a single foundational intuition – is as mentioned an obvious central trait in Judaism. Here again it is reasonable to draw a parallel with Socrates's understanding who represents a similar breakthrough in Greek culture. In his dialogue with a priest (Euthyphro) he leads our attention to the recognition

that piety and righteousness, which were commonly regarded as two separate cardinal virtues, actually are connected very closely as presupposing one another. For Socrates as well as the Jewish Bible, the situation is that a new monotheism with its humility towards an incomprehensible giver of life has permeated attitudes to fellow humans with a new, elevated ethics. (And vice versa, a new experience of the wonder of every human and its value has inspired a new religiosity in the form of a humble and grateful monotheism).

In connection with this recognition of the unity of the good the question arise again. Is this of any *practical* consequence? Does it hold any essential value for *our* time? On the face of it, it seems as though it is of interest mainly *historically* or for *the philosophy of religion*. But a little reflection will reveal that such is decidedly not the case.

In so far as we realize that the good isn't simply a collection of laid-out proprieties, but that it consists in a fundamental turning towards right-mindedness that demands extrication from our ingrown narrow egocentrism, we will radically discover *the unreasonableness and unseemliness of pharisaical self-regard and censoriousness*. It is then no longer possible falsely and dangerously to divide people into those who are good and those who are bad, not even to dispatch the latter to later punishment in hell. It will be realized that no one is able to become good but also that no one is simply evil, that everyone has moments of goodness and for its development everyone is deeply dependent on circumstances, that is, on something not of one's own fault or on something undeserved.

This deeper understanding of the concept of the good warns most valuably *against any kind of absolutism*, against every attempt at an abstract definition, as though a

single formulation valid in *all* situations could serve as guide. Such absolutism can take many forms.

It may simply consist in elevating one particular virtue to a place of all importance, as goodness itself (for example, science inspired, merciless honesty. But neither does love tolerate becoming absolute. See chapters X and XI). Or it may be expressed in a fixed complex of a few virtues, such as the four cardinal virtues of the Greeks or Moral Rearmament's "four absolutes" [these are described by Andreas Simonsen in a letter to Marianne Olsen, dated April 4, 1989 as, "honesty, purity (sexually, so similar to chastity), altruism and ministering charity (that is a mentality of service). Of course, I can't see why it wouldn't be possible just as rightly or wrongly to establish any other list (with the exception of charity (love of neighbor))"]. Finally and especially in *our* time there is *ideological* absolutism, where total submission to a sharply delimited philosophical, religious or political idea is viewed as identical with rightness and goodness. This attitude could also be called *particularistic idealism* in so far as characteristically its adherents exclusively commit to an idea that is actually only relevant to one part of our existence. In this area of worldviews it is common to focus on a single aspect of our being as the essential, the fundamental, such as *the sex drive* (Freud), *the emotions* (the Romantics) or *the will* (often in protest against the opposite idea, determinism, that rejects the concept of will as an illusion), or *the intellect*, as is common in our time with its *determinism* and *science idolatry*.

Science idolatry, of course, isn't one of the forms of idolatry the monotheism of the Jewish Bible opposes. But we can reasonably assume that this is only so because science at that times was underdeveloped. It is decidedly in the spirit of Judaism's

monotheism that not only the intellect but all sides of a human being must be valued and used to form a unity, in as much the human was created as a unity, as a complete work from the hand of the single God. Right living must be based on all human resources, on thinking interplaying with our dynamic sides (drives, passions, emotions, will). It is no accident that the *greatest* scholars and researchers, also in the natural sciences, are remarkable not only intellectually, but also for uncommon passion and strength of will and an uncommonly rich inner life, with a fully retained childish excitement and sense of wonder and therefore they exhibit a deep religious humility (in contradiction to an intellectualistic triumphant imaginings that we eventually will achieve an in-depth understanding of existence, "solve the riddle of life"); just think of such people as Newton, Darwin or Bohr.

Science idolatry is thus inconsistent with Jewish monotheism just as any other particularism, any other worship of a chosen *part* of existence. All forms of particularism is simply *idolatry* – self made deification of a single element of the God given world's totality as the creation of a single creator.

It is true that the forms of idolatry that confronted ancient Israel were first and foremost the deification in neighboring lands of a certain tree or animal or heavenly bodies (already in the first chapter of the Bible we encounter a rejection of Babylonian). But when we now apply this view to our own time we find here a warning against a one-sided domination of a scientific worldview, one that describes and explains, at the cost of an ethical-religious worldview, one that evaluates and chooses. One-eyed scientism or any radically intellectualistic-rationalistic worldview is idolatry at the same level as – what is also current – an attitude that finds life's essential value in a maximum of

variegated sexual enjoyment. Indeed, both intellectual and sexual expressions lose their God-intended meaning by being emancipated from emotional life.

I have tried to suggest how the understanding of unity that is implied – or is approached – in the Jewish Bible's monotheism is brought forward in three points, in its view of humanity, of the human being and of the good. But another point remains, the deepest and the most problematical. The Prophets proclaim, by going to the uttermost consequence of monotheism, *the totality of good and evil*: "…there is none but Me./ I am the Lord and there is none else,/ I form light and create darkness,/ I make weal and woe -/ I the Lord do all these things." (Isaiah, 45.6,7).

How is this to be understood? In the first instance, naturally, to the effect that no separate evil power exists in the world, some equal devil placed next to God, as it is presumed in the ancient Persian religion that proposed a fundamental dualism.

Further, the words plainly mean that *everything* has its final cause in God. *Everything*, also those terrible events (such as natural catastrophes and horrible illnesses), that for us appear as evil, but that we in our insignificance cannot possibly grasp or evaluate. *Everything*, also the extent to which the ethical worldview and attitude to life is lit in an individual. The next verse speaks of the Lord as the one who sends down justice.

But when we consider the thought that human morality like everything else is dependent on God we confront a major difficulty because Judaism is permeated with the conviction that a human being not only has the duty but also *the ability* to act ethically – that is, we both can and must *choose between good and evil*. No other religion assumes

with such unshakable confidence that the human being has *the possibility* of choosing the good, that is, has *free will*.

In contradistinction the verses from Isaiah shows that Judaism just as unshakably holds on to mature monotheism's conviction that God is *the only* fundamental power in existence, the ultimate end behind *everything*, including the mind and behavior of human beings.

Here we confront *a confusion so confounding it cries to the heavens!* Yes, it literally cries to the heavens in so far as it, unlike the usual "earthly" confusions always will have to cry in futility to the heavens for clarification. Because *both* proclamations are irrefutably true. Both the one that ever appeals to us as beings able to choose, to will, and the one that maintains that it is not within our own power to choose pure unselfishness, just as we are unable to fall into great wretchedness and evil all by ourselves. (This last truth we must remember when dealing with a criminal, by as far as possible considering the unhappy situation lying behind the act, that "it is not his fault," and thus avoid the desire for revenge).

When the Jewish Bible presents both proclamations it is not because of incapable, illogical thinking but because of an honest openness to *an actual paradox in our life.* In this way, the permeating confidence in free will was not allowed in the scriptures to take the form of an *absolute* doctrine, as a theory of indeterminism, as has occurred in the history of philosophy. Again we observe a staying clear of absolutism, because the utter unfathomable character of existence as a work of God's was respected, elevated far above human understanding and thus the editors were not tempted to commit any high-handed,

violent trimming of reality for the sake of reaching a crystal clear understanding. (More on the Jewish Bible's maintaining this basic paradox follows in chapter III).

Having taken a look at ethical evil we have now, at its uttermost point, slipped into the other area of evil, those accidents people suffer through no fault of their own. We are confronted with the *problem of suffering*, the most profound of all problems. Theologians and philosophers call this the problem of theodicy, the word theodicy (from the Greek theos, god, and dike, justice) names an attempt to justify God in relation to horrible suffering in human life.

What answer does the Jewish Bible give to this? Nothing! Or, rather, it gives no answer in the sense that we desire it. Nowhere do we find a theodicy. What we find is *a rejection of the question* as absurd and improper, indeed, it is blasphemy. For what reason? Because the question implies a weakening *reverence and humility towards the Lord*, whose ways are inscrutable for humans who are but particles in His tremendous creation. (See first and foremost the Book of Job (more on this in Chapter VI)).

(It should be noted that the words reverence and humility express two sides of the same relationship. Reverence emphasizes God's unfathomable highness, whereas humility emphasizes the human's bottomless powerlessness).

Again the Biblical writers avoided proposing a simplified absolutism. Rigorous monotheism had to make room for *our twofold relationship with God*, because our fundamental experience of life was, in addition to thrilling awe, imbued with an ultimate sense of *joy*. Just as the first mentioned experience of life was expressed in the relationship to God as reverence and humility, so there arose from the fundamental joy in life a *love* for its giver – a love which took the form of *gratitude*, not only with regards to

the past and the present, but also concerning the future in *trust* - in spite of the fact that this trust related paradoxically to the agnosticism of reverence (its renunciation of cognition). Thus assurance was given that all the suffering that seems shockingly meaningless to humans after all has meaning, in so far as it was sent by God, whose all-powerfulness is not executed with despotic randomness, but in loving care. While reverence prohibited the formation of any imaginings or even concepts of God – they would inevitably be anthropomorphic – the affirmation of life did ascribe a quality to Him, the highest known to humans, love.

The relationship to God described in the Jewish Bible is then *twofold despite its permeating monotheism* out of respect for the fundamental paradox in our existence. It contains both an elevated reverence for God as *the Lord*, the one who is raised above all human thought, and simultaneously a solid trust in God as *the Father,* the loving giver and guide of our life. On one side we find humility, on the other love in the form of gratitude and trust.

From my point of view, it is important to be aware of this twofold relationship to God in Judaism when thinking about the main difference between Judaism and *Christianity*, that is, *their different views of Jesus*. Over against the Jewish notion of Jesus as one of humanity's noble figures and most inspiring preachers, the Christian faith propounds the divinity of Jesus. While this belief for Jews is a radical break with the monotheism, the support pillar of their religion, belief in the Christ is for Christians the very lifeblood of *their* religion and they see this as a decisive elevation over Judaism, but reject that it has been at the cost of monotheism.

Undeniably we are talking about an important dividing line. But is it actually so sharply drawn as it seems and as they both think? Is it possible to glimpse a point of contact between Judaism's gratitude and trust in God as the loving father and the Christian belief in a mediator who on one hand by his humanity really can be understood and felt as *loving* by us, but on the other by virtue of his divine nature is "son of" – that is, he is unfathomably identical with – the Lord, who in His highness is unapproachable for humans. (See John 10.30, "I and my Father are one.")

As I see it, the agreements between the two biblical religions run far deeper than their disagreements. In common Judaism and Christianity have monotheism, expressed as a paradoxical two sidedness, but grounded in reality, of gratitude/trust and reverence – arising from the fundamental experience of life as a gift and a wonder.

II. On Gratitude

"Bless the Lord, O my soul,/and do not forget all His bounties." (Psalms, 103.2)

The questions a modern reader of an old text automatically asks about *who wrote it* and *when* cannot be answered satisfactorily in the case of Psalms, because they held no interest for the people who gave the collection its final form (presumably in the 4th or the 3rd Centuries BCE). When they cited David as the author to many of the psalms this was not meant to be taken literally. The important thing was that David was seen as the founder of divine service in Jerusalem (though the temple wasn't built until Salomon). In the same way the Torah is ascribed to Moses in order to express that the Law comprised a *totality* beginning with God's revelation to Moses on Sinai.

Research has reached the conclusion that Psalms were written at many different times, most of them during the time of Kings (between 1000 and 587 BCE). So some of them could actually have come from David.

With regards to *type* the psalms are also quite varied. Common for the majority of them is that they were intended for the service in the Temple. Some are psalms of thanksgiving in response to a prayer granted, others are psalms of lament or of penance, still others are psalms of praise and a special type is comprised of coronation psalms, used for a new king.

The psalm cited above belongs, as the words indicate, among the psalms of praise. A peculiarity of these is that the usual do not *address* God, but that they are *about* him.

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Stated in short and unembellished prose one could say that the content of the cited words is an urgent exhortation to an *overall sense of gratitude towards God*.

The precondition for having such a feeling and attitude was of course a fundamental experience of *life as a boon*. Indeed, a life-affirming disposition characterizes the Jewish Bible (with a slight caveat concerning the most recent sections).

But such a life-affirming disposition is only a necessary but not at all a sufficient precondition for this prescribed gratitude. The crucial point is whether life is also viewed as *a gift*. This was exactly the view that was taken as the obvious foundation supporting all thinking in ancient Israel, and it has always been Judaism's natural point of origin.

But having recognized as a matter of course that life was a gift, why the *exhortation* to gratitude which after all must be the natural reaction on receiving a gift? Because human beings *forget*. The exhortation is thus aimed at this forgetfulness.

It is worth taking a closer look at this forgetfulness even though we are very familiar with it in our relations with one another – or, rather, because we don't think about it very much in that case either. What we forget is either that a boon is a gift, or even that there was a boon.

The major theme of this radical form of forgetfulness is articulated in the subsequent verses of the psalm. When it is pointed out the Lord *heals diseases* we are confronting a condition which is, at once, one of life's greatest boons and one that most often remains unnoticed (unnoticed as a boon and even more so as a gift). How aware are we of the inconceivably great boon it is that the body to a large extent is able to heal itself – that most wounds and broken bones can heal and that many even apparently hopeless illnesses "pass?" Of course, those who have just undergone such an experience

are filled with this awareness. But what about just a short time later? And don't we tend to think much less about this phenomenon than on those – more rare – incidents when the body fails even with the help of medical knowledge? The immediate answer is that this is completely natural because in those cases we are talking about inconceivable tragedies. Yes, it is undeniably a natural response, but do we have to forget so extensively the just as inconceivable blessings?

What matters when the body *regains* its health matters to a much greater extent when it *possesses* it – when feeling lifted like an eagle by some youthful power, as in the fifth verse of the psalm, "He satisfies you with good things in the prime of life/ so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Our forgetfulness is indeed a fundamental evil – our inattention not only for the gift but for the boon itself. When we for a long time have enjoyed good health in body and mind we rarely give it a second thought whether daily or weekly; we view it as a matter of course – because it has become normal. In other words, the positive *quantitative* fact that we frequently experience healthiness, more often than its opposite, makes us ignore the *qualitative* boon! Only when we lose our mobility do we realize how wonderful it was to be able to move according to our wishes. Only when we fee pain do we become aware what a boon it is when we experience a painless performance of all the body's complicated processes. And only when we have to drag ourselves along, debilitated by exhaustion or burnt out by depression, we do arrive at a clear recognition of how blessed it is to have the strength for activities and openness to impressions.

Such inattentiveness regarding boons could be viewed as *unconcern*. The reason is the neurophysiological fact that impressions that are frequently repeated or that last long have decreasing effect. In as far as this mechanism is felt in regards to boons we become blunted by what is habitual, we grow unconcerned – the more so if one is coddled with boons. Against this mechanism stands, in so far as the human is not only a mechanism, a spiritual factor that is able to intervene and correct. The ability of reflection the human has in contradistinction to all other creatures. It is towards reflection that the psalm aims its appeal.

Of course, our inattentiveness and forgetfulness is only *partly* so, because though we may be aware of the boon, we are not aware of it as a gift. There may be two reasons for that.

Firstly, again, unconcern. We are unconcerned when the joy of the sunlight shinning through light green beech leaves never reaches deeply enough to transform into gratitude. And we are unconcerned when we never think of life as a wonderful gift, "It was You who created my kidneys;/ You fashioned me in my mother's womb.// I praise You,/ for I m awesomely, wondrously made;/ Your work is wonderful;/ I know it well." (Psalms, 139.13 and 14).

Secondly, often there is *overweening self-regard* at work. Sometimes this is because of one's trust in cognitive abilities. When, for instance, a rainbow doesn't cause the full thrill of gratitude it could be because we imagine that we have understood that its colorfulness is "merely" a function of various wavelengths. Sometimes we have an overweening sense of human ability. Many healthy specimens who at least are aware that their health is a great boon are far from recognizing it as a gift. They are proud

rather than grateful, because they imagine that it is the natural result of their own efforts, their enormous cleverness and self-discipline regarding how they live (exercise, food, etc.)

The Jewish Bible repeatedly warns against this overweening attitude. Thus in Deuteronomy concerning the Lord's promise to lead Israel "into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey" (8.7 and 8). "When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Take care lest you forget the Lord your God (…) [Beware lest] you say to yourselves, "My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me." Remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you the power to get wealth …)" (8.10,11,17,18). That the Lord has chosen Israel for his special care must not lead the people to pride, as though the reason lay with some merit of theirs. That they were chosen must be seen as pure mercy and therefore calls on gratitude and its accompanying sense of duty.

It is precisely this understanding of human powerlessness in its central, ethical form that is the mainspring of praise in our psalm. That is, the praise of the Lord as mercifully forgiving – by granting us life over again every day despite our iniquity. "The Lord is compassionate and gracious,/ slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love./ He will not contend forever,/ or nurse His anger for all time./ He has not dealt with us according to our sins,/ nor has he requited us according to our iniquities." (Psalms, 103. 8-10).

Here reflection has led to deep gratitude for life as a gift. Here is awareness of the contrast between life's splendor and *our being not only underserving but our wretched failures.*

When the psalm now so urgently exhorts us to gratitude we must try to become absolutely clear about what is the important difference between mere *joy* of life as a nice *boon* and *gratitude* for life as a wonderful *gift*. Why does the psalm warn us so seriously against forgetting the giver.

As mentioned in chapter one, it is a main point in Jewish monotheism and its corresponding attitude towards life that the different "parts" of the human must be recognized as belonging to a unity, a totality, and that therefore they all need to be developed. This view is clearly and strongly stated in the fundamental commandment concerning God, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." It doesn't say, "with deep feeling," or, "with all your thought," or, "with you entire will," but with these three mental resources as one.

This implies that the attitude towards life isn't only about joy, which is after all merely a feeling or a mood, but also about gratitude, which *mobilizes all three mental powers, feeling, thinking and will*.

Thinking and will? Yes. This is the peculiar thing about gratitude, also in our relations with others. This is what necessitates the warning against forgetfulness. Transformed into a positive expression we are dealing with an exhortation to *thoughtfulness,* so that a boon is recognized both as a gift and is kept in memory, and as an *effort of will* that is needed in order to remember the kindness and to express gratitude for it.

Gratitude only enters when a feeling of joy is *deepened and held fast* by thinking and will. Most people over twenty have probably experienced, when thinking back on a happy event, that one wonders at and reproaches oneself for not having been quite *aware* of one's happiness at the time, of how little one recognized it as remarkable in comparison with the fates of so many other people, not to mention the comparative effort one put into it. That is, how little one recognized it as a privilege and a gift. And even when we really have paid attention to what we have been given, we usually *forget* it again, either because it continued for a long time or because it was replaced by *difficult* experiences. When these tendencies to lethargy and forgetfulness - hardened tendencies we all have – are allowed to evolve without intervention, there will be no ground for the development of gratitude. This must be purposefully cultivated, with strengths of thought and will.

It should now be clear why the psalm exhorts us so intensely, that is, why it presupposes such *strong tendencies towards failure* with regards to its prescribed gratitude.

But why does it give *such importance* to gratitude? Indeed, it gives it a superlative standing that shines through innumerable places in the Jewish Bible. Gratitude is (as mentioned at the end of chapter one) nothing less than the cornerstone of Judaism's relationship with God. In human addresses to God the emphasis is placed on the past, as *thanksgiving* for the good that *has been* given, rather than on the *prayers*, the pleadings for a boon *wished for*. The Talmud says, "…and even should prayer be abolished, that portion thereof which comes under Praises will not be abolished."

(Leviticus Rabbah 9 [after Danish version]). We must seek clarity as to why Judaism sees gratitude as the main issue in the proper relationship of humans to God.

