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DIVINE REVELATION AND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE
FROM A PROCESS THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE

PINES SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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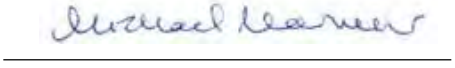
BY

Alexander Grodensky

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF HEBREW LETTERS



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A special and profound gratitude is reserved for my family, my husband Isak and our son Moritz, for their love, patience, and generosity in allowing me the luxury of engaging in research. Isak, your encouragement, presence, and steadfast support have been my foundation, and Moritz, your joy and curiosity remind me every day of the beauty of learning and discovery. The love I feel from both of you is my greatest source of strength.

This dissertation is dedicated to Isak Schneider.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the concept of divine revelation from a process-theological perspective, engaging with Jewish and general philosophical thought to reframe revelation as an evolving, relational process. By analyzing key thinkers – including Moses Maimonides, Benedict Spinoza, Mordecai Kaplan, and Charles Hartshorne – this study traces the historical development and transformation of revelation, from premodern conceptions