An initial response must be to reject the issue as unreasonable. The fundamental aspects of a relationship to God and an attitude to life *cannot be grounded*, it cannot even be deduced from a background. The person who in the end experiences life as valuable or even beautiful cannot explain this convincingly to someone who has concluded that life is miserable.

It is possible, though, when attempting to understand Jewish religious gratitude - to understand it as the new breakthrough that it was – by reference to a foundational experience, in which was found a mighty and steady *confirmation* of it. Namely the experience that this and this alone was able to create sunshine, make life flourish – that this made possible the right and happy development of our lives, which first and foremost means our life with other people. In short, religious gratitude proved itself to be *the only unshakable support beam for ethics*.

This was shown when *expressing* gratitude. Already the earliest Prophets (8th Century BCE) recognized that sacrifices were an insufficient form of expression. They had already vanquished anthropomorphism and realized that God, unlike humans, had no use of leg of lamb or other presents. But since gratitude could not be expressed directly to the giver of gifts, to the Creator, how then? *By indirect means, that is, towards one's fellow beings.* By obedience to the commandments the Lord had given in regards to one's fellows.

This is clear already in the formulation of the Decalogue. The basis for the moral commandments is the prior religious commandments the foundation stone of which is the

introductory statement, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage” (Exodus, 20.2). The commandment to obey the moral commandments is grounded in *gratitude to God* as the one who gave life to the people (that is, life worth living, a life of the free).

Religious proclamations and commandments, including numerous prescribed ceremonies, took aim first and foremost at *holding humans fast* to gratitude, partly by prescribed demonstration of this to the Lord (for instance, by keeping Shabbat), partly and especially by constant reminders to keep the ethical commandments; phylacteries and mezuzah were meant to counteract the aforementioned forgetfulness.

Obedience in this case is not one demanded by a despot. Instead, it is one claimed by a benefactor – as a self-evident obligation undertaken out of gratitude.

And the content of this demanding obedience was likewise utterly logical. The love that was received from the Lord was to be handed on to one’s fellows. *Gratitude to God had to be transferred into love of neighbor*. “Love God in the people He created.” (Midrash Sifre).

How such transference can happen we know from *human relationships*. When we have to deal with a person who by his behavior or at first impression provokes our dislike we are confronted by the beneficial possibility that we must remember – again it is about *remembering* – how often we have received a large measure of joy from other people (not only by their deeds but by the light and beauty of their personality), a measure of joy far greater than we have deserved, than we could have expected, even understood – and far greater than we were able to reciprocate. Most of us have from time to time experienced the blessing of the sunshine that can stream from a few favored people. The unsatisfied

need to reciprocate will then receive the happy opportunity of *transforming* into tolerance and pleasantness when confronted with ill-favored people one meets.

In the same way, Judaism's religiosity of gratitude means gratitude for life's gifts, that only imperfectly can be expressed to their giver, is to be communicated to one's fellows, partly in steadfast gratitude towards those from whom one has received a lot, partly in love or pleasantness towards those one meets who are especially in need thereof.

The described religiosity of gratitude is also found, in newer thinking, to be the mainstay of the other biblical religion, *Christianity*. It is, for example, the central idea in Luther that love of neighbor is not a means for us to obtain God's love, but rather that it is God's love which is the foundational reality, which, when we become aware of it in full gratitude, will stoke embers of love of neighbor in our otherwise helpless selfishness. Hence, the drive behind ethics ought not be the *need for security*; the selfish desire that God *in future* will be benevolent *towards one personally*. The drive must be *gratitude* for *having already experienced* God's love for *humanity* as this was realized in the gift of life and especially in the merciful ever new granting of this despite our iniquity.

III On Humility Regarding Our Successes

"*Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it.*" (Psalms 127.1)

If you have the impression that Judaism, in contradistinction to most other religions, displays *a wide-ranging kinship with humanism*, you have grasped a significant truth. But over against this stands another truth, seemingly contradictory: Judaism sees humans not only a created by but as in every respect dependent on the Lord, the only source of being and becoming. In other words, alongside its humanism stands – paradoxically – *a fundamental humility*.

It is this latter issue that informs my main subject now. But as this, despite the seeming contradiction, is inseparably connected with the humanistic aspect of Judaism, I wish to begin by addressing this issue.

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Humans are according to Judaism endowed with nothing less than *glory*. Alone among all living things they were created in God's image, "And God created man in His image, in the image of God he created him, male and female He created them." (Genesis 1.27). Certainly this does not imply that humans are fundamentally noble, much less divine. Only a few pages later (in 8.21) we read the Lord's words to the effect that, "the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth."

Still it remains a fact that having been created in God's image is of decisive importance. It means that humans at the very least were *created free of sin* – and consequently are always born free of sin, because in Jewish interpretation being created in the image of God was not something lost in the Fall. A passage from the Talmud that is also used in morning prayers states, "My God, the soul you have placed within me is

pure." (Berachot 60b). That humans were created in God's image means rather that they take part in God's creative power with the aim that they work toward their own completion. Humans were granted effective knowledge of being created by God and of having a God-given purpose, "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to him that he was created in the image." (Pirkei Avot, III, 14). When humans were granted the ability to create and a rock solid orientation towards value, they became, so to speak, God's partners. This hallmark meant that, in contradistinction to all other creatures, humans were given the option of a relationship with God. (See further in Chapter VII).

That the Israelites despite their reverence felt worthy of being God's partners is notably evidenced in the conversation, or better, the negotiation Abraham has with the Lord concerning the punishment of Sodom. (Genesis 18.23-33). At first he submits that there possibly are fifty innocents in the city, "will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? […] Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" When the Lord promises in that case to forgive, Abraham hazards, "Here I venture to speak, my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. What if the fifty innocents should lack five? Will you destroy the whole city for want of the five?" Note his cunning. He doesn't say, "even if there are forty-five innocents," but "because of a deficit of only five!" And in what follows Abraham succeeds gradually to the effect that God will spare Sodom if there are only ten innocents. What is going on here? Is Abraham really able to bargain with – *the Lord*? Yes, he is because the argument is about justice and love which he has learned from the Lord because he was created in his image. By manifesting righteousness and mercy Abraham feels himself as God's

interlocutor and coworker and he is acknowledged as such. Certainly he speaks with reverence and humility, but at the same time with proud frankness. See also Numbers 16.22 when Moses and Aaron call out to the Lord, "When one man sins, will You be wrathful with the whole community?"

That humans have been created in God's image implies, as mentioned, that they have been outfitted with an ability to create, an ability to develop themselves in accordance with God's purpose. It is, thus, a fundamental axiom of Judaism that humans are *capable of choosing*; that is, they possess *will*. Moses ends the proclamations of God's commandments with these words, "I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life […]." (Deuteronomy 30.19). There's no room here for the strained determinism of later times, the philosophical notion that human choice, human will, is an illusion because we in reality are determined by causes in every respect just as the courses of the planets and that therefore we are solely gears in the great machinery of the universe. Against this we find in Judaism an elementary conviction that grows healthily from the *totality* of human existence, and not one-sidedly from the perspective of intellectual probing (with its inherent tendency towards degeneration). And this ability, in the very least the ability to pursue goodness, is noticeably granted to *all* humans, "'Sovereign of the universe, what shall be the fate of this drop? Shall it produce a strong man or a weak man, a wise man or a fool, a rich man or a poor man?' Whereas 'wicked man' or 'righteous man' he does not mention […] Everything is in the hands of heaven except the fear of God […]." (Niddah 16b). *No one is born with moral handicaps*; no one can avoid responsibility for a defect of character by maintaining that it is congenital – whether inherited from parents of nor due to the constellation of the stars

at the time of birth. The Jewish Bible abhors Babylonian astrology, not only because it is false but in recognizing its danger – which is detrimental to a sense of moral responsibility and will. For that reason it is stated with sharp satire in the Talmud that, "The Torah is not in heaven, nor with those who occupy their time in studying heavenly bodies." (Deuteronomy Rabbah 8).

How firm the conviction that all humans along with life are granted the possibility of making their lives *succeed* in this important respect is made clear in a statement by the famous Jewish philosopher of religion, Maimonides (12th Century CE), "Each person is fit to be righteous like Moses, our teacher, or wicked, like Jeroboam. […] This principle is a fundamental concept and a pillar on which rests the totality of the Torah and the mitzvoth […]" (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah, Chapter 5).

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Yes, humans should acknowledge their glory, but equally they should recognize their *insignificance*. This is repeatedly and strongly emphasized because humans due to self-centeredness have difficulties accepting it and especially with remembering it.

This forgetfulness about being created in God's image and being God-dependent is illustrated in the chapters right after the creation story with *two distinctive examples*. When Adam and Eve misappropriates the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, they do not do so from some noble desire for ethical insight. One might be led to such a reading when told that the fruit provides knowledge of "good and evil," but this expression means "everything." In other words, Adam and Eve pursue becoming all-knowing – becoming like God.

The other example of how humans pursue equality with God, is when building the Tower of Babel. “Come let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky […].” (Genesis 11.4). Noteworthy is the subsequent story of how the Lord counters and crushes such arrogance by actually splitting the language of the builders, making them unable to understand each other and to collaborate. Here is taught the truth that arrogance towards God leads to the destruction of relations with one’s neighbor and hence to defeat and despair. When an ego inflates in the conceited belief in and will to its own power of divinity it will necessary lead to a perverted relationship to others, and blindness to the obligations and happiness located there. As humble love of God withers, so does love of neighbor.

It is this humility that is enjoined in the line from Psalms that heads this chapter, that a successful result of the builder’s work *can only be achieved with the help of the Lord*. This help can also enable the weak, doubting person to do great things. When Moses is chosen as God’s messenger, he objects despondently that he lacks sufficient eloquence. But he is told, “Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? (Exodus 4.11). Humans must understand and remember that all their abilities – their strength, the ability to think, etc – in the end come from God, just as life itself does. There are situations when we get the opportunity to recognize this. For example, when we have a great idea, especially when a problem we have worked on for a long time suddenly, in a flash, is solved (perhaps in the first waking moment of a morning). When that kind of experience arises in a great and wonderous fashion we call it an inspiration or an intuition. The person granted such an experience will feel a deep sense of humility (unless he is so foolish that instead he is prompted to

arrogance). It is a characteristic of the greatest artists, thinkers and researchers that they have been endowed with a fundamental humility.

While Judaism's view of life, as mentioned, in many respects can be called humanistic, here is the point at which it distances itself sharply from humanism. Or, rather, it distances itself from the kind of humanism that is often referred to by the term, the kind that with a victor's gleam in the eye proclaims that, "you make your own luck." But in contradistinction to this kind, there is also a deeper, often Biblically inspired humanism that recognizes the firm limits to the validity of the above motto. In the same manner as the line from Psalms heading this chapter, Ludvig Holberg, on of the greatest examples of this religious humanism, stresses humanity's dependence on God in one of his epigrams,

"Fool are you to pride yourself on powers of intellect and body
Those powers are the work of heaven, their credit never yours
Always credit belongs with the Creator, never with the created
All your abilities are gifts – you obtained nothing on your own."

How *distant* Judaism (in its best form) is from belief in *deservedness* – a belief that humans are able to justify themselves before God, make themselves *deserving* of His blessings – is clear in this morning prayer, "Master of all the worlds, not of our own righteousness do we cast our supplications before You, but because of your great mercy. Who are we? What is our life? What is our kindness? What is our righteousness? What is our salvation? What is our strength? What is our might? What can we say before you, Lord our God and God of our fathers?" (L'Olam Yehei Adam).

See also Proverbs in which wisdom is praised, but yet, "No wisdom, no prudence, and no counsel can prevail against the Lord." (21.30). And, "If you see a man who thinks himself wise, there is more hope for a dullard than him;" but still, "he who trusts his own

instinct is a dullard. But he who lives by wisdom shall escape." (28.26). (This reveals a double attitude that is completely in synch with that of Socrates).

It is apropos to note that the quality the Jewish Bible especially highlights in its main character, Moses, is humility, and not – as could have been expected – triumphant greatness, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth." (Numbers 12.3)

But *how is this humility consistent with the aforementioned frankness?* How can the Jewish Bible on the one hand proclaim the glory of humans and on the other their insignificance? Isn't this a contradiction?

No, it merely bespeaks the paradox of the human condition which on one hand places humans among animals with their associated primitive egotistical drives, and on the other as unique spiritual beings, with the capacity to pursue truth, goodness and beauty – and the opportunity for a relationship with God. On one hand humans are like dust, not only in relation to God but in relation to the greatness of His creation; on the other they hold a special position – by the fact that they alone were created in the Creator's image. This singular but in the end non-contradictory doubleness is expressed in Psalm 8.4-7, "When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars You set in place, what is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him, that You have made him little less than divine and adorned him with glory and majesty, You have made him master of Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet."

So far I have spoken in general terms about the notion of humility, its implication of insignificance. But it also contains a special aspect that requires particular mention,

because it reveals a problematic tension regarding what was discussed in the previous section (about the glory of humans), namely that Judaism assumes as obvious that humans are capable of choosing the good; that is, they possess a fundamental ability. Over against this primary conviction of free will the notion of humility sounds a loud memento: All capabilities rest with God, the All-powerful; human will can effect nothing unless God gives it wings. In philosophical terms – and therefore misleading (see below) – *humility implies determinism* (the rejection that humans possess free will).

One of the clearest examples of humans holding in a position of powerless dependence on God in a decisive aspect, in ethics, we find in Exodus's description of Pharaoh's relation to the Israelites who want to leave Egypt. Exodus 9.12 says, "But the Lord stiffened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not heed them," corresponding to Exodus 7.3 when the Lord told Moses of His decision, " But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt." These statements clarify that Pharaoh's hard rejection is not seen as a result of his own free will. It is, rather, part of the Lord's plan to free the Israelites through impressive wonders, such as the ten plagues. The psychological point of this process seems to be that Pharaoh who had already acted unmercifully and had a hard heard was determined by these in this new situation also. There is thus a recognition that a person believing himself to be choosing freely is in fact determined by his previous actions that have tainted mind with overpowering mechanisms, "The wicked man will be trapped in his iniquities; he will be caught up in the ropes of his sin." (Proverbs 5.22). Every single bad act imperceptibly weakens the soul, both will and mind, "[…] if a person commits a transgression and repeats it, he will come to regard it as permitted […]" (Mishna Yomit 8)

(That previous behavior for *everyone* is recognized as transgressive, determined by an overpowering general tendency to egotism, will be discussed in the next chapter).

Still, the story of Pharaoh cannot be taken as evidence of true determinism, with a consist deterministic view of human nature. The story also bespeaks, without regard for logic, a breakthrough of the opposite view, that humans after all possess in every action some measure of free will and therefore moral responsibility.

Exodus 7.13 states, in literal translation, "But Pharaoh's heart was (or, turned out to be) stiff and he did not heed them," which Bent Melchior translates as, "Then Pharaoh *stiffened his heart*." That is, Pharaoh himself causes the action, not the Lord. In Melchior's translation Pharaoh's refusal is not viewed as determined, but as a result of his own free will and therefore deserving of punishment. (This particular contradiction cannot be seen in the authorized [Danish] translation which perhaps in an attempt at logical consistency erases it by translating 7.13 incorrectly as,
"Yet Pharaoh's heart stiffened[…]"). [Translator's note: in the Danish this differences is sharper, though Simonsen's point also in translation into English is clear enough; and made more so by referring to the King James Version in which 7.13 appears as, "And he hardened Pharaoh's heart," which directly puts the agency on the Lord].

A solution to the conflict between the humility of determinism and zealous ethical will and responsibility is attempted in various contexts – but by no means everywhere (see chapter IV) – by refined by finally unsupportable claims that human morality and piety in contradistinction to all other aspect are not dependent on God, free of His omnipotence, "Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except the fear of Heaven." (Berachot 33b). That is, while (as already mentioned) intelligence and a strong

constitution are goods we cannot obtain by ourselves, God has left our relationship to the divine to our own choosing. "Thus said the Lord: Let not the wise man [i.e. the intellectual as supposed to the one of life wisedom who is mentioned later on] glory in his wisdom; let not the strong man glory in his strength; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But only in this should one glory: In his earnest devotion to Me [which in the Danish reads as, "In his ability to know Me"]. (Jeremiah 9.22 and 23).

Thus, Judaism does not really solve the philosophical problem of free will. For the perfectly good reason that there is no solution. Additionally, Judaism is not concerned with a psychological-philosophical problem but with universal concerns (theological concerns, if you will) regarding the relationship between God and humans, between God's omnipotence and human capacity, albeit limited capacity. As discussed in chapter I, it is a central feature of Judaism that it derives its view of life from the *totality* of human being, not merely from the intellect or from the emotions, but from both aspects. That is, despite, for a religion, its remarkable intellectual content we are confronted not with a philosophy but a wisdom of life; and with it the understanding that the problem of free will is just as unsolvable as the entire problem of what the human soul is, *what life is*. Better than to claim that Judaism endorses both determinism and indeterminism would be to avoid these terms of art from philosophy.

Comparing how free will is treated in *Christianity* one notices that the problem only rarely has been recognized as unsolvable and that different Christian teachers and denominations have taken up different positions that often have been defended with great zealousness and pugnaciousness. Augustine (ca. 400 CE) denied freedom of will over against the slightly older Pelagius. He was, of course, accused of heresy at church

meetings, but during the Middle Ages his view gained traction with the Catholic teaching of salvation through deeds. This teaching was rejected by Protestants who denied human will and endeavor. Luther answered Erasmus of Rotterdam's, "On Free Will," with a sharp rebuttal, "On the Enslaved Will," and Calvin even maintained that the entire life cycle of a person, including behavior, salvation or damnation, was pre-ordained by God, who being all-knowing had to know the future.

It should be mentioned that while most liberal theologians during the past century have tended towards an overweening humanism, forgetful of the Bible's teachings of humility, after WWI had undermined this cultural optimism, the pendulum swung to its diametrically opposed position, as Karl Barth, taking his point of departure in "The Epistle to the Romans," insisted on human powerlessness.

As examples of the not overwhelming number of Christian teachers who have recognized that the problem of free will is unsolvable via logical doctrine, and that we must maintain our ethical responsibility and its associated possibility of choice *simultaneously with* recognizing our dependence on God, I will first mention Erasmus of Rotterdam. In his work "On Free Will," it is not only his aim to stand for a humanistic trust in human endeavor. Rather, he maintains Christian humility alongside humanism by emphatically adding that nothing can succeed for humans without God's grace. (See also the hymn, "All good gifts around us are sent from Heav'n above" (Original Trinity Hymnal # 614) as the Christian parallel to the psalm heading this chapter).

A similar understanding of how necessarily and decisively harnessed are humanism and humility, we find in one of our greatest Christian teachers, Morten Pontoppidan (1851-1931).

With regards to the problem of free will, these forms of Christianity may then be said to be in agreement with Judaism.

IV On Humility as Recognition of Transgressions

"Have mercy upon me, O God, as befits Your faithfulness, in keeping with Your abundant compassion, blot out my transgressions." (Psalms 51.3)

This – and many other – desperate cries for forgiveness is clear evidence that alongside its steadfast humanism the Jewish Bible contains a deep recognition of transgression.

Its depth rests on the fact that all rationalizations attempting to ameliorate or flatten this recognition have been see through as false.

First of all, due to the high esteem of Torah study, it could be tempting to imagine that diligent and discerning application would secure God's acceptance or at the very least a significant credit against the debit of one's transgressions. But there are firm warnings against the temptation of this kind of thinking, as these three quotes from Talmud testify, "The essential thing is not study, but deed." (Pirkei Avot 1.17); "He who possesses great learning but is without deeds of loving-kindness does not please the Lord." (Avodah Zarah 17b); "One whose wisdom is greater than his deeds, what is he comparable to? To a tree with many branches and few roots. Comes a storm and uproots it, and turns it on its face." (Pirkei Avot 3.17).

Second was the always obvious error that the avoidance of certain transgressions is equal to being free of sin, a very easy mistake in a culture where God's will was written down in concrete commands, first and foremost in the Decalogue. Several places in the Jewish Bible and in the Talmud provide clarity that, *being free of sin is in no way simply a question of committing or avoiding certain acts but it is also tied to their underlying motivations* (insofar as the ethical worth of an act loses its value to the degree

that it is selfishly motivated, for example, by fear of punishment, whether divine or human, or by vanity).

Tentative attempts at such an *ethics of character* are already detectable in the Decalogue. If these were merely laws, they would only have addressed actions; but they also contain commandments regarding feelings, attitudes; namely concerning reverence of God and respect of parents, as well as the final commandment against *coveting* the neighbor's property. That is, not merely against *appropriating* it (theft has already been prohibited in a previous commandment). With regards to commanded acts of kindness toward the poor, it is further enjoined that these should not only be done but that they should be done gladly and willingly, "[…] do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. […] Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so […]." (Deuteronomy 17.7 and 10).

Generally it is taught that love of neighbor is to be realized not as a sour duty, but as something in which is found joy, something one loves to do (see the previously quoted words of Micah).

Insofar as the ethical aspect was so deeply understood – the ethics of character had only to a limited extent substituted primitive moral judgment based on acts alone – it was naturally also recognized that *no human, even approximately, can ever be free of sin before God* who sees through private thoughts, "[…] there is no man who does not sin […]" (Solomon says in I Kings 8.46). "Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for before You no creature is in the right." (Psalms 143.2). "Most devious is the heart; it is perverse – who can fathom it? I the Lord probe the heart, search the mind –" (Jeremiah 17.9). Goodness does not consist in faithfulness to rules but in knowledge of the heart.

As the Psalm heading this chapter states, "Indeed You desire truth about what is hidden [trans: in the Danish this reads as, "… truth about the secrets of the heart."]; teach me wisdom about secret things" [trans: in the Danish this reads as "teach me wisdom about the depths of the heart."].

In a third way the depth of the ethical teachings must have worked as a correction to tempting imaginings that is was possible to be guilty of minor transgressions with a reasonable expectation of forgiveness. I'm referring to the then as ever general thought that sinfulness consists in mistakes made in relation to one's *fellows* and that those, as long as you avoid more pernicious ones, will be redeemed or forgiven. Against this Scripture sets a thorough and unshakeable conception of sin, namely that *sinful is every egocentric tendency* as an apostasy, disobedience against the God-given purpose of the God-given life – that one is sinning against *the Creator* every time one distances oneself from one's fellows. It is this understanding that is trumpeted in our quoted Psalm, "Against You alone have I sinned." (Psalms 51.6).

Yet there was the possibility – and this is the fourth way of avoiding acknowledgement of sin – that one's relationship with God could be used to be found guilt free by referring to God as all-powerful, implying that God is the cause of all things and therefore also one's transgressions. But the "deterministic" arguments Judaism derives from God's all-powerfulness and humans' dependence on God (see Chapter III) never take this form. That is, they never lead to the undermining of the concepts of ethics, responsibility or sin. They are instituted only regarding what *succeeds* for humans, not regarding what *fails*. Thus, *humans must assume responsibility for their own sinfulness,* in accordance with the words from Talmud (cited in Chapter III) that there is

one thing withheld from God's power, i.e. human fear of God. It is part of our sinfulness – in the form of self-satisfaction and self-acquittal – that we often place our guilt onto God, "A man's folly subverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord." (Proverbs, 19.3).

Thus were rejected all the various attempts at thinking one's way to weakening or revoking the acknowledgement of one's sins. At several points in the Jewish Bible the pain of human sinfulness is expressed, "Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity and purify me of my sin; for I recognize my transgressions and I am ever conscious of my sin." (Psalms 51.4). "Hide Your face from my sins; blot out all my iniquities. Fashion a pure heart for me, O God, create in me a steadfast spirit. Do not cast me out of Your presence, or take Your holy spirit away from me." (Psalms 51.11-13). "Out of the depths I call You, O Lord. O Lord, listen to my cry; let Your ears be attentive to my plea for mercy. If You keep account of sins, O Lord, Lord who will survive?" (Psalms 130.1-3). Not even someone like Moses or David. It is characteristic that even Moses and David, both of whom might have been expected to glow as pure, ideal figures in Israel's historiography, are actually described as tainted by sin. Moses wavered in his trust of the Lord at a decisive moment and was therefore punished by not being allowed to lead the people into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20.1-13). And regarding David's transgression against Uriah we are given an explicit and intense description culminating in Nathan's powerful sermon. (II Samuel, Chapters 11 and 12).

In other words, for Judaism it is a basic fact that *humans inevitably lapse into severe sinfulness*. But what more does it make of this? *How are humans to relate to this? How does God relate to it?*

Humans are, not surprisingly, faced with a demand for sincere repentance, accompanied by full admission and acknowledgement of the sin. But here are two points of interest concerning repentance. On one hand it must be expressed as a will, partly by the greatest possible restitution regarding the harm done; partly by a complete change in attitude and behavior. On the other hand the state of remorsefulness must be time limited – based on the faithful expectation of God's forgiveness.

Here we arrive at Judaism's thoughts about how *God* relates to human transgression. Regarding this many people hold a prejudice to the effect that the God of the Jewish Bible is always jealous and punishing over against the God of the New Testament who is merciful and forgiving. A closer reading reveals that the God of both books is conceived as partly strict and jealous and partly kind and merciful (note for example Matthew 10.12-15 and 22.13). This is one of those double statements that seem contradictory but that relate realistically to human situations. *Before* transgression we must fear disobedience to God's will; *afterward* we need to trust God's mercy. Thus God of the Bible is both the Lord, who makes strict commands and the Father who mercifully forgives.

That *faith in God's forgiveness is central to Judaism* is clear from the fact that the holiest day in the Jewish calendar concerns a reconciliation between humans and God. At Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the people as well as the individual can obtain God's forgiveness for sins committed during the past year, though only insofar as one to has done one's best to rectify omissions and harm and reconciled with those one has sinned against.

This faith in forgiveness is strongly expressed throughout Scripture. Thus, towards the end of the Psalm heading this chapter we find the comforting conviction that, "God, You will not despise a contrite and crushed heart." (Psalms 51.19). And further in two other Psalms, "O Lord, Your faithfulness reaches to heaven; Your steadfastness to the sky." (Psalms 36.6); and "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor has He requited us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him. As east is far from west, so far has He removed our sins from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear Him. For He knows how we are formed; He is mindful that we are dust." (Psalms 103.10-14).

In addition, I will quote some of the prophets, "Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and remitting transgression; Who has not maintained His wrath forever the remnant of His own people, because he love graciousness? He will take us back in love. He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins into the depth of the sea." Micah 7.18-19); "Is it my desire that a wicked person shall die? – says the Lord God. It is rather that he shall turn back from his ways and live." (Ezekiel 18.23); "I dwell on high, in holiness; yet with the contrite and lowly, reviving the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the contrite. For I will not always contend, I will not be angry forever: Nay, I who make spirits flag, also create the breath of life." (Isaiah 57.15-16). The Talmud also strengthens faith in God's mercy, "you are children of the Lord, your God, even when you do not behave as His children." (Kiddushin 36a); "a good thought is combined by God with an action (i.e. God counts it as if it were done, even though it was

not) and not a good thought is not combined by God with an action (i.e. God does not count it as if it were done)." (Tractate Peah, Chapter 1, Tosefta 4).

When comparing Judaism's view of human transgression and God's response to it with Christianity's view we come to a significant difference is as much as Christianity views humans as *born* encumbered with sin, given that they entered their essence with the Fall of Adam and Eve. Thus humans are entirely dependent on God's mercy (through Jesus's sacrificial death). Whereas Judaism, as mentioned, is convinced that humans also after the Fall are born free of sin, in God's image, and hence to a certain degree possessing an obligatory ability to fight to avoid and to repent sinfulness. What separates the two religions on this issue is *the teaching of original sin*. (This teaching is not found in Jesus's revelations but it was, based on hints in Paul, adopted by the church fathers; initially by Tertullian, ca. 200 CE, and definitively by Augustine, ca. 400 CE).

Important as this difference is one should not exaggerate it. After all, we do find in Luther, especially in his beautiful "On the Freedom of a Christian," the powerful teaching that when humans wholeheartedly let themselves be held in the faith of God's love and forgiving grace, they will also receive the will and strength to love their fellows. In this way Lutheranism, too, maintains the conviction that within human essence lies an image of God, a capacity for goodness. Thus, Luther had a sense of the mentioned paradoxical doubleness that characterizes humans, whom he termed "justus et peccator" (righteous and sinner) and in a letter to Melanchthon he writes that his teaching must appear contradictory, since regarding good deeds it both demands and condemns them, regarding sin at once asserts and denies it.

On the other hand, it should now be clear that Judaism despite its rejection of original sin contains as deep understanding of human sinfulness and the need for forgiveness – that it, as a paradoxical counter to its bright humanism, holds a painful recognition of human ethical powerlessness.

V On Humility Concerning Knowledge of the World

"Concealed acts concern the Lord our God…" (Deuteronomy 29.28)

These words are from the farewell speech Moses gives to Israel shortly before his death. Over against these he states the things that alone are to be objects for the human drive for knowledge, "but with overt acts, it is for us and our children ever to apply the provisions of this Teaching," that is, in accordance with God's commandments. The knowledge of these is on the one hand the only objects humans should pursue and on the other, it is easy to obtain. "Surely this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'Who among you can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?' No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it." (Deuteronomy 30.11-14).

And the Talmud states, "Why was the world created with [the Hebrew letter] Bet [the first letter in Genesis]? Just as the Bet is closed at the sides but open in front, so you are not permitted to investigate what is above and what below, what is before and what is behind." (Bereshit Rabbah 1:10) (This interpretation should not be understood in terms of our concepts of philology. One has to be prepared to see Jewish Biblical interpretation as something in between philology, philosophy and poetry. The interpreter does not seek an objective historically correct understanding. Rather he gives into his personal enthusiasm and the joy which has inspired him to a new statement and in fact a

transmission of the wisdom he experienced in the text. Perhaps, one could call this *creative* philology).

But what is thought of – and what can *we* think further on – with the expression "concealed acts"? First and foremost it referred to *God's essence and ways*, as opposed to *God's will* (regarding humans).

That you cannot credit that you are able to know the nature of God means that you must resist *anthropomorphizing*, that is, resist giving God human traits. This we will naturally be guilty of if we seek an image of how God is. We will inevitably transfer something or other we know from our own being – if not from our physical nature, then from our psychological life.

It is thus a fundamental feature of Judaism that from the very first and always most definitely it refuses all anthropomorphism; in the first instance in its crudest form, idolatry. "To whom, then, can you liken God,/ What form compare to Him?/ The idol? A woodworker shaped it. / And a smith overlaid it with Gold,/ Forging links of silver./ As a gift, he chooses the mulberry-/ A wood that does not rot -/ Then seeks a skilled woodworker/ To make a firm idol,/ That will not topple.// Do you not know?/ Have you not heard?/ Have you not been told/ From the first?/ Have you not discerned/ How the earth was founded?/ It is He who is enthroned above the vault of the earth,/ So that its inhabitants seem as grasshoppers; Who spread out the skies like gaize,/ Stretched them out like a tent to dwell in./ […] Do you not know?/ Have you not heard?/ The Lord is God from of old,/ Creator of the earth from end to end,/ He never grows faint or weary,/ His wisdom cannot be fathomed./ He gives strength to the weary,/ Fresh vigor to the spent." (Isaiah 40.21-22 and 28-29). But it isn't just such materialistic

anthropomorphism that is rejected. Judaism insists with extreme jealousness that God is absolutely inapproachable via human intelligence, on the Lord's infinite elevation not only beyond human imagination, but also beyond our concepts.

Thus there is *reverence* which – together with gratitude – is fundamental to the Jewish relationship with God.

Reverence is expressed markedly in *the attitude to the Lord's name*. The revealed name, YHVH, was regarded a so holy that it could only be pronounced by the High Priest on Yom Kippur and by the priests when they blessed the people; instead the appellation Adonai, the Lord, was used when reading scripture. Suggestively, later on the vowel signs from Adonai were added to the consonants YHVH. To this day an orthodox Jew would never pronounce YHVH. But reverence goes still deeper. The Lord is not merely unpronounceable, but is in fact already unnamable. This can be seen when Moses asks the Lord tell him His name, so that he can declare specifically Who has sent him, " And God said to Moses, 'Eheyh-Asher-Ehyeh' [I Am That I Am, I Am Who I Am, I Will Be What I Will Be]. He continued, 'Thus shall you say to the Israelites, "Ehyeh [I Am, I Will Be] sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3.13-14). What is taking place here is that the name YHVH is made identical to "I am," the intention is that YHVH *refuses* to name himself! (The actual etymology of the name is unknown).

In line with this deep seated weariness towards using a name for the One elevated above anything human is another peculiarity: after the ark of the covenant was lost during the Babylonian exile there was *nothing* placed in the holiest room in temple for the next 600 years (until its destruction in 70CE), in the fullest compliance with the commandment against making an image.

In addition to *the nature of God* this reverential resignation towards knowledge naturally included *His ways, His governance*, " For my plans are not your plans,/ Nor are My ways your ways/ - declares the Lord.// But as the heavens are high above the earth,/ So are My ways high above your ways/ And my plans above your plans." (Isaiah 55.8-9). This attitude was formulated thusly by one of Judaism prominent 18th Century rabbis, Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev (1740-1809), aka The Berdichever, "I don't not ask of You to reveal the secrets of Your ways – I wouldn't be able to bear those. But show me one thing […], what is happening in this moment, what it means for me, what it demands of me, what You Lord of the world is saying to me through it. Alas, what I want to know is not *why* I suffer, but only whether I suffer in accordance with *Your* will."

This attitude is synonymous with *rejecting dogmatism*. Indeed, Judaism is a religion where dogma plays a remarkably small role.

While teachings concerning *death* are central in many religions, in Judaism there is very little and it is not given much weight.

As in ancient Greece, the original conception was that there was no actual existence after death: "For Dust you are,/ And to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3.19); "We must all die; we are like water that is poured on the ground and cannot be gathered up." II Samuel 14.14); "As a cloud fades away,/ So whoever goes down to Sheol does not come up" (Job 7.9). Nothingness was also thought of as the dead remaining in their graves - "Their grave is their eternal home" (Psalms 49.12) – or that they entered a shadow existence in a dark realm of the dead. Thus in Job's plaint to the Lord, Leave me alone, let me be diverted a while/ before I depart – never to return -/ For the land of deepest gloom" (Job 10.20-21).

At a later date a different view arose, that continued in inconclusive co-existence with the notion of nothingness. (That Judaism's thoughts on death do not comprise a logical totality is not all that remarkable. What is remarkable is how little concern it has raised) That is, the belief that the Lord even after death cares for humans, rewarding and punishing, according to the life they have lived.

But it must be emphasized that this belief only enters the Jewish Bible in its youngest text, the Book of Daniel (from the second century BCE). Thus it was only in Hellenic times when various religious lived side by side (especially in Egypt), influencing one another, that this new belief entered Judaism – with its dualistic conception of the human as consisting of a perishable part, the body, and an eternal part, the soul. Scripture was then in several passages reinterpreted to support this belief (for example, Job 33.30 and Psalms 16.10). Talmud states, "In the world to come there is neither food nor drink, neither hate nor jealousy; the pious sit crowned by their noble deeds and God-fearing achievements and delight the gaze of the Holy One, blessed be His name." The statement is characteristic in its only mentioning the fate of the good. Judaism likes to dwell on the eternal salvation that awaits the pious, while only rarely addressing the punishments that awaits sinners – punishments that are *not eternal*.

However, this new belief never shook two fundamental attitudes, that compensation in the after life ought not be necessary, because good and evil already carried reward/punishment in themselves; and that one is actually not allowed to imagine of the other side as this belongs to what's "concealed."

This also holds true for the question of the meaning of *incomprehensibly gruesome sufferings*, especially when not connected with any evil form of sinfulness. This will be taken up in the next chapter.

Likewise regarding the question of *the world's first and last days*. Here again the concepts are free of precise formulation and thus of dogmatism. Regarding creation there are *two different* stories, set side by side without commentary or scruple. There is no insistence on details, but only the main thought that the world and in a special way, humans, are the work of God. In the same way, the belief in the coming Messiah contains no details. All that is held firm is that some day God's kingdom will arrive, where justice and love will be victorious among humans and even among animals, " The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,/ The leopard lie down with the kid;/ The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together,/ With the little boy to herd them./ The cow and the bear shall graze,/ Their young shall lie down together;/ And the lion, like ox, shall eat straw./ A babe shall play/ Over a viper's hole,/ And an infant shall pass his hand/ Over an adder's den./ In all of My sacred mount/ Nothing evil or vile shall be done;/ For the land shall be filled with devotion to the Lord/ As water covers the sea." (Isaiah 11.6-9). Only later on was a belief added that the dead would rise again on that day, a belief that has lasted in Judaism.

(Judaism isn't only undogmatic with regards to thoughts of the ways of God, but also about the one thing humans on the other hand must strive to realize, namely God's will. It is not demanded that the commandments be understood in a singularly authoritarian permanent manner. The Talmud displays in its commentaries on passages

of The Torah very involved different interpretations that have been defended by various rabbis, and leaves space with matter-of-fact tolerance for individual positions.

The prohibition against pursuing knowledge of "concealed acts" means importantly a *rejection of occultism* – both theoretically, seeking knowledge (e.g. fortune telling) and especially any practical, that is, magical, attempt with special means to force a desired outcome (e.g. a cure). The latter form of occultism implies after all an objection to God's governance. As it says in the Torah, " Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an auger, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the Lord," (Deuteronomy 18.10-12).

Judaism found Babylonian astrology monstrously ungodly. Moses said, "And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them." (Deuteronomy 4.19). Think as well of two such central passages as in the Ten Commandments where the prohibition against other gods, idols, among other things is aimed against the deification of the stars (Exodus 20.3) and in the first creation story that teaches that the sun and the moon not only were created by *God* but that they were created after the creation of light, secondarily – as lamps serving to mark day and night and holy days. (Deuteronomy 20.14-18) . And when Job counts the severe sins he has avoided he also mentions that whenever he saw, "the light shining,/ The moon on its course in full glory," (Job 31.26) he was never tempted to worship them as gods. The

contradistinction to religions that worshipped the sun as a god is drawn by Solomon, "The Lord has chosen/ To abide in a thick cloud." (I Kings 8.12)

Indeed, the Talmud does contain a good deal of occultism. And in fact in Judaism there is a separate mystical tradition, *Kabbalah*, which achieved its highest expression in its main text *Zohar*, from the 13th Century, with speculations on the final things by using mystical numbers derived from the values of Hebrew letters.

But given the vast superstitions and magic that flourished in antiquity and in the Middle Ages it is of greater interest that the Talmud on the other hand also carries many warnings against occultism, e.g. against astrology and the notion that one could perform miracles by pronouncing the name of God.

Reflecting on what Judaism's reverent resignation about "concealed acts" might mean for us *today*, one could come to the conclusion that the warning concerning *astrology* has become relevant again, as this superstition is gaining ground also (and not least) among the educated – powered by its sheen of science which is attractive given *the idolatry of science in our time*.

We are thus faced with a central issue where we need to learn from Judaism's (and Christianity's) reverence of wonder, in so far as it implies *a necessary corrective to our rationalism*. Of course, the Jewish Bible does not hold any direct position on science for the simple reason that it speaks to a pre-scientific culture. But its warnings concerning transgressing human cognitive possibilities has been understood in Judaism's later development not, of course, as a rejection of intense scientific research, but as a reminder that no form of rational cognition will ever be able to eliminate or even reduce what is unfathomable about existence, especially the phenomenon of life. This is a

reminder of great significance for our time when the vast achievements of science are rightfully admired and exploited, but these are often misunderstood as preliminaries to a complete comprehension of life conceived as simply identical with biochemical processes in our nervous system, especially in the brain, which is viewed as "just a computer." Or, consider Freud's mechanical explanation of our experiences of beauty in love and art as produced by the sex drive, and that's it.

Against such an idolatrous attitude towards science and the intellect, against such a forgetfulness of the decisive difference between to understand and to comprehend the Jewish Bible's deep reverence for life as a wonder provides us a momentous memento, that can lead us back to a more gentle and happy attitude towards life, preserving and developing childhood's immediacy of wonder. "Three things are beyond me;/ Four I cannot fathom:/ How an eagle makes its way over the sky;/ How a snake makes its way over a rock;/ How a ship makes its way through the high seas;/ How a man has his way with a maiden." (Proverbs 30.18-19) .

How does this attitude compare with *Christianity's*? While it is clear that reverence is also a corner stone in the Christian relationship with God, it must be said that in the mentioned form of a resignation towards the abilities of human cognition it is somewhat weakened, in so far as Christianity (with a few exceptions such as its existentialist interpretations) has more dogmas than is mother religion. Especially its incarnational teaching, its central dogma that God took on human form in Christ, is viewed from a Jewish perspective as a break in reverence. This is the central difference between the two biblical religions. But that this difference is not as deep as it seems as I tried to suggest at the end of chapter I.

VI On Suffering

"the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1.21)

These words may be said to be the foundational words in the short amazingly deep text known as the Book of Job, in the sense of the book about Job.

Its *author* is unknown, and its *date of origin* is uncertain. Its main part, that is, its poetical section (3.1 – 42.6) consisting of the dialogues between Job and his friends and between the Lord and Job is generally dated to around 400 BCE, while the prose sections – the introduction where the Adversary is given permission to tempt Job and the ending about Job's regained happiness – seem to be from an older story. I will follow the excellent German Bible scholar, Gerhard von Rad, whose theory is that an unproblematic story, about a pious man who resisted strong temptations to turn away from God and was therefore rewarded, was considerably expanded at a later date when the relationship between difficult sufferings of the innocent and God's justice and love had become a challenging problem, because people no longer felt part of a generational chain, but as individuals and thus were unable to find comfort in possible compensations for descendants. (See Job 21.19-21). In addition, Gerhard von Rad, suggests that Elihu's speeches (Chapters 32-37) are a later addition. See 42.7 where the Lord's reproach is only directed at Eliphaz "and your two friends" even though Elihu did not speak very differently from the three other friends.

For modern readers the dialogues between Job and his friends (chapters 3-37) present *substantial difficulties* because we encounter three expectations that are not at all fulfilled.

First of all we expect *differentiation* between the four friends. We presume that they represent four different attitudes or at least four different character types. But there are no markedly different aspects to them. Though Elihu, the last of the friends to speak, does differ somewhat from the others. Secondly, we expect *reciprocity* in the speeches, i.e. that Job's answers aim at what has been stated. But that is not what happens in this special dialogue form. The speaker repeats in each new speech his main point without regard to the formulations his counterpart has just used in order to put into play *his* position. Thirdly, we expect to find a *progression* preferably towards a result (the author's manifestation of his views), or in any event towards a increasing sense of resolution. But what we find is that the positions laid out in the last of the many long speeches are exactly the same as in the first speeches. There is no movement at all and the author has used no means to suggest his own position.

Apart from this difficulty with a foreign genre we meet yet another – though not one that the author can be said to face us with, rather it is one he does not relieve us from. He does not help us by simplified stylization of the two attitudes that that put against each other. He maintains with reliable realism for each position those *vibrations* and straightforward *contradictions* that always show up in actual discussions of this kind (that is, when they are not conducted by academic philosophers – and indeed even then).

It is therefore reasonable to give a *brief account* of how the text presents the two lines of thought – *their main points and their deviations*.

Job maintains already during his first difficult tests the position that everything he has lost is something he did not gain for himself but was given to him by the Lord who now is taking back his gifts and that he therefore has no right to complain but must

receive his misfortune in the same way as he earlier received fortune and be steadfast in his love of God. (See the quote at the top).

But as his suffering is further increased, when he is hit by a painful and debilitating illness, he is driven into an new attitude the main feature of which (further about deviations below) is bitter accusations against the Lord as governing with incomprehensible injustice – by rewarding the godless with glorious success while on the other hand sending gruesome suffering to the god-fearing.

At the end Job regains his love of God, instilled by the Lord's admonitory speech. Now he is completely clear. He repents that he dared reproving God, that he used aworldly concept of justice against God. He realizes the absurdity and reprehensibility of wanting to fathom the ways of the Creator, "Indeed, I spoke without understanding/ Of things beyond me, which I did not know." (43.3). His despair over the fact that God as "the Creator of darkness" (See Isaiah 45.7) also decrees undeserved torment is replaced by the peace of mind, beyond all reason, a God-trusting comfort, that comes from knowing that even undeserved torment comes from *God*.

The central aspect of *the friends' speeches* is an assertion of the traditional belief that the Lord is just in an unproblematic human sense – rewarding the good and punishing the bad. Thus, Job must realize that his misfortune is just punishment for an offence and by repenting he will regain God's grace. The notion that Job *must* have given offence is most radically expressed in 22.4-11, "Is it because of your piety that He arraigns you?" [Meant ironically for, "Surely you can't be pious since He is arraigning you."] […]"You know that your wickedness is great,/ And that your inequities have no limit./ You exact pledges from your fellows without reason,/ And leave them naked,

stripped of their clothes;/ You do not give the thirsty to drink;/ You deny bread to the hungry." Here Eliphaz is driven by his dogmatic belief to assume that the prevalent opinion of Job as a god-fearing man must be untrue, that in fact he must be guilty of the sins against mercy that the Torah especially condemns. However, it must be said that Elihu's reproaches against Job are not aimed at assumed previous sin but only against his present attitude. It is probably this aspect that is referred to in the introduction to his speech that mentions his anger with the three friends that spoke before him. But his basic position is in line with theirs, the lord reciprocates the behavior of the just human, (see 34.10 on).

Thus the *main points* of the two partners, but only the *main* points. As mentioned, from time to time *divergent thoughts* do break through.

In the case of Job there are naturally occurrences when during his reproach of God he still is held back by his former deep love of Good. First, let us observe the point at which he charges God with favoring the godless. With indomitable indignation, Job puts forward, "Why do the wicked live on,/ Prosper and grow wealthy?/ Their children are with them always./ And they see their children's children./ Their homes are secure, without fear;/ They do not feel the rod of God. Their bull breeds and does not fail;/ Their cow calves and never miscarries;/ They let their infants run loose like sheep,/ And their children skip about." (21.7-11). Still, a little further on (27.7-23), in the same way as his friends, he commits to the traditional superstition that God punishes the wicked.

Indeed, its positive counterpart, trust in God's justice towards the god-fearing, does break through from time to time, as in, " Would that I knew how to reach Him,/ How to get to His dwelling-place./ I would set out my case before him/ And fill my

mouth with arguments./ I would learn what answers He had for me/ And know how He would reply to me./ Would He contend with me overbearingly?/ Surely He would not accuse me!" (23.3-6). Note the sharp contrast to the verses immediately following, where mistrust and bitterness return. Most pointedly the struggle between disappointment and trust thus, "But I know that my Vindicator lives;/ In the end He will testify on earth –" (19.25). Here God, in a manner of speaking, has become doubled. He is at once the judge Job accuses and the defender in whom he trusts. Note also, "Surely now my witness is in heaven;/ He [i.e. God] who can testify for me is on high./ O my advocates, my fellows,/ Before God my eyes shed tears;/ Let him arbitrate between a man and God/ As between a man and his fellow." (16.19-21).

Finally there are glimpses in Job's prosecution of a beginning recognition that comes abundantly to the fore after the Lord's answer – the recognition that the very question of God's justice is mistaken, because justice is a idea of order among humans that cannot possibly be applied to the Creator and Ruler of all the world. So when Job in 26.5-14 depicts the might of the Lord, there are hints of a germinating understanding that this might prohibits condemnation and only should provoke praise," He wrapped up the waters in His clouds;/ Yet no cloud burst under their weight./ He shuts of the view of His throne,/ Spreading His cloud over it./ He drew a boundary on the surface of the waters,/ At the extreme where light and darkness meet./ The pillars of heaven tremble,/ Astounded at His blast./ By His power He stilled the sea;/ By His skill He struck down Rehab./ By His wind the heavens were calmed;/ His hand pierced the Elusive Serpent./ These are but glimpses of His rule,/ The mere whisper that we perceive of Him;/ Who can absorb the thunder of His mighty deeds?" (26.8-14). Likewise in 9.1-12, where

verses 5-10 state, " Him who moves mountains without their knowing it,/ Who overturns them in His anger;/ Who shakes the earth from its place/ Till its pillars quake;/ Who commands the sun not to shine;/ Who seals up the stars;/ Who by Himself spread out the heavens,/ And trod on the back of the sea;/ Who made the Bear and Orion,/ Pleiades, and the chambers of the south wind,/ Who performs great deeds which cannot be fathomed,/ And wondrous things with out number."

In the same way passages occur in *the friends' speeches* where they suddenly rise above their main attitude (the common belief in justice) to a shining understanding that all talk of justice must grow silent when it is God humans confront, as in that case we cannot claim or perform justice. I will cite some of the passages where these breakthroughs occur.

"You subvert piety/ And restrain prayer to God. […] Were you the first man born?/ Were you created before the hills?/ Have you listened in on the council of God?/ Have you sole possession of wisdom?" (15.4-8). "Dominion and dread are His;/ He imposes peace on His heights./ Can His troupes be numbered?/ On whom does His light not shine?/ How can man be in the right before God?/ How can one born of woman be cleared of guilt?/ Even the moon is not bright,/ And the stars are not pure in His sight./ How much less man, a worm,/ The son-of-man, a maggot." (25.2-6). "See, God is beyond reach in His power;/ Who governs like Him?/ Who ever reproached Him for His conduct?/ Who ever said, "You have done wrong"?/ Remember, then, to magnify His work,/ Of which men have sung,/ Which all men have beheld,/ Men have seen from a distance./ See, God is greater than we can know;/ The number of His years cannot be counted." (36.22-26). "Give ear to this, Job;/ Stop to consider the marvels of God./ Do

you know what charge God lays upon them/ When His lightening-clouds shine?/ Do you know what marvels worked upon the expanse of clouds/ By Him whose understanding is perfect,/ Why your clothes become hot?/ When the land is becalmed by the south wind?/ Can you help him stretch out the heavens,/ Firm as a mirror of cast metal?" (37.14-18).

Thus we notice how the idea of the text, which at the end is taught by the Lord with blinding clarity and overpowering firmness, is anticipated momentarily in the dialogues between Job and his friends, both by him and by them.

The composition of the dialogical part is as follows: A speech by Job (Chapter 3); the first round (chapters 4-14), including a speech by Eliphaz and a response from Job, a speech by Bildad and a response and a speech by Zophar and a response; the second round (chapters 15-21) taking the same format; the third round (chapters 22-28) that only contains speeches by Eliphaz and Bildad with responses; a final speech by Job (chapters 29-31) about his former happiness, his present troubles and his sin-free life; four speeches by Elihu (chapters 32-37).

In consideration of the mentioned difficulties it might be recommended that in order to give a *primary impression of the text* one skip a few passages (I am thinking about when teaching young people). One could for example pass over the second and third rounds as well the Elihu's speeches and focus on chapters 1-14, 29-31 and 38-42.

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When we take a closer look at the attitude towards the problem of suffering the Book of Job points towards it is useful first to consider *other possible attitudes* – partly the one that is explicitly rejected in the text, that is, the one taken by Job's friends and partly two

others, only implicitly rejected, that the text does not directly take a position on but are clearly unacceptable given the its main view.

As mentioned Job's friends maintain *the simple dogmatic conviction* that God's justice sees to it that every human receives *a fate according to merit*. They hold steadfastly to this conviction despite the fact that they are confronted with an obvious example of its faultiness. They deny, suppress and explain away the facts.

Who do they? Because they are driven by a passion that is stronger than the intellect, namely desire for comforting order in existence. Thus it is not existence as it is that is their point of departure rather it is their own ego, their instincts of self-preservation and self-fulfillment with their accompanying desire for comfort. In other words, their point of departure is egocentrism, one that is all the stronger than the natural kind, because it is completely unacknowledged and therefore unopposed.

This is accompanied by the practical consequences of the conviction. (This and the following only applies to Elihu with some significant limitations, as explained above). These people who so passionately demand and expect justice from God make themselves shockingly guilty of injustice towards their friend – as well as betraying a shocking heartlessness. Without considering all the goodness they have found in their friend they now conclude, presumably feeling that God is on their side, on the basis of his misfortune that he must have committed a serious sin, regarding which Job bitterly states, " You [God] have shriveled me;/ My gauntness serves as a witness,/ And testifies against me." (16.8). And that their injustice is not even modified by empathy but is rather extended into hard heartlessness is seen clearly in the words of Eliphaz quoted above. See also speeches by Bildad 8.10-14 and of Zophar 11.2 on. Their attitude to their tormented

friend lacks both a sense of righteous consideration of the facts and open-heartedness towards the despair of a fellow they are confronting. Both aspects are hindered by a locked-in self-regard and egocentrism. Their egocentric relation to God has led to egocentrism in relation to their neighbor. (And vice versa, as explained above).

In the end it is clearly expressed that this form of an apparently strict god-fearing attitude is far from dear to the Lord, as it actually awakes his anger (42.7-9). Indeed, the Lord is angered over Job's accusations but He is much more deeply angered by the friends' defensive speeches that unjustly and cruelly so gravely ignores the commandment to love their neighbor.

We are then in concert with the text when we feel contempt for Job's "comforting" friends. But if we stay there we will miss the point that the attitude depicted, albeit in more diffuse ways, exists everywhere and in all times, including our own. It is a common reaction for people to conclude from misfortune a lesser worth – possibly from an unconscious idea of justice, either as divine rule or simply by virtue of how existence works, in such a way that everyone may fashion their own fortune. Doesn't a person lose prestige even at *undeserved* defeats? When this happens to a leading politician or a general don't they usually have to resign? And when many people are conspicuously reticent about their health, isn't that among other things in order to avoid some kind of disdain? Correspondingly, isn't there a kind of glory surrounding *every* success and about great health in advanced years?

After these considerations concerning the attitude to the problem of suffering the text rejects, I will, as mentioned, point out two other attitudes that are not treated in the text but are obvious for us to consider given the teachings of the Book of Job.

Firstly, the *dualistic position*, that is, one that finds a satisfying explanation for suffering by seeing it as not coming from God, but rather from an evil tendency in existence, often called the devil. Through this assumption many feel that they have obtained a certain fulfillment of the egocentric demand that the universe must be governed by a conceivable order, as understood by the little animal species homo sapiens. The Book of Job – and all of Judaism – stands in sharp contrast to this tempting dualism with its radical *monotheism*. For Job as well as for his friends it is an unshakeable fact that suffering comes from *God*, as do the *whole* world and *all* its processes come from Him, as per Isaiah, also quoted in Chapter I, "[…] there is none by Me./ I am the Lord and there is none else,/ I form light and create darkness,/ I make weal and create woe -/ I the Lord do all these things." (Isaiah 45.6-7). Judaism takes its point of departure firmly and humbly in *existence*, as the actual totality that it is, not in the *ego* and not in the ego's desire to grasp it (comprehend it, control it) intellectually.

But isn't this exactly the dualism that is presented in the introductory scene with the Adversary? No, absolutely not. The Adversary is only one of God's *servants*, in the same way as the angels, in no way in possession of an independent power – after all, he must ask God's permission for the experiment – not to mention an equal oppositional power. He suffers *defeat*, not just at the end but already in the fact that Job's bitter accusations of God are backed by a *firm belief* in Him. The Adversary does not achieve what he expected and wished for with his words, "[…] he will surely blaspheme You to Your face." (1.11).

Secondly, through time there have been numberless people who have thought themselves in possession of a complete solution of the problem of suffering by counting –

whether securely or anxiously – on *compensation in the after life*. That is, they have been convinced that every human's tally is totaled after death and the good are rewarded with salvation and the wicked fall into hell with presumably fitting punishment. (Above I have mentioned that in Judaism thoughts of an after life also do appear, but they have only had limited expression and have never been foundational).

What is characteristic about this notion, that also exists today albeit more rarely, is that it like the previous implies a breakthrough of human egocentrism. It is strictly speaking pretentious when we demand an existence beyond the one – undeniably partly painful – we have been given. And it is pretentious when we in our intellectual neediness for clear regularity desire that the principles of justice we have acknowledged as ideals for our behavior towards one another also must count for our fates. There is especially egocentrism in the demand for reward for good deeds because these are seen as overcoming of egoism, whereas viewed with less egotistically they would be recognized as carrying their own reward.

It is just this egocentric pretentiousness the teachings of the Book of Job contradict. Humans do not have the right to demand things from existence, whether its duration or its intelligibility. They must humbly submit to the conditions they have been given. The demand for reward for proper behavior is especially rejected, since this is not all to the benefit of God but for the human person, "If you are righteous,/ What do you give Him;/ What does He receive from your hand?/ Your wickedness affects men like yourself;/ Your righteousness, mortals." (35.7-8). It is because of selfishness we have difficulties behaving rightfully and therefore we expect a reward, otherwise we would realize that fellow human feeling by itself carries the greatest happiness.

After having considered how the teachings on suffering in the Book of Job relates to *alternative* attitudes we will now consider them *in themselves* - as the expression of the deep-going Judaism they are.

That it was Judaism's strictly maintained monotheism that allowed the problem to stand in full undeniable harshness has already been discussed.

When we now seek a more exact understanding of the Book's answer to the problem – "answer" is of course not meant in the sense of "solution" – it is reasonable to take off from *the commandment to love our neighbor*, because in that we have a relatively firm manifestation of a foundational view in Judaism, and because the alternative answers proceed from the opposite of love of neighbor, namely egocentrism.

The context in the Hebrew formulation of the commandment (Leviticus 19.18) is presumably," Love your fellow: he is like you," that is, because you realize that he is human like you. So we are speaking of an understanding that all humans we meet – not only one's closest or one's countrymen – are beings of the same type as one self, a kind of kin that one must meet with good will. This understanding will then, if it is more than superficial, leads one not only to think about one's own suffering but also that of one's fellow humans. The problem of suffering is thus raised from being a special personal issue to being humanity's issue and the attitude at least becomes freed from its dangerous character of personal injustice. The egocentric question, "Why have I been hit so cruelly?" gives way to a recognition that suffering, also undeserved suffering, is a general human condition. This recognition, of course, does not solve the problem of suffering but it does raise it to a level where painful and undermining self-centered bitterness are replaced by a purer form of pain.

The next step in the process seems to consist in recalling *the beautiful aspects of life* – "My soul praise the Lord and do not forget all his good deeds," so that one seriously becomes aware that it is not only in the face of death, illness and suffering as sucht hat we stand powerlessly uncomprehending but also with regards to life, health, happiness in its highest manifestations. When we look into the cradle of delightedly kicking infant we comprehend nothing, absolutely nothing. But since such experiences of life's mystery, its glowing forms, are easily dimmed by habit or are quickly forgotten, we are only shaken to the ground by its dark manifestations. "People tend to look at a solar eclipse with greater awe than at the sun." Here we may learn from Job who in his distress for long managed to hold on to the fact that not only his misfortune but also his former fortune were incomprehensible and that thus the loss of this had to be seen as given back a wonderful gift. He realized that it was from the Lord that he had received his beautiful days and that he now from the same hand had to receive the dark ones, "Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?" (2.10). "It is incumbent on a man to bless God for the evil in the same way as for the good […]" (Berachot 54a). If we never in the slightest way have comprehended life's peaks of happiness and beauty with what right or even reasonableness does our wonder then rise so one-sidedly against it chasms of horror?

The fact that humans are as specks of dust in Creation's wonderful totality, which does not contain only what helps and gladdens us but also what harms and pains us reverberates from the Lord's chastisement, " Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?/ Speak if you if you have understanding./ Do you know who fixed its dimensions/ Or measured it with a line? […] Is it by your wisdom that the hawk grows

pinions,/ Spreads his wings to the south?/ Does the eagle soar at your command,/ Building his nest high […]" (38.4-5 and 39.26-27). Concerning its wonder human-friendly side it states, "Have you ever commanded the day to break,/ Assigned the dawn its place […]" (38.12). Against this is set a for us more forbidding side with a depiction of huge creature like the behemoth and Leviathan, " Take now behemoth, whom I made as I did you;/ He eats grass, like cattle./ His strength is in his loins,/ His might is in the muscles of his belly,/ He makes his tail like a cedar;/ the sinews of his thighs are knit together./ His bones are like tubes of bronze,/ His limbs like iron rods. […] Can you draw out Leviathan by a fishhook?/ Can you press down on his tongue by a rope?/ Can you put a ring through his nose,/ Or pierce his jaw with a barb? Will he plead with you at length?/ Will he speak soft words to you?/ Will he make an agreement with you/ To be taken as your lifelong slave?/ Will you play with him like a bird,/ And tie him down for your girls?" (40.15-18 and 40.25-29).

And Job must answer, " Indeed I spoke without understanding/ Of things beyond me, which I did not know." (42.3). There nothing here indicating, as some interpreters would have it, a submissive capitulation to the superior power of a despot, but rather a strengthening reverence for the Lord, an uplifting devotion to God. Because *reverence is inextricably connected to Judaism's other fundamental element, namely gratitude and trust*.

Job views human existence from an elementary affirmation of life (as it is by Judaism generally) as not only something unfathomable also positively as something highly valuable, that is – as already emphasized – as a *gift*. The sense of *gratitude* that follows from this grows into an intense love of life that is extended to a corresponding

attitude towards *the future*, a *trust* – a confidence that the love that provides the gift of life also will determine the future. I.e., that in the end our existence, far beyond our ability to understand, is ruled by a loving God. It is a foundation stone in Judaism that the Lord cares for humans as His highest creation, who He created in his image, "Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness,/ I fear no harm, for You are with me;/ Your rod and Your staff – they comfort me." (23.4). See also Isaiah 49.19, where the Lord comforts Israel, "Can a woman forget her baby,/ Or disown the child of her womb?/ Though she might forget,/ I never could forget you."

One might object that this is not a comfort one can embrace, but on the contrary one must oppose the reverence that prohibits holding an opinion concerning the ways of the Lord, of "concealed acts." Even though reverence maintains that a human may not ask for, not to mention demand, knowing the ultimate meaning of life, there is one thing the faithful Jew knows in his heart namely that everything is ruled by a loving God. There is thus undeniably a tension, even a contradiction between the resignation of reverence and safety of comfort. But such logical weakness at the outer reaches is, after all, only avoidable by further weakness, the loss of the inner strength and solidity of the relationship to God.

Taking off from the commandment to love our fellow we can reach a deeper understanding of the Book of Job. Even though this commandment in the Jewish Bible does not demand an actual love, but only a friendly attitude, this demand when seriously understood will reveal people's firmly rooted tendency in the opposite direction, towards egoism and egocentricity. The result is a significant recognition of sin. This implies *that humans would be ill served with divine justice and far more are in need of God's merciful*

grace. Once primitive selfishness is recognized not only as harmful for one's fellows but also for one own joyous development and actually is meaningless, the following realizations appear: that it is unjust of humans to complain about God's injustice when they wouldn't be able to handle justice and that it is meaningless for them to complain about the meaninglessness of the universe when they behave meaninglessly in their corner of it. One could therefore say that the more love of fellows and the accompanying understanding of sin are developed, the more the tendency to make egocentric claims on God will be overcome.

The connection between the commandment to love our neighbor and Job's devotion to God also works in reverse. Love of neighbor is not only a *precondition* for an attitude of devotion to God in the face of suffering, but it is also its *consequence*. When suffering is realistically and humbly recognized as a condition of life it will promote tolerance and helpfulness and generally a feeling of solidarity. It will work against developing egocentric attitudes like proud self-sufficiency in good times and envy and self-pity in bad ones. With some right suffering could seen as a teacher in love of neighbor, but only with some right. The most gruesome of human sufferings do not become more understandable in this view, they remain incomprehensible.

There is then despite an apparent contradiction a connection, an interplay, existing between *a humble resignation* towards transferring our ethical principles to the macrocosm and *a full commitment* to them within our microcosm. (Such transference would be as mistaken as would be the reverse, to transfer scientific causality as the only valid principle, including in human life, with an elimination of moral concepts).

By deep-going thoughts on suffering and love of neighbor, Judaism has arrived at recognizing *the unbreakable interdependence between the relationship to God and the relationship to one's fellow* – a recognition that is one of its main points.

The comparison between the two biblical religions I usually end with is, concerning the attitude towards suffering, practically superfluous. It is immediately clear that the peak of *Christianity* is exactly the same as that of Judaism – a peak we find in in Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26.39) and in Lord's prayer, "Your will be done." (Matthew 6.9-13).

VII On the Coherence of the Relationship with God and the Relationship to the Neighbor.

" He has told you, O man, what is good/ And what the Lord requires of you:/ Only to do justice/ And to love goodness,/ And to walk modestly with your God […]" (Micah 6.8). Already in this ancient proclamation from a Prophet - from the 8th Century BCE - the proper relationship to one's neighbor is set beside the proper relationship to God in a manner that shows a recognition of some coherence. After all, the two phrases "what is good" (i.e. the nature of the *ethical* obligation) and "what the Lord requires of you" (i.e. the nature of the *religious* obligation) are put side by side, as are the answers of justice, love and humility.

Herein lies a matter that was and is a characteristic feature of the Jewish religion, namely *its mainly practical orientation*. It does not ask, not to mention answer, theoretical questions about how the universe is organized, or what death is, but it concentrates on the practical problem of how to live. And since that predominantly concerns how to relate to one's fellows, the religiosity of Judaism first and foremost *serves as a support for an ethics*.

The practical orientation furthermore implies that this support, provided by religiosity, also is not of a theoretical character, consisting of theoretical *knowledge* (expressed in articles of faith), but for the most part consists of fundamental *feelings* and their consequent *attitudes*. The Hebrew word for "faith" (emuna) does not suggest conviction, fully accepting a series of articles of faith, but a firm binding to God. The word is related to the well-known word "Amen," which suggests "certainly, let it be so." Faith, therefore, suggests grateful love of God, expressed as trust and its accompanying

faithfulness; just as humans trust in God, God should be able to trust in humans. (The same is implied in the Christian Bible's Greek word for faith, pistis).

But *how* is this faithfulness towards God to show itself in one's conduct? After all, here a God-given knowledge must be needed? No, not really. Judaism does posses such knowledge – in the revelations to Moses. But they are not actually needed: the fundamental commandment to love one's neighbor is stated as an appeal to *our own faculty of cognition*; and everywhere it appears that Judaism relies on humans' ability to recognize (at least superficially and momentarily) that the grateful love they owe the Creator must be transformed into a love of their fellows. The fact that the ethical prescriptions appear as revelations only means that they as divine commandments strengthen and maintain humans' own – frail – ethical realizations.

It would be natural here to object that the Torah *indeed does contain ritual prescriptions,* in fact, several of them. But these are clearly of secondary moment; they serve the continuous *maintenance* of the awareness of God and thereby the will to faithfulness; they serve as a protection against *forgetfulness,* which is one of the great dangers in our relationship with God. Even with respect to such a distinctive ritual as animal sacrifice (which was maintained until the destruction of the Temple in 70CE) it was early on warned against considering it as *in itself* pleasing to God. Thus Hosea and Amos, both of whom belong like Micah in the 8th Century BCE, "For I desire goodness, not sacrifice;/ Obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings," (Hosea 6.6.) and, "I loathe, I spurn your festivals,/ I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies./ If you offer me burnt offerings – or your meal offerings – I will not accept them." (Amos 5.21-22). See further, in Psalms, "You do not want me to bring sacrifices;/ You do not desire burnt

offerings;/ True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit;/ God, You will not despise/ a contrite and crushed heart." (Psalms 51.18-19). In this connection it should be mentioned that many believing Jews today only partly, often in a few matters or not at all, keep the ceremonial prescriptions.

With regards to Judaism's view on the duties to God I can be said that they are predominantly of an ethical character and that even if they had not been revealed it would have been possible for humans to arrive at them themselves. In so far as Judaism does not contain any separate religious knowledge it only maintains a small degree of authoritarianism and thus shows some kinship with humanism.

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The proposed coherence between the religious and the ethical will be further documented and understood more precisely in the following.

We find the most important evidence in the *Creation story*, "And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1.27). The sense here is of course not that humans were created to *look like* God (in which case it would also have to involve the soul; but they did not at that time distinguish between body and soul), as this would contravene Judaism's clear rejection of anthropomorphism. See for instance, "All nations are as naught in His sight;/ He accounts them as less than nothing. To whom, then, can you liken God,/ What form compare to Him?" - Likewise it would have been inconsistent with human sinfulness right after their creation. The intention must be that God created a being who can hear Him and with whom He can talk – as His partner, as the only creature given a relationship with God. Claus Westermann's great work of commentary to Genesis,

which I am following, states, “The sentence means that humans’ actual being is seen in contrast to God; the relationship to God is not some addition to humanity, rather humanity’s being is thought of a lying in the relationship to God.” (Biblischer Kommentar, P. 218).

Indeed the image of God aspect must not be over-interpreted to suggest that humans are of a godly nature. They are part of Creation and differences in being between them and God remain firm. Over against the aspect of human *glory* in the image, the second creation story immediately after puts humanity’s dizzying *smallness,* expressed as their having been created from dust, as per the Lord’s words, “dust you are” (Genesis 3.19). See also the prohibition against making images of God that implies that there is no likeness between God and human, no commensurability. This deep understanding of human glory as well as their smallness runs through all of the Jewish Bible and Talmud. One of the most beautiful formulations of this is found in Psalms, “When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,/ the moon and stars You set in place,/ what is a man that You have been mindful of him,/ that You have made him little less than divine,/ and adorned him with glory and majesty,” (Psalms 8.4-6).

But even though being created in the image of God must not be seen as godliness, it does imply a special glory for humans. The glory it is to be the only creature created to be in continuous *dialogue with God*, to which naturally belongs an ability to think, having will and an orientation towards value (good and evil) – as well as an understanding that these resources are frail; that is, they are to be used with the humility of dust.

The fact is that *dialogue is fundamental to Judaism*. Thus, it is distinctive when models of piety like Abraham and Job dare make demands of God, charging him with

failing the justice He demands of humans. And each time the remarkable occurs, that the Lord in no way finds the challenge ignorable or absurd or objectionable, but He *answers* – clearly recognizing for humans a right to dialogue concerning the foundation of ethics and therefore of life: justice-love. Humans must be allowed, when they are jealous and anxious regarding the holiest value, to talk to their God – as the One who has given it and fully animates it.

In the same way *yeshiva schools' serious debates down the centuries* attempting to arrive at increasingly nuanced understandings of God's will have been acknowledged as a genuine form of worshipping God. As mentioned earlier, nothing has been seen as dogmatically resolved and unshakeable. Every Torah passage has been taken up for renewed debate. Talmud, which accounts for all the interpretations that have been proposed, does not conclude in a single one as the right and final, authoritative one; the pedagogical format of those schools was characterized by a singularly free language between students and the teacher, who was completely ready not only to teach his students but also to learn from them. "Who is wise? One who learns from every man." (Pirke Avot 4.1) It is characteristic that even this definition is proclaimed in the form of a dialogue. To my knowledge only one other ancient culture has to that extent held dialogue to be the royal road to wisdom, namely the Greek (with Socrates as its model).

For Judaism dialogue has also been the road to the wisdom that also is pious. Talmud states, "If there is no wisdom, there is no fear of God; if there is no fear of God, there is no wisdom." (Pirke Avot 3.17). How is this to be understood?

The wisdom mentioned here is not a learned one, or even an intellectual one, but one that involves the whole soul, one that by influencing one's feelings and passions not

only expresses itself in words and thought but in one's behavior. "Where does wisdom reside? In the heart, that resides in the middle of your body." (Midrash Yalkut).

With regards to one-sided development of the intellect, which for some became the goal of their Torah studies, Talmud has many warnings both concerning its dangers – "the sharper the wit, the greater the danger of error" (Bava Metzia 96 [**exact quote must be found]**) – and about its limitations, "The essential thing is not study, but deed." (Pirke Avot 1.17). The wisdom extolled here then is an elementary understanding of life that goes deep and therefore determines not only our view of life but our attitude to life.

Thus it becomes understandable that wisdom can be seen in interplay with "fearing God" which in Talmud generally means "piety", albeit including an aspect of both fear and reverence, but first and foremost consisting in gratitude, trust and faithfulness, that is, a *love* of God. What is pointed at is *cohesiveness between love of neighbor and love of God*. Without continuous and persistent work to understand (= to achieve insight into) one self as co-created and belonging with one's fellows, one will reach a mistaken relationship to God, and without the basis of gratitude for life and reverence for the wonder of life one will go wrong in one's relationship with others: "The beginning of wisdom is fear [i.e. reverence] of the Lord," (Proverbs 9.10).

The central evidence that gratitude is viewed as the foundation of ethics we find in the prologue to the Ten Commandments; namely that the Lord has freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and are therefore obligated in gratitude to follow His commandments, see again, Talmud, "Love God in the humans He has created." (Midrash sifre to Deuteronomy). A poignant expression of this thought is found in Jeremiah where knowledge of God is simply synonymous with mercy towards those in need, " he upheld

the rights of the poor and the needy -/Then all was well./ That is truly heeding Me/ - declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 22.16).Likewise Isaiah says of the messianic kingdom of peace, "In all My sacred Mount/ Nothing evil or vile shall be done;/ For the land shall be filled with devotion to the Lord/ As water covers the sea." (Isaiah 11.9).

The following rabbinical story will serve in evidence that, in reverse, love of neighbor is seen as the rightful path of a proper relationship with God. A man who was known for his miserliness came to a rabbi and said to him, "I have heard that you a capable of wonders. Please teach me a way to fear God." "I know of no such way," the rabbi answered, "but I can teach you how to come to *love* God." "How?" Asked the miser. The rabbi answered, "By loving humans." (Martin Buber, Die Erzählungen der Chassidim, P. 617).

The Hebrew langauge itself shows how strongly felt is the right relationship to God and to fellows. The noun tzedakah means both righteousness and piety, sugesting an attitude towards life in its totality without usual differentiation between the relationsip to the Creator and to one's fellows.

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Having now disclosed the central position ethics holds in Judaism – in so far as the ethical and the religious is inextricably connected, indeed is a totality – it should be clear that *Judaism shares something essential with humanism*, more than most other religions. *Its differences from humanism* in its most common form will be clear from chapters III, IV and V, but it makes sense to add a few more precise considerations here.

The differences are obvious in relation to the most widespread *irreligious* form of humanism. This form rejects the notion of ethics founded on religion. Instead it seeks a

rational, philosophical foundation of ethics. Generally it views morality as a rational transformation of primitive egoism; that is, as a more reasonably and in the long term more sustainable realization of our self-preservation and developmental instincts. The differences to *religious humanism* should aslo be clear. That is the humanism that despite being alien to the notion of a personal God still is founded on religious gratitude and humility. From its own perspective, the differences between this form of humanism and Judaism are of limited importance.

The more thought-provoking point I want to make concerns *Goethe's form of humanism*. This form usually considers itself religious (and can rightfully do so in so far as the meaning of the word is not that well delimited) but one should be aware that its religiosity is very different from that of Judaism, not only imaginatively (regarding its non-personal notion of God) but also attitudinally. Albeit, like Judaism it is founded on an intense affirmation of life, a particularly deep sense of life's beauty, but this joy does not complete into an obligating ethics, and this for there reasons.

It does not take on (at least it did not for Goethe, whom I am considering) a character of gratitude, the genuine kind, that is constant and obligating, but rather a form that is more momentary and sentimental. In addition it focuses less on elementary shared joys than on exclusive ones – not least in art - that are assumed (and indeed partly are) a privilege of the specially gifted. Goethe held, particularly later in life, a distinct notion of elite humans, called "Lieblinge der Götter." In which case joy would promote a sense of connection with those intellectually endowed rather than with humanity at large. Finally, the experience of beauty is not connected with the humility that is of decisive ethical importance since it partly will promote a sense of caution and respect concerning the

unfathomable connections and possibilities in the human mind and partly will promote linking people together in consciousness of their shared powerlessness.

The religious aspect of Goethe-style humanism thus lies not in its form of joy, but only in its intensity – as a form of *enthusiasm.* This *could* be ethically heightening in so far as it gave wings to good character traits already present (a person's personality is often much richer than her view of life), but it *need not* be the case that it exerts a positive influence on a person's attitude to others. Rather, it could become isolating, an exaltation of the ego, a kind of ego trip.

Finally, a few words of comparison with *Christianity*.

The relationship between faith and morality and generally about God and humans is viewed very differently among the various Christian denominations.

At one extreme, represented by Tertullian (ca. 200 CE) and Don Scotus (13th Century CE) who teach that what is morally right can only be known from God's revealed word while human though is completely incompetent; thus, the latter maintains that if God had determined goodness to consist of other than love of neighbor, then this other would have been the ethical. This is the complete opposite of Judaism, in which the divine and the human are not two separate worlds in such a way that religion is 100% authoritarian, but in a way that one conditions the other and love of neighbor is recognized as God's will not only through revelation, but is seen as the royal road to knowledge and love of God – much as in reverse devotion to God directs one to and inspires love of neighbor.

But the numerous Christian denominations' variegated spectrum also points to the other end, in which the relationship between divine and human as in Judaism is seen as a

dialogue, generally as interplay. Consider, of example, liberal theology at the turn of the twentieth century. Not, of course, its superficial representatives, who let irresponsible optimism and easy-going humanism suppress Christianity's genuine humility, but rather such experienced and spiritual teachers as Morten Pontoppidan. This at once realistic and idealistic theologian maintained with full force humanity's dependence on God and its being made in the image of God, both its powerlessness as a creature among millions and its glory as dialogue partner with God. He understood deeply that, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it." (Psalms 127.1) and "[…] what do you have that you did not receive?" I Corinthians 4.7); but he realized just as clearly that, after all, we are graced with an ability to think and a will which it is our duty to exert. In one of his, "Words of Encouragement for Sundays and Work Days," from 1899, he talks of "self-help and God's help," rejecting "preaching about humanity's absolute powerlessness," "The power in us and the power from above – are both from God, they are intended to collaborate in the work for our salvation." (*Aldrig fortvivle*, P. 199).

This understanding of a deep-going connection between humble devotion to God and firm love of neighbor is shared by the two Biblical religions in their best expressions.

VIII On the Relationship between Love of Neighbor and Self-Realization

"When you observe and carry out God's commandments, it is as though you carry out yourselves, as though you create yourselves." (from Midrash Leviticus rabbah, as cited in Leo Baeck, Das Wesen des Judentums. P. 187).

For most of us the experience is that the duty to perform moral precepts is connected with elementary distaste, in so far that they prescribe avoidance of something one desires, or to submit to something one doesn't like. Regularly one is confronted with a contradiction between what morality demands and what the ego spontaneously is driven toward.

But when we look for reflections on the issue, whether theological or philosophical, there is no agreement. Throughout time a variety of ideas have been proposed concerning the relationship between morality and self-realization, between fulfilling moral obligations and the achievement of happiness.

I will briefly sketch *the main positions that have asserted themselves* and in relation to them give an account of Judaism's point of view.

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On one side are the views that confirm and deepen our immediate sense of a *conflict between duty and happiness*. Calvin, for example, maintained that humans, due to their thorough wickedness, were not able to achieve anything ethically valuable, something that would please God and that in some way would become the basis of their happiness. All they were able to do was complete submission to God's concrete prescripts (all the way down to Calvin own prescription against dancing) – that its, a bothersome and still valueless and thus not an honorable morality. The general Christian belief in a reward *after death* was even rejected by Calvin; everyone was already at birth predestined for

salvation or damnation. Thoughts of an absurd lack of relation between morality and happiness have also been promoted in philosophy. Freud, for example, in his text, "Das Unbehagen in der Kultur," found an irresolvable conflict between a culture's necessary moral rules and the individual's biologically given dynamic, especially aggression and sexual instincts. Camus likewise found himself confronting the absurdity that no ethics could exist that in someway would harmonize with our natural instinct for self-expression. Despairing he arrived at thinking that a heroic acceptance of this absurdity, a will to struggle through life *despite* its acknowledged absurdity, could be set as our agenda, as, paradoxically, an ethical value.

A special grouping is those views where albeit life is experienced as irresolvable disharmony between duty and happiness, but where one puts one's trust in a *just solution after death*. Such a view is especially prevalent, for example, in pietism and evangelical revivalism where life on earth is perceived as a continuous agonizing struggle against one's helplessly sinful desires – a struggle that is maintained only in the comfort of a reward in the afterlife. In philosophy we encounter a view of this ilk in Kant, as he first of all on principle claims a contradiction between fulfillment of duty and the achievement of happiness – behavior only becomes ethical once it is carried through by an exertion of will, across the desire for happiness – and thus sees it as necessary to count on reward on the other side.

On the other side are the views that – in different ways – see *a satisfying cohesion between morality's prescripts and our natural instinct for self-expression*.

This form of cohesion is the one expressed in the Danish adage, "*As you yell in the forest so comes your answer*." Indeed, at the very least there's a tendency that a

person who behaves properly, considerately and helpfully will also be treated in this way by others. This morality is often viewed as an intelligent form of egoism, in so far as one has realized that in the long term and generally speaking one obtains more satisfaction when keeping certain moral rules than when spontaneously actualizing one's instincts.

An important connection between morality and satisfaction lies in the fact that by submitting to moral restrictions *one can buy one of the goods that provide most joy: prestige*. Indeed, it is often the case that the sweetness of being well regarded or possibly even admired makes for a delightful prize that redeems the effort and bother of honoring moral claims.

For many a third form of cohesion is promoted as they are convinced of *a connection between morality and a good life*, in consequence of a just divine ruler. In the cases where one inevitably experiences conflict instead of expected harmony the problem has not been overly serious in cultures where kinship was regarded as the smallest meaningful unit. One could find comfort in the expectation of equalization for one's descendants. In individualistic cultures on the contrary the problem has created great difficulties and scruples. Attempts have been made at notions of hidden guilt and with a theory that makes it generally possible to expect some future offset in order to hold the belief throughout life; the theory that God's mill grinds slowly.

Finally we can talk about a cohesion that differs from the one just mentioned by not relating to fateful consequences sent by God; and from the two former ones by taking a much more intimate form, in that it does not regard morality as leading to satisfaction, but *that the proper relationship to one's fellows represents actual happiness*. In the history of philosophy this view had its beginnings with Socrates who focused and

reflected on the two elementary but often overlooked conditions that right behavior is at once the purpose of the soul and its happy expression, just as health is at once the body's rightful and pleasant condition, and that humans can only achieve real meaning in life though interplay, not least in dialogue with their fellows.

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Where does Judaism stand in regard to the positions sketched above? Not regarding a single position, of course. After all, positions have not remained firm in the 3000 years since Moses. But some main points are clear.

When considering the view that holds an irresolvable *conflict* between moral claims and the desire for happiness, we simply find *nothing analogous in Judaism*. It always holds that human existence as created by God and ruled by God is meaningful – first and foremost because of a fundamental *cohesion between human duties, as laid down by God and human nature created by God*. It is in this context we understand that the emergency solution of compensation in the hereafter arrived remarkably late and through intense foreign influence was absorbed in Judaism, most frequently as a support, never as fundamental.

But when one investigates the Jewish Bible and Talmud to find out *how* harmony between duty and happiness is thought of, one does not get one answer. *All the four answers described above are represented.* Thus, in Proverbs the *two first mentioned positions* – that one achieves the most satisfying life by right behavior. Many of the proverbs are not religious in character; they are completely in line with common sense morality found in many cultures, such as the following warnings against lying, pride, anger and drunkenness: "Treasures acquired by lying tongue/ Are like driven vapor,

heading for extinction" (21.6). "Before ruin a man's heart is proud;/ Humility goes before honor." (18.12). "An angry man provokes a quarrel;/ A hot-tempered man commits many offences." (29.22). "Do not ogle that red wine/ As it lends its color to the cup,/ As it flows on smoothly;/ In the end, it bites like a snake;/ it spits like a basilisk./ Your eyes will see strange sights;/ Your heart will speak distorted things./ You will be like one lying in bed on high seas,/ Like one lying on top of the rigging." (23.31-34).

The form of wisdom Proverbs time and again praises is merely sagacity, a sagacity that could easily exist without any connection to religiosity. But it is found here without any demarcation along with the wisdom that is identical to fearing God, "The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord,/ And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (9.10). There is no differentiation made between the life knowledge humans learn through reason, their God-given reason, and the one directed by the fear of God.

We are thus touching on the connection between morality and happiness, which is fundamental and always near in Judaism's attitude to life: *The good is what the Lord in His wisdom as Creator has arranged as the proper development for humans, and that he asserts through His rule* in such a way that He provides for well-being while He cows evil with punishments. The keynote in the Torah – that obedience of the commandments will draw down blessings and disobedience damnation (Deuteronomy 30.19) – reverberates throughout Jewish tradition. It is sounded regularly in Proverbs, such as, "He who is generous to the poor makes a loan to the Lord;/ He will repay him his due." (19.17). "The righteousness of the blameless man smooths his way,/ But the wicked man is felled by his wickedness." (11.5). "The house of the wicked will be demolished,/ But

the tent of the upright will flourish." (14.11). (See further 2.7; 12.21; 13.21; 15.3; and 22.4) . And Judaic interpretation of history is carried by the conviction that defeat, especially the Babylonian exile, was decreed by God in punishment for disobedience against His commandments.

Indeed this idea of cohesion between morality and fate is dominant throughout Judaism. But we also find statements that challenge it and re-interpret it in a deep way. I am, of course, first and foremost thinking of Job's despairing protest against this prevailing notion that so zealously is promoted by his friends. This text's new understanding is shown in Job's reaction to God's speech that reproaches both him and his friends – him for having demanded the cohesion, them for having insisted on it. Though Job must acknowledge that his hoped for cohesion cannot be expected, much less demanded, that it is both a false and a presumptuous claim concerning the inscrutable ways of the Lord, he does not fall into seeing existence as absurd; he maintains or, rather, regains that love of God that during his first sufferings made it possible for him to conclude, "Praised be God." He has thus reached a deeper understanding of the cohesion between faithfulness and blessings.

At its peaks Judaism has glimpsed *a less robust but in return a completely indisputable cohesion between righteousness and happiness*, the evidence for this may be shown by the following passages. The Lord says to Cain, "[…] why is your face fallen?/ Surely if you do right,/ There is uplift." Or, consider these wonderfully simple expressions from Psalms, "As for me, nearness to God is Good," (73.28) and, "Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, […] rather, the teaching of the Lord is his delight,/ and he studies that teaching day and night./ He is like a tree planted

beside streams of water,/ which yields its fruit in season,/ whose foliage never fades,/ and whatever it produces thrives." (Psalms 1.1-3). That sin actually breaks down a person is shown in Ezekiel, "Our transgressions and our sins weigh heavily upon us; we are sick at heart about them. How can we survive?" and in Isaiah 57.20-21, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea/ Which cannot rest,/ Whose waters toss up mire and mud. There is no safety/ - said my Lord -/ For the wicked.

From Talmud I will cite to the epigraph for this chapter and this, "[…] the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the reward of transgression is transgression." (Pirke Avot 4.2).

The recognition of cohesion expressed here is on one hand quite elementary and self-evident, but on the other it is one that is difficult to maintain due to our powerful impulses of primitive egocentrism, so only to a limited extent does it effect our behavior. There is no need for high intelligence or learnedness to realize that life and its happy development is one and the same thing. This simple truth was developed further philosophically by Martin Buber in his main work, *Ich und Du* [I and Thou]: Here the concept of "I," taken in isolation, is devoid of meaning. The smallest meaningful reality in existence is the relationship between an "I" and a "you."

To the extent that this understanding grows in the mind one will be able to appreciate the cohesion mentioned above - righteousness leads to a good life, as a kind of scaffold. And while the prohibition against repaying evil with evil in Proverbs 20.22 is because the Lord will deliver retribution - " Do not say, 'I will requite evil,'/ Put your hope in the Lord and He will deliver you." – it is deduced from most developed teaching

in Judaism, the love of neighbor. Love of neighbor is seen as the truth in human life, and its flourishing according to God's purpose.

It is a central aspect of Judaism that *following the commandments is not felt as sour duty but as joyful faithfulness to God and the order of life*. "Greater is he who performs (the commandments) from love […]." (Sotah 31a). It is also characteristic that the Torah itself and its study are sources of jubilation and praise, " I rejoice over the way of Your decrees/ as over all riches./ I study Your prescepts;/ I regrd your ways;/ I take delight in Your laws;/ I will not neglect Your word." (Psalms 119.14-15). "O how I love Your teaching!/ It is my study all day long." (119.97). See also, "Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6.7). The Torah is further glorified in the following passage from Talmud, "The Torah was to God, when he created the world, what the plan is to an architect when he erects a building." (Midrash Genesis Rabbah). See also Psalm 19, which testifies to the Glory of the Lord not only regarding nature (19.2-7), but especially to Torah (19.8-12), as in 19.9, "the instruction of the Lord is lucid,/ making the eyes light up." And the deeply felt joy experienced by students in yeshiva-schools is expressed in a rabbinical tale about how deceased learned would be transferred from the earthly academy to the heavenly, where they would continue to study Torah, now taught by God Himself.

(I am reminded of Socrates who toward the end of his apology expressed delightful hope that in Hades he would be able to continue the dialogues for which his judges have condemned him to death.)

Regarding the relationship between Judaism and *Christianity* on the question of duty-happiness, we must first and foremost say that Christian answers have been as varied as Jewish answers. Apart from those already mentioned that are in contradistinction to Judaism, there are many that are quite in line with Judaism's deepest understanding. But by and large one gets the impression that Christianity has been more plagued by the problem than Judaism and therefore has been more in need for notions of salvation or condemnation in the hereafter.

IX On Faithfulness

"*Remember the days of old* […]" (Deuteronomy 32.7

If one were to point to a trait that is especially characteristic for Judaism one could reasonably mention the earnest and persistent exhortation to show *faithfulness to the past, the people's as well as one's own*. Everywhere in the Jewish Bible and in Talmud there are demands – indeed assumptions – of faithfulness toward parents, teachers, in general toward elders, toward the forefathers' relationship with God and their wisdom, and toward the history of the people. It is taken as a matter of course that one embraces one's past with strong positive feelings – of reverence and devotion – and this exhortation demands that with the help of reflection and strength of will one maintains these feelings, that is, shows faithfulness.

Already in the Decalogue we find the well-known phrase, "Honor your father and your mother […]" (Exodus 20.12). While showing respect, especially obedience, to one's parents was self-evident in many other cultures of that time (and generally has been until recent generations), the point here is that this behavior is meant to become deeply-rooted with persistent feelings of deference and love. After all, the Ten Commandments are not worldly rules of morality, they are commandments from God and therefore do not only speak to behavior but to character. The thought is the simple one, that one must *remember* – not least during the teenage years with their intoxicating perception that one is now become able to judge and act – that is through one's parents one received life, physical life as well as the foundations of spiritual life. In the same way much weight is given to faithfully maintaining a living regard for one's *teachers* and persistently holding – and showing - a deep respect for them. " A Tanna taught: Which rising up shows

honour? Say, that is four cubits. Said Abaye: That was said only of one who is not his distinguished teacher; but as for his teacher par excellence, as far as his eyes reach. Abaye used to rise as soon as he saw the ear of R`Joseph's ass approaching." (Kiddushin 33a). (Modern readers who find this instruction not only exaggerated, but completely unreasonable or laughable, are encouraged to be aware that it is only in recent times that their judgment has prevailed).

It is in this context that one should view the prominently high valuation of *the aged*. "You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old […]" (Leviticus 19.32)

The shared basis for these three forms of respect – of parents, teachers and the old – is faithfulness to the people's past as a high value. Important is the notion of " the God of your forefathers." The forefathers' relationship with God is a dear treasure and one's task is to take it over and hand it on. Likewise with *the past fate of the people*. "Remember the days of old,/ Consider the years of ages past;/ Ask your father, he will inform you,/ Your elders they will tell you […]" (Deuteronomy 32.7). "Ask the generation past,/ Study what their fathers have searched out/ For we are of yesterday and know nothing;/ Our days on earth are a shadow –" (Job 8.8). This deep interest in history was practical-existential; this was not about scholarly history, driven by an intellectual need. What was sought was to learn from the past with a view to the present and the future, to learn about just and unjust behavior. They saw it as a distinguished mark of humanity that we are able to learn from our past, so that each new generation may build on the life experiences of former generations.

Still, this is not an exhaustive account of the Israelites' view of history. It will be discussed further below in an attempt to account for a peculiarity in their view of the concept of the past.

Faithfulness to the past must also be maintained with regards to *special boons* received on occasion whether one self was the recipient or received by kinsman, a close friend or the people. The joy at the boon must be preserved undiminished and regularly be remembered and one must seek occasion to express it. Gratitude is thus a main virtue in Judaic ethics, just as it is a cornerstone in the relationship to God.

For instance, it is seen as a natural and welcome duty to be especially obliging toward a person one of whose relations once showed kindness to one's own relations.

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It is reasonable now to consider whether there isn't a special *background* for Judaic ethics so strongly to focus on faithfulness. I believe that there is such a background in its view of the concept of the past. Bringing my suppositions to bear I must remark that they are only suppositions.

It is a peculiarity of Hebrew that in contradistinction to Indo-European languages – such as Greek, Latin, the Romance and the Germanic languages – it does not have special expressions for distinction between past, present and future tenses. The nearest equivalent is a distinction between the complete and the incomplete using two main forms that therefore are named perfect and imperfect, however in a different sense than what these designate in, for example, Latin. The perfect form is often translatable as the perfect or the present, but that is not always the case; and the imperfect form can suggest something in past tense (a condition), something in the present, or something future

(including something possible or wished for or commanded), or something perpetual. Thus it is not unusual for a translation to be incomplete (when we are considering two incongruous language types) or even doubtful, in so far as a context provided for two different interpretations.

How are we from this for us unfamiliar trait of the Israelites' language get closer to their *understanding of time*?

An important and, I believe, convincing answer to this difficult question was delivered by the Norwegian theologian Thorleif Boman in his dissertation from 1952, written in German. He emphasizes that time for us, with its origin in Greek culture, is pure abstraction, created by a schematic division into past, present and future. That is, it is an entirely intellectual concept (scientific, if you will, objective), while time for the Israelites was not abstracted from its content, but it was a psychological, subjective reality, involving the whole person, not least their emotional life. As an example he mentions how Nehemiah states the timing for opening the gates of the city, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the heat of the day […]" – not "when the sun is high in the sky." What is of concern and to be expressed is *not a point in time or distances in time but an experienced duration as a totality*, as entailing necessarily connected elements and as a unity belonging to one and the same person. While our perception of time is schematic-objective, "*the speaker's consciousness* is the fixed point for the Semites, the point from which they orient actions. In this case there are two psychological possibilities: the actions can be completed or still be in process." (Boman: Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem griechischen. P 125).

In other words, the past was perceived by the speaker as something simultaneous, something belonging to his own time. To illustrate, Boman discerningly to a parallel, namely, Kierkegaard's concept of simultaneity, to live in simultaneity with a decisive past, to be contemporary with Jesus. (There are other parallels to this concept of time. It obtains in many so-called primitive cultures, but what is particular to the Jewish concept is that it has prevailed).

We now arrive at my idea of how the Israelites' concept of time may be seen as the background for their particularly high valuation of faithfulness, especially to their people's past.

Since this concept of time implies that the Israelites were intensely preoccupied by their past not intellectually, in the sense that they wanted to research it, but in an existential sense in that they always carried it with them, always lived it, one may better understand the following peculiar traits regarding their *attitude* to history.

The most important event in their past, their liberation from Egypt, was not merely recalled as a historical event. They reformed what originally had been a spring fertility festival, Pesach, to account for this event and relived it point to point, as though they themselves no less than their forefather who experienced this boon from the Lord. Through a long list of rituals and an intense sense of happiness at intimate belonging and released from the present they lived through a wonderful liberation from slavery. Orthodox Jews preserve this particular form of Pesach festivities. The people's past is not conceived as a distant object in need of scientific investigation but as a present part of life.

This existential attitude toward the past makes it easier to understand the peculiar form of historiography in the Jewish Bible, namely that nothing is tendentiously left out, added or distorted – in contradistinction to what is general found in national historiographies. (That is, apart from Chronicles which is a very tendentious work). With no muting, manifold misdeeds and sins the people have committed against the Lord are recounted. "Know then that it is not for any virtue of yours that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess; for you are a stiffnecked people." (Deuteronomy 9.6). Even of the heroes of past we are told of shocking traits (for example, about David's crime against Uriah). Non-tendentious historiography and ruthless truth, of course, also appears in the best scholarly work but in that case as a result of the scholar's ideals of objectivity and honesty. In the Jewish Bible on the other hand it is that the past simply still exists, and therefore it is not possible to leave anything out or distort; honesty is a matter of course, it is not the result of an intention, an ideal.

The difference from scholarly historiography appears more clearly in the absence of the qualities that is characteristic of that form. The Jewish Bible, thus, does not display honesty in the sense of exactitude and clear logical connection, and by not critically selecting between different traditions. An example is the two stories of creation recorded without any preference; in addition there are regular appearances of contradictions, vagueness, and repetitions. The question of which elements of the tradition would bring us closer to historical reality was never asked. The entire tradition was perceived as one's past (and thus present), the aim was not to separate one authoritative version.

That one simply lived in the tradition resulted in the previously mentioned peculiarity that readers and interpreters as a matter of course took *a liberal even creative approach to the written text*. People were in a continuous dialogue with Scripture and felt *a natural right to interpret subjectively* – not only independent from older revered interpretations or present scholarly interpretations, but, indeed, with a constructive addition of personal experience and understanding of life. A reading was thus often creative, more of a making than a finding, more of a philosophical and artistic achievement than a scholarly one.

Regarding liberalness it must be emphasized in view of the above mentioned reverence owed one's teachers that this in no way set limit to the students' freedom to defend interpretations that differed from the teacher's. Indeed reverence for teachers was accompanied by great respect for the work of the students, "The world endures only for the sake of the breath of school children. […] School children may not be made to neglect [their studies] even for the building of the Temple." (Tractate Shabbat 119b).

The creativity practiced in interpretation may be elucidated with two examples. Regarding the phrase, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3.6), this wide formulation – as opposed to "Abraham's, Isaac's and Jacob's God" – makes the point that the relationship to God always will be particular to each generation. This interpretation would hardly be acceptable to a philologist, that is, a scholar seeking the historically correct understanding. But that is not what the interpreter in the above case has attempted; he has elaborated further from the preconditions of his own time. We are confronted with a special form of philology, a creative philology. The same goes for a Talmud interpretation of Psalms 112.1, "Happy is the man who fears the

Lord." To a question of why it says "man," not human or person, the answer is that the meaning is that happy is one who over-rules his inclination like a 'man,' (that is, with manliness). (Tractate Abodah Zarah 19a).

The existential attitude to the past depicted above should make it more understandable why faithfulness has become such a central ethical ideal in *the life of the individual Jew*. Since they perceive past boons as always present, as elements of fate along with present conditions, faithfulness becomes an almost obvious duty. They are not inclined to say, "Well, that was then; let us return to our present situation, to reality;" because the past is still alive in their present.

Judaism's relatively *little need for a concept of an afterlife* may possibly be appreciated in relation to its particular view of the past. Though it is generally a human tendency to imagine, after losing someone close, that the deceased in some way or other is not definitively gone, and even that one may be granted a reunion. But such imaginings become less necessary when all one has had together is still seen as a living reality where one can find deep joy in the reliving of it, or, rather, in the continued living in and with it.

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I have wanted to emphasize Judaism's view of the past and its connection to its high valuation of faithfulness because, in my view, this is an essential feature.

In addition because this feature might hold *special interest for our time* that could be said to be characterized by the complete opposite attitude, by a prevailing future-directed orientation. We do not merely live – as people always have – in the present but nearly as much in the future. Our attention is in a way probably never before seen

directed toward the future – with anxieties, hopes, and calculations and with a narrow striving for improvements (especially regarding our finances and prestige) that are expected to bring about actual living. Thereby engagement in the present becomes limited – one is only open to half or a quarter of the simple joy the present luckily often provides – and so does a strong empathy with the past, the dimension of life that it is our species' privilege to find enrichment and learning in. Think of how our school curricula long have limited teaching of the past to the extent that our students graduate with fragmented knowledge of European history or of Danish literature before 1920. Or think of how infrequently a person over 50 is hired (or kept on), as they are regarded as worn down machines.

Comparing *Christianity's* position on the issue under discussion one, not infrequently, finds the view of the past described above with its particular connection to faithfulness; for instance, as mentioned earlier, in Kierkegaard. But it must be upheld that it is a characteristic of Judaism that the phenomenon is given such an unusual prominent position.

X On Thoughtfulness and Sensitivity

"You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God. You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another." (Leviticus 19.10-11)

There is a prevailing idea that Jewish ethics lags behind Christian ethics by only or mainly focusing on *righteousness* because it was not until Jesus's teachings that the recognition of the fact that *love* is at the heart of ethics came into play.

This notion is incorrect, but it contains some truth. It is incorrect to suggest that the Jewish Bible lacks a clear view of the emotional side of ethics. But it is true that it puts considerable emphasis on the rational virtues, those that are available to rational cognition.

This is caused by its markedly realistic view of humanity. In two ways; firstly the writers maintained the spontaneous recognition that *a human is a totality* with no distinction between body and soul; therefore *the ethical ideal became a totality of cognitive and emotional virtues*. Secondly, they held firmly to the knowledge of *humanity's deep-rooted selfishness*; thus, Jewish ethics could not aim at a spontaneous self-forgetting love of fellows, but demanded *solid help from rational morality*. "Demanded" is meant to recall that the Jewish Bible does not differentiate between the ethical and the legal and so it is not characterized by high-sounding ideals, but rather of *claims*, that *must* be fulfilled.

That ethics truly is perceived as a totality of the intellectual and the emotional, of the reflected and the spontaneous becomes clear when considering the crucial Hebrew

word Tzedakah that connotes not only righteousness, but also gentleness, compassion, empathy (indeed, also piety).

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I will now cite passages from the Jewish Bible and from Talmud to back up of my two claims – partly, that Judaism firmly insists on rational virtues as invaluable support and as necessarily belonging to the totality of the ethical, and that, at the same time, it contains highly inspiring teachings about spontaneous, warm fellowship and love as the alpha and omega of ethics.

Regarding *rational virtues*, first and foremost, an elementary righteousness is constantly and urgently enjoined – that is, for behavior that maintains the basic goods of peace and trust between people, by avoiding violence, misuse of power, lying, deception and theft. Indeed, this concerns a *negative* quality, the avoidance of injustice; but avoiding injustice, after all, represents the first step, the simplest comprehensible and realizable form of morality.

Among the numerous passages in the Jewish Bible where righteousness is emphasized, I will mention first of all the Decalogue. Its prescriptions (with the exception of honoring one's parents) concern this matter, in so far as they prohibit violence and any form of falseness. Here are a couple of examples of the how sharply formulated are the prohibitions against dishonesty: "You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures. […] .. everyone who deals dishonestly is abhorrent to the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 26.15-16). "A scoundrel, an evil man/ Lives by crooked speech,/ Winking his eyes,/ Shuffling his feet,/ Pointing his finger." (Proverbs 6.12-13). "To acquit the guilty and convict the innocent -/ Both are an

abomination to the Lord." (Proverbs 17.15). Concerning court proceedings there is a warning not to defer to the rich nor favor the poor (Leviticus 19.15). The Talmud's prohibition against condemning an accused of murder on circumstantial evidence illustrates how zealously this unshakeable sense of justice was guarded, and the Torah's demand of at least two witnesses - "A person shall be put to death only on the testimony of two or more witnesses" - is sharpened to the effect that the witnesses must have seen the actual murder take place. (Sanhedrin 37b).

Righteousness, the avoidance of abuse of power and deceitfulness, represents the negative side of the law of reciprocity, as it was expressed by the great Talmudic teacher, Hillel, "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor," that is, the principle that is often called the golden rule. (It is also stated in other culture such as in China, Indian and Greece).

But the positive side of the principle – as expressed by Jesus in Matthew 7.12 – we also find in the ethics of the Jewish Bible for example in exhortations *to show consideration*, such as through *helpfulness*, usually by reasoning how one self would like to be dealt with in reverse. In Exodus 23.4, we thus find, "When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him." This is based on a very rational morality, it is not noble, but it is highly valuable.

Finally, Jewish ethics values highly a third rational virtue, *respect*. "Do not scorn any man […]. For there is no man who has not his hour […]." (Pirke Avot 4.3). The idea is that *everyone* – as created in God's image – contains something beautiful that under the right conditions could be made to flourish. The Talmud therefore warns against being

judgmental, “One who embarrasses another in public, it is as if that person shed blood.” (Bava Metzia 58b).

This does not mean that one should hold back with reprimands. On the contrary in the verse just before the commandment to love our fellow it is stated, “Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him.” (Leviticus 19.17). “Love without reproof is not love.” (Midrash Yalkut 95).

Respect needs also be positive, in a preparedness to learn from all, “Who is wise? One who learns from every man.” (Pirke Avot 4.1). See also Proverbs, “As iron sharpens iron/ So man sharpens the wit of his friend.” (27.17). “To answer a Man before hearing him out/ Is foolish and disgraceful.” (18.13).

Respect is insisted on *especially regarding groups that were devalued to a greater or lesser extent*, as in the case of women, who were generally not considered fully equal humans (indeed, that is how they were considered until just a century ago). There are strong reminders of this kind of respect. For example in Proverbs, “ Property and riches are bequeathed by fathers,/ But an efficient wife comes from the Lord.” (19.14); What a rare find is a capable wife!/ Her worth is far beyond that of rubies. […] She is clothed with strength and splendor;/ She looks to the future cheerfully./ Her mouth is full of wisdom,/ Her tongue with kindly teaching.” (31.10 and 25-26). And in Talmud, “One must always observe the honor due to his wife, because blessings rest on a man's home only on account of his wife […]” (Bava Metzia 59a). “[…] a person is forbidden to lay a heavy yoke on his sons and be particular about their honoring him to the point that he presents an obstacle to them.” (Maimonides: Mishne Torah, Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Mamrim, Chapter 6, Halacha 8).

There are many urgent reminders against devaluing *slaves* and *strangers*. There are appeals to thoughtfulness - and at the very least to show respect, "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt […]." (Deuteronomy 5.15); "You shall not oppress the stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 23.9) Over against the (then as now) prevailing disdain and haughtiness toward other peoples Scripture shows a strong counter of respect for various peoples as particular variants of our common humanity, thus Talmud states, "The righteous among the nations of the world will have a share in the World-to-Come." (Tosefta Sanhedrin 13.2).

But as mentioned the ethics of Jewish scripture does not rest on thoughtfulness alone. It also possesses the most beautiful testimony of spontaneous fellowship among people, " As face answers to face in water,/ So does one man's heart to another." (Proverbs 27.19). And especially fellowship across social and national boundaries, " Rich man and poor man meet;/ The Lord made them both." (Proverbs 22.2). Job expresses this beautiful sentiment as he declares himself free of the sin of having demeaned his slave, "Did not He who made me in my mother's belly make him?/ Did not One form us both in the womb." (Job 31.15); and the Talmud states, "In that hour [when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea] the ministering angels wished to utter the song [of praise] before the Holy One, blessed be He, but He rebuked them, saying: My handiwork [the Egyptians] is drowning in the sea; would ye utter song before me!" (Sanhedrin 39b). Here is a demand not only for reasoned respect toward strangers, indeed toward enemies, but for a kind of family feeling. Likewise in Deuteronomy 23.8, " You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land."

We find emphatic protests against legalist morality, that is a morality that is perceived as complete when it strictly and without insight obeys the commandments, in the Talmud, “Jerusalem was destroyed only because they gave judgments therein in accordance with Biblical law. Were they then to have judged in accordance with untrained arbitrators? — But say thus: because they based their judgments [strictly] upon Biblical law, and did not go beyond the requirements of the law.” (Bava Metzia 30b). Talmud also states that there are “acts for which the offender is exempt from the judgments of Man but liable to the judgments of Heaven.” (Bava Kamma 55b).

There are a good many urgent enjoinments to show compassion toward people in distress, such as slaves and the poor and the widows, the fatherless and strangers, prisoners of war and the handicapped.

When dealing with slaves the mandate is that, “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that you bondman and the stranger may be refreshed. (Exodus 23.12); “You shall not turn over to his master a slave who seeks refuge with you from his master. He shall live with you in any place he may choose among the settlements in your midst, wherever he pleases; you must not ill-treat him.” (Deuteronomy 23.16). Regarding the poor it is stressed, “[…] do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. […] Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so […]” Deuteronomy 15. 7 and 10); “If you take your neighbor’s garment in pledge, you must return it to him before the sun sets; it is his only clothing, the sole covering for his skin. In what else shall he sleep?” (Exodus 22.25-26); “He who […] lends a *sela'* to the poor man in time of his need — of him Scripture says, Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall

answer." (Sanhedrin 76b). If a man has a complaint or is in a dispute in which he is unable to achieve his rights because of poverty, one must help him out, "He upheld the rights of the poor and the needy -/ Then all was well./ That truly is heeding Me/ - Declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 22.16).

The same kind of helpfulness – reaching beyond the mentioned rational kind – one must show to widows and the fatherless - discretely, "When you reap the harvest in the field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow -" (Deuteronomy 24.19).

Compassion is also prescribed regarding prisoners of war and the handicapped, a compassion that was unusual for its time. "When you take to the field against your enemies, and the Lord your God delivers them into your power and you take some captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman and you desire her and would take her to wife, you shall bring her into your house, and she shall trim her hair, pare her nails, and discard her captives garb. She shall spend a month's time in your house lamenting her father and her mother; after that you may come to her […]" (Deuteronomy 21.10-13). "You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19.14). When this proscription against becoming irritated at or exploiting a person's handicap appears to us rather unimpressive, we must remember that it represented a breakthrough to a completely new form of humanity – the very one that is now the foundation of our feeling that it is obvious.

In line with this empathy into the difficulties of others we also find a kind attitude to animals, " A righteous man knows the needs to his beast,/ But the compassion of the

wicked is cruelty." (Proverbs 12.10). "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing." (Deuteronomy 25.4).

Tolerance is also an expression of the spontaneous, emotional compassion for others that is regularly praised and demanded. The prophet Zechariah makes this short statement, "[…] deal loyally and compassionately with one another." (7.9). And we find another poignant passage in Proverbs, "[…] love covers up all faults." (10.12). The thought here is that when you feel great affection for another you will not take offense at the person's negative traits because you'll either overlook them or see them in the context of the basic qualities you love and admire.

Tolerance for others' sins is seen as the responsible answer to the compassion you yourself receive from God. An unforgettable illustration of this recognition – our need for mercy and our duty to act mercifully – we find in the Book of Jonah. When Jonah angrily feels that God has failed him because the punishment, it was his task to warn the sin inhabitants of Nineveh was coming, has been rescinded and because the ricinus plant that he was given to provide shade is now withering, the Lord says to Jonah, " 'Are you so deeply grieved about the plant?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'so deeply I want to die.' Then the lord said, 'You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. And should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well.'" (4.9-11).

Having now documented that the ethics of Judaism is not merely based in reason but is at the same time penetrated by spontaneous warm-heartedness, I want finally to

observe that The New Testament on the other hand not only teaches love but also – what often is not appreciated – provide strong prescriptions for righteousness, general thoughtfulness and determined compassion for others. Also in this case an ethos that involves the complete soul is demanded; in this case too righteousness involves right behavior of the whole person, as in "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (Matthew 5.6).

We must thus conclude that the assertion of a *fundamental* difference between Jewish and Christian ethics regarding righteousness and love is incorrect.

XI On the Commandment to Love Your Neighbor

"Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord,"/ "Show friendliness to your neighbor, he is human like you. I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19.18)*." (I suggest the latter translation as agued below.)*

When faced with a short, concentrated statement concerning one of life's great problems, for example, a proverb, one will often, even in the case where it is actually composed in one's mother tongue, encounter the peculiar difficulty that one or more of its words on second thought turn out to be understandable in more than one way. One is confronted with the fact that many words in a language can have several meanings, not simply meanings that are clearly separable and generally known and appearing in a dictionary, but also some that are difficult to make precise and that one must attempt to deduce from a better knowledge of the speaker. The statement, "Know yourself," for example, has two different meanings when declared by the Delphic oracle and by a Freudian – respectively, "Know yourself as a human with the implied limitations," and "Investigate and recognize your individual nature, as it is hinted at by your subconscious."

Much greater is the difficulty we encounter when the statement is composed in a foreign language, namely that we cannot always find a precise equivalent for each of the foreign words. We encounter the fact that each language produce concepts in its own way, even concepts for something as concrete as sense impressions can be untranslatable. And while untranslatability is a limited problem with languages that are related, it becomes a serious issue when it comes to a precise understanding of a statement in a completely foreign language.

This is the problem we face when we seek a precise understanding of the commandment to love our fellow in the Jewish Bible written in Hebrew, and not in an Indo-European language.

In fact, there have been and still are *a great many interpretations of how the Hebrew sentence is precisely to be understood*. The authorized version is not fully satisfactory, at least not without commentary. Therefore in the following section, I will attempt a philological clarification of the three Hebrew words the sentence is made of, and I will seek to verify the results in the context of the ideas in the text in which it appears, namely the Torah.

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The original's three words are translated in our authorized version as,

1 "(You shall) love,"

2 "your neighbor"

3 "as yourself."

1. "(You shall) love"

The Hebrew word (ve'ahavta) that has been thus translated, first of all, is peculiar because it – in contradistinction to "love" – has a very wide field of meaning. Used in regards to an individual it can be applied to a wide scale and kinds of connections, such as erotic, or the tender love between parents and children or between siblings, as well as the sense of belonging in families, or the affection among friends, as well as a students warm appreciation of their teacher, a slaves attitude to the master, the people's gratefulness to their commander.

Taking these facts as our point of departure we must seek the meaning of the word in the present sentence where it is used in general terms about our relation to other people. The two great German works *Theologicshes Wörtebuch zum Alten Testament* [Theological Dictionary to the Old Testament] and *Theologisches Wörterbuck zum Neuen Testament* [Theological Dictionary to the New Testament] point out two noteworthy features in the use of the word: it indicates an attitude of will, taking aim at an action ("nicht Trieb, sondern Wille" [not instinct, but will], "nicht Rausch, sondern Tat" [not high spirits but deed]); and that it is used about specific situations, holding knowledge of our relations to those close to us, not abstractly or philosophically ("keine kosmopolitische Liebe, die die Millionen umschlingt" [not a cosmopolitan love that embraces millions]), the word thus indicates "ein entgegenkommeddes, freundschaftlich-hilfbereites Verhalten" [an accommodating, friendly prepared-to-help manner].

This meaning fits well with the statement's character of a commandment; in as far as a commandment must not primarily be aimed at feelings but at the will. We can then provisionally maintain that the verb in the commandment to love our fellow has its primary content and weight in the sense of "exhibiting friendly behavior." Further nuances, especially a wider, idealistic perspective is derived from the third word and from the "I am the Lord" and from other passages in the Jewish Bible (see further below).

"You shall love" it must be said is a very misleading translation. First of all, "love" has a much narrower field of meaning than the Hebrew word. Our language does not have a verb that covers the spectrum of connectedness from "to love" to "to be fond of." Secondly, the narrow field suggested by "love," viz. the spontaneous, strongly passionate feeling of love lies outside – or better only in the periphery of – the meaning

of the verb in the original, which as mentioned is first and foremost an unsentimental injunction to behave from a position of good will. It is interesting to note how the word is translated in the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible written by the knowledgeable church father St. Jerome around 400CE. It achieved great importance and is still the Catholic Church's authorized translation), here the verb "diligere" the main meaning of which is "to hold in special regard" "to respect", and not "amare," which is closer to our "to love."

That the word "love" should be understood in a special way when translating the commandment to love our fellow, seems clear to many, but far from all. In reality the extemporaneously misleading translation has regularly led to misunderstandings and criticisms of the sentence and thus with Biblical ethics generally. For example, the biologist H.V. Brøndsted writes that he wonders whether the commandment to love our fellow, "actually does more harm than good. It is, after all, impossible to realize the commandment. […] Wouldn't it be better to turn down on the demands on our relationship with our fellows so that we in daily life do not continuously have to feel miserable in the face of a prescription that cannot be fulfilled? Therefore I would find it better to turn down our demands to the somewhat achievable, namely that "you shall show kindness to your fellow." (Kontroversielle essays, P. 109). But that is exactly the realism that is prescribed in the original text of the commandment!

2. "your neighbor"

There has been great disagreement about what the Hebrew word (l'reach) translated as "fellow" actually means. Some have maintained that it only pertains to the countryman the compatriot; others that it extends to all humanity. Both parties can actually cite

passages where the word must or nearly must need have their preferred reading. This is because its base meaning covers a wide field, namely, "the person one is facing now." Its probable narrower meanings are determined by its context. In the statement before us the thought is most probably directed towards the countryman, as the previous sentence in the verse states, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen." On the other hand we must take into consideration the fact that a little later on it is stated (in 19.33-34) that, "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God."

It is important to hold on to the base meaning of word and this may be suggested by the word neighbor with is connotation of nearness, that is understood as, "the person who is near by me," "the one I am currently engaging with." "Neighbor" thus corresponds exactly to the word used in the Greek version of the New Testament of the commandment, that is, "ton plesion" which means, "the one who stands near oneself."

The word in the Jewish Bible then has quite the same meaning as the one Jesus expressly clarifies. When after having referred to the commandment, he is asked what is meant by "neighbor" he answers with the parable of the Good Samaritan, who with kind helpfulness assists the injured man, he happen to come across on his way, and showed understanding that in this situation it was he who was the suffering person's neighbor (or in reverse that this person was at this moment his neighbor).

Good and useful is the following modern commentary on the word written by supreme court president Mogens Hvidt, "Let us remember, that we are not to love all the

worlds billions or all of our countrymen or all of our city inhabitants – but our neighbor. Unusually, this is a word in the singular. Thus it means quite concrete, given people, who today need our kindness, encouragement, support and prayers. Our neighbor is the one who today needs us." (Ved dagens begyndelse [At the Beginning of the Day] P.13).

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3. "as yourself"

This translation is quite correct – as a literal rendition of the word found in the original, Kamocha -, but it is easily misunderstood, and is so quite often. Generally the meaning is taken to be "(you shall love your neighbor) as much as you love yourself." But with reasonable certainty its actual meaning is, "(you shall love your neighbor) as though he were you," that is, you recognize that like you, he is a human like you. This interpretation is asserted by the remarkable theologian Leo Baeck, who translates it as, "Love your neighbor, he is like you" and explains, "In this 'like you' lies the entire point of the sentence. Given in it, is the notion of the fellow human: he is like you; he is essentially equal to you; you and he are as humans one and the same. And this word is not merely philosophy and not merely dreamy sentimentality, but an unconditional commandment, expressing the demand that in the other we honor what is like ourselves. It is not because he must achieve something or be esteemed for this or that that we show him respect, but because he is human. […] God created him just as He created us." (Das Wesen des Judentums. P. 211).

When the third word of our statement is understood in this way, the *realism* of the commandment appears. In two ways: partly because the claim does not concern only the exceptionally achievable which it would be to love every fellow human as highly as

oneself, - and partly because in so far as the commandment is a command directed at our will, it is additionally an appeal to our reason, namely to understand that the command fits with our nature.

But the *idealistic* aspect of the commandment also appears. That the other is seen as a being of the same kind, simply as a *fellow human*, means that he is perceived as having the same creator and father, that is as a fellow-sister/brother. In this way the starting position of reasoned righteousness and friendliness has the possibility of lifting itself in the direction of love.

In order to check that the presented interpretation of the *separate* words of the commandment holds we have to see them in the context of *the basic attitude that characterizes the Torah generally*.

It turns out that this understanding of the main expression of the ethics of the Torah quite coheres with its view of humans: *in the creations story*. The coherency is observed regarding all three foundational thoughts outlined above in the sentence, "God created man in His image."

Firstly, in the recognition that is appealed to in the commandment's "he is like you," that is, that all groups of humans (generations, nations, etc.) have one and the same origin – as created by God. This teaching of the unity of human kind is a main expression of the remarkably new view that broke through with monotheism. Chief rabbi Marcus Melchior expressed it in this way, " With this teaching Judaism distanced itself decisively from the old paganism. In its time every people and every tribe had is god, but every god also had its group of people. The break-up of the concept of human kind is not

less characteristic of paganism than is the break-up of the concept of God." (Man siger, at Jøderne -. P. 32).

Secondly, there is in the idea that humans were created in God's image, a rock solid confidence that we by nature are – not good, but equipped with the ability to develop in the direction of the good, thus God's commandment to us in this regard did not need a despotic formulation, but it could appeal to our reason, our recognition that it harmonized with our nature, with our condition as humans among humans.

But, Thirdly, over against this, the creation story contains a marked realistic element. Already the fact that humans are created in God's image implies, as mentioned earlier, that we were not created as *divine*, as *good* (exactly here is a sharp distancing from pagan religions and their beliefs in humans as *descended* from gods). Likewise revealing is the story of the Fall and of Cain's fratricide: human evil is a recognized reality from the very first chapters of the Torah. Thus the prominent French-Jewish thinker Bernhard-Henri Levy has in his critique of zealous idealism pointed out, as an insightful aspect of Judaism, that evil is recognized as part of the created world – he refers to the fact that the serpent already existed in paradise! – and therefore ineradicable, He reminds us that it is this realistic acknowledgement that is missing from the various world-improving "isms" that strive to create the perfect society. And it is this realism that is expressed in the fact that what God requires of humans is nothing so utopian that they should *love* one another.

The recognition that *selfishness is an ineradicable massive factor in human nature* is such a strongly prominent feature in the Jewish Bible in contradistinction to naïve radical forms of humanism. And is in line with the New Testament, which people

often overlook because they do not pay enough attention to the passionate acknowledgment of sinfulness in Psalms and in the prophets. Indeed, it may be said that the realism of the Jewish Bible is farther reaching in so far as its ethical claims to a large extent are *tempered according to its recognition of ingrown human selfishness*. Precisely by the fact that what is demanded is frequently justice, respect and friendliness and more rarely love. The interpretation of the commandment presented here as, in the first instance, taking aim at these unsentimental, relatively achievable sides of the ethical is confirmed by a general impression of the Torah (and the Jewish Bible in general): its main point is *proscription against injustice*; that is, in its demand of at least *righteous behavior*.

On this matter Leo Baeck forcefully states that, "justice is what we owe our fellows […] lifted out of mere waves of feeling and put on the ground of obvious duty, unsentimental action. We will always find warm hearted people who during their whole life wanted to make all the world happy, but who never managed to the prosaic work of seriously being a blessing to just one person." (Das Wesen des Judentums. P. 216). And regarding the dominant negative formulations of the ethical, he writes, "In everything concerning the love of neighbor the beginning is that you aim not to harm another human. […] Concerning morality the negative sets firm limits, definitive demands; from what we must not do we learn moral behavior. […] Therefore we find the constant refrain, "you shall not" in the Bible. Where this is lacking, […] there all may quickly dissolve into mere fantasy." (ibid, P. 235).

When finally we look at the nearest context in which the commandment to love our neighbor appears (as we must when attempting to verify an interpretation), we find it

among *a set of laws*. In other word, it is not primarily about what we call ethics but about legal prescriptions to a people. It is not about what in the first instance one *ought to do as far as possible* but about what one *unconditionally must do* – it is not about *ideals* but about *commands* one must fulfill in detail. Then it becomes absolutely clear that the commandment cannot be interpreted to as a prescription to love: in line with the surrounding prescriptions it is a God-given law about how the people *must behave* (and not – or rather, only secondarily – how they *ought to feel*).

The weight of the commandment's first word should then be put as, "you shall behave friendly toward…"

But since the concept of the ethical here just as in the Decalogue reached from matters of law (concerning the actions themselves) to the religious, the background stance towards life and God is only secondarily comprised in the attitude which is undeniably to a certain extent a precondition for friendly behavior (but indeed is a consequence of it). As this element with its idealistic perspective only presents itself completely in the light of other passages in the Jewish Bible I will here in the analysis of the individual words limit myself to the above and follow up with further considerations in the final section.

The fact that the concept of the ethical – as so many other concepts – is perceived in a wider spectrum in the Jewish Bible than it is for us, has often led to misinterpretations, by, on the one hand, overlooking that the ethical prescriptions in the Decalogue are not only laws, but that they have a character ethical dimension of depth, and on the other hand, that the commandment to love your neighbor is not primarily a character ideal but in the first instance a prescription for action.

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I will now seek greater clarity of the aspect of the commandment that I am especially contemplating, its *realism*. That is, the side of the ethical the commandment takes aim at in the first place, given its main focus on action followed by appeals to will and cognition.

In order to elucidate the effect – prior to a clear understanding – *the special moment of willing* can have, I will quote some, in my opinion, wise and important reflections by C.S. Lewis, "Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' you neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less. […] Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of." (C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*. P. 132-133).

The first and decisive moment for Lewis is *willingness* to follow the commandment, obey it as given by God. It is not about a process of *thinking* meant to arrive at *complete security* of its reasonableness. Neither is it about a *feeling*, a spontaneous sympathy. "[…] it would be quite wrong to think that the way to become charitable is to sit trying to manufacture affectionate feelings. Some people are 'cold' by temperament; that may be a misfortune for them, but it is no more a sin than having a bad digestion is a sin; and it does not cut them out of the chance, or excuse them from the

duty, of learning charity." (ibid. P. 132). Thus, on the one hand, our duty is not about a spontaneous response, and on the other hand it is not what we should expect in return. When we think that "it sounds a bit cold" that the commandment does not direct us to spontaneous affection, Lewis comforts us by pointing out that following it will *lead* to such a feeling.

Apart from making demands of our will, first and foremost, to friendliness, the commandment challenges us further – in just an elementary fashion – to a simple realization by *reasoning* that will guide our behavior towards *righteousness* and *respectfulness*.

Righteousness has its source in the essentially simple realization that all humans have the right to live and develop. To the extent that this realization becomes self-evident and perpetual – and thus not just remaining in the mind, but becomes flesh and blood – one's behavior will become righteous. This realization may sound unimpressive, but it is of decisive importance and, to say the least, very difficult to achieve. E.g. do we always avoid discrimination? Do we always view ourselves as but a single leaf on the tree of humanity? That the virtue of righteousness despite its apparent insignificance is elementary and powerful is clearly suggested by the fact that it is the centre of children's moral awareness; nothing can offend and vex a child more extremely than injustice.

Likewise it is simple understanding that conditions *respect* towards others, namely recognition of differences that must supplement the mentioned awareness of equality; while righteousness comes from the recognition that all humans are equal, as belonging to one species, respect has it source in the recognition that all humans are different as particular individuals. From this recognition of individuality – as the

necessary supplement to the recognition of equality – I will, when facing another, that apart from being human, my equal exemplar of the species homo sapiens, he also has (the human) particularity of being a *unique* individual, and that, therefore, he is not simply meant to submit to my ideas of what it means to be human, about good and evil, but that he is equipped with a *sovereignty* that must be respected.

How important this respect is as an ethical quality is seen clearly by the fact that it must function as a corrective in the part of the ethical that often without the usual caveats is pronounced as the noblest and absolute supreme - in matters of the most intimate love. There is great wisdom in the wedding ceremony's injunction not only to love but also to honor the spouse. If the respect for him or her as a sovereign person is lacking or withers love will halter and become monopolizing, or it becomes patronizing or sentimental.

Patronizing love has special opportunities for development in the case of parents' relationship with their almost grown children, where the parents due to their greater experience are aware of a danger, but do not live themselves sufficiently into the vital value present to the child; typically this may for a son concern driving a motorcycle, or for a daughter a late return after a party. Or, it may concern, a boyfriend or girlfriend the parents that rightly worry about, but unjustly warn against or even sabotage.

A very thought provoking and emotional example of how a deep love can take a wrong turn into paternalism when it is not hitched to an equal respect, and warm affection develops into transgression, we find in Kaj Munk's play *Love*. The main character is a minister, who has arrived in an Inner Mission parish in West Jutland, where there is poverty and constant catastrophes on the seas – storm surges and shipwreck; he sees his calling to help his parishioners in all ways based on his sense of charity that he burns for

as life's only truth. He now realizes that before anything else, what gave them their strength and the comfort to endure was their rock solid Christian faith, and so he has decided to put all his effort into working with this, despite the fact that he himself is not a believer, he is unable to believe in a loving God. – So here we have a person who with the fire of pure idealism and a need for simplicity has elevated love to be the only proper North Star and is consequently convinced that this justifies all means, it even justifies, indeed demands fundamental *deception*. But this expression of paternalistic love, putting oneself in the place of the Lord in relation to one's fellows, implies a failure not only to the duty to be truthful, but also to the respect we owe our fellows as sovereign individuals. The seemingly noble and elevated ethos of the heart overflowing with love has become unethical by sidelining two elementary, rationally founded rules of morality.

As Bonhoeffer states, "We can until the very last only serve our brother, never elevate ourselves above him. […] We do not hold the paths of our brother in our hand, we cannot hold together what will break, we cannot keep alive what wants to die." (*Life Together* [from the Danish translation] P. 92-93).

And just as love without an unsentimental corrective can develop into paternalism it can also – in the opposite direction – develop into sentimentality. By this I mean into exaggerated amiability, pleasantness and need for warm coziness, that often prevent us from putting forth the critiques required by righteousness and justice. This kind of behavior what may have its source in a loving attitude and look like love is actually nearly the opposite of love. Bonhoeffer also has a poignant expression for this, "Nothing can be more gruesome than the mildness that leaves the other to his sin. Nothing is more

merciful than the hard reproof that brings the brother back from the ways of sin." (Ibid. P. 92). It is useful to recall the verse just before the commandment to love our neighbor.

Still two dangers threaten if you, supposedly based on the commandment, perceive the ethical as simply identical to a self-forgetting love, not acknowledging this high ideal's necessary cohesion with more achievable rational forms of morality.

One danger is a *mechanism of self-delusion* whereby banned egocentrism sneaks in not merely as an occasional saboteur, but as the very foundation of the exhibited kindness. About generosity as a "gleaming seductive ideal," the Danish philosopher Johannes Sløk states incisively, "The generous person lets his generosity pour over all others; but he does not do it for their sake. He does it for himself so that in this way he may become the ideal person. He wants to give himself this particular form, to be generous. He wants that for the sake of his own inner satisfaction – and because of the general admiration that will be is reward among humans." (From the essay, "Ansvar og fælleskab" ["Responsibility and Togetherness"] in Mit Livssyn [My View of Life]. P.47-48).

But even the person who is able to stay free of such derailment and wholeheartedly submits to unlimited and all-ruling duty to self-forgetting love is exposed to serious danger. He will hardly be able to avoid being penetrated by a *noisy and tormenting feeling of inequity* in so far as he will necessarily come to realize that he constantly and frequently most gravely will fall short of his ideal. Of course there is great value in recognizing the vast chasms of ethical failure, the ever sly and evil infiltrations of selfishness, but if this realization leads to continual and complete doubting

of one's worth, serious damage will occur and in two ways: healthy self-respect is a precondition not only for happiness but also, finally, for a vital morality.

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However, as already pointed out in the first section, it is not my aim to dispute that the commandment to love our neighbor in addition to the emphasized realism also contains an uplifting *idealism*. Before reflecting on its character I must clarify how it is an extension of the abovementioned elementary rules of morality the commandment primarily takes aim at.

Thus it may stated with some reliability that regarding attitudes to the other one can posit a developmental range *friendliness over righteousness and respect to love*. Indeed, in so far as friendliness is merely based on a vague sense of kinship – an *instinctual* recognition that can also be found in animals' relation to member of their own kind – while, further, righteousness and respect derive from an insight that has penetrated the emotional depth of the personality and expresses itself as a sense of togetherness in a spontaneous fashion. That is, only with some reliability, can one establish such a hierarchy. The rational virtues of righteousness and respect do not always hold a subordinate place in relation to love, because they often have parallel functions as necessary complements, as argued above.

As an important supplement it must be mentioned that there is also another way toward the beautiful spontaneous form of loving togetherness than via practicing the will-based or cognitive virtues the commandment claims. There are rich possibilities for the spontaneous development of a sense of togetherness given by specific occurrences of spontaneous love or affection that nature and fate have grated us, if I may put it that way,

partly through friendships and the like. But it is a precondition that these granted relationships also have been attended to, that some effort has been put into them (in order to protect and develop what was given).

Hence there is an *inextricable cohesion among the will and cognition conditioned side of the ethical and the spontaneous feeling conditioned side*. The latter cannot – as did the flower children of the 1960s – be taken as a sufficient definition of the ethical. Woefully inadequate is an ethos that arrives spontaneously partly towards a few people, partly only in moments where we are in a vigorous and happy mood, or in any event untroubled. On the other hand we must recognize spontaneous, self-forgetting love as the crowing height of ethics, believe in it as a developmental possibility that lies as a gift in our nature. An article of faith that Morten Pontoppidan put forth briefly and well in a sermon in 1930 answering his parishioners' question of why God asks us to love, "Because fundamentally you already do love. If that were not the case it would have been impossible to address the command to you. Because love would not have you in her address book." (Sidste prædikener [Final Sermons]. P. 54).

So the ethical cannot be determined narrowly, whether from an ethics centred in happiness, as a flourishing of natural togetherness, or from a duty-driven philosophy or theology, as willful obedience. The situation is much like the one regarding the creation of an original artwork, which requires goal-directed effort and technical knowhow for the grace of inspiration to arrive.

At a more refined, abstract level the theme is found in *the debate between creation theologians and existential theologians*. Love – as the essence of humanity (in human nature and value - is regarded by the creation theologians as a given, as created, as

inherent in human life as created by God. Existential philosophers on the other hand regard humanity, humanness, as something that is becoming, something, that must continually come into being, that is, something that unlike our bodies that are created, first must be created, in so far as it must be *chosen*. The fundamental view goes back to Kierkegaard who uses the phrase over and over again that a human must choose himself. *But* despite his putting forth this brilliant view which reasonably could be called humanistic he had from his position of deep religiosity at the same time an eye for complementarity, to what is given, to the created, "If what I chose did not exist, but became absolute with my choice, then I would not be choosing, I would be creating; but I do not create myself, I choose myself." (Enten-Eller [Either-Or], Samlede værker [Collected Works], Vol. 3. P.200).

That the commandment to love our neighbor, closely aligned to its realistic foundation, its unsentimental demand for a solid will and cognition based morality, also contains an uplifting idealistic vision, a teaching of love as the full purpose of humanity, becomes apparent *when the commandment is put in the context of what else is stated in the Torah and generally in the Jewish Bible concerning ethics.* There we encounter as highlighted in the previous chapter, next to the morality of justice, a dimension of love in rich measure.

This we find even in the commandment itself, albeit as subtext. Notice its intimate connection with our relationship with God, made clear by the addition of, "I am the Lord." The commandment is then closely connected to the main commandment to love God with all our hearts. The basic idea is that love of God must manifest as a love of fellows. This love, which we owe our *creator*, we must realize toward out fellow

humans as our *created* fellows, “Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?” (Malachi 2.10). In the end the perspective of the commandment to love our neighbor is an exhortation to relate to our fellows not only from the recognition that they are human like us, of our kind, but from a fellow-feeling with them as brothers and sisters.

It is this completeness of the love dimension that Jesus puts at the centre of his teachings. Indeed, he sees this not only as the most meaningful but also as the only thing of importance. For Jesus it is all about teaching the ultimate truth of the human purpose given by God; that is, the full realization of goodness, not merely in our best achievable form. Therefore it is about character, not acts, which after all will depend on external circumstances.

The meaning of the commandment to love our neighbor as expressed in Jesus’s teachings differs substantially from its original. While the commandment in the Jewish Bible is part of legislation and first and mostly takes on the character of a demand that must be fulfilled since it is a directive for a particular behavior, it is presented by Jesus as a vision of ideal humanity, clearly recognized as unachievable, teaching of the disposition that will characterize the purified, saved person. The difference must be appreciated as due to their completely different aims. While the commandment in the Jewish Bible was addressed to the Israelites as compatriots in an *earthly state*, it is in the New Testament addressed to humans in *the Kingdom of God* that was felt to be just around the corner and already in view.

The commandment is then brought to us both in an earthly form and in a heavenly form. We need both forms, but in the first instance the earthly.

First, we must let the commandment lead us in specific situations, that is, in our relations with the specific people we encounter and primarily to those for whom we have been given a sense of togetherness in advance, making the task relatively easy. With this accomplished we will have rich opportunities for seeking out neighborly love (I purposely overlook the fact that some few people already from early on are graced by a thoroughgoing loving disposition).

And just as students of physics must know classical physics before they can ever hope to grasp any of the refinements and depths added to it by Einstein and Bohr, so the commandment to love our neighbor must generally at first be realized in the elementary forms of friendliness, righteousness and respect before it can be deepened and present itself in powerful spontaneous impulses of tenderness and awe.

The commandment contains not only a demand but also an enchantment, not only a duty, but also a guide to happiness. But as the most powerful drive in us is selfishness we will most often have to direct our attention to its demand, toward what is simply our duty. Only to the extent we focus our will on following the Bible's guidance do we develop our possibilities for comprehending and being penetrated by its article of faith, its rock solid teaching of love as at once our duty and our happiness. Only when we take the commandment to love our neighbor in its realistic dimension as our foundation will we have the possibility of being lifted by its idealistic perspective, its faith.

Only when the commandment to love our neighbor is understood primarily as a concrete obligation in specific situations and then as a general elevated ideal can it become more than encouraging fanfare one sings about in life's sentimental moments; only then it becomes "the sound out of heaven" that "never ceases" in our daily lives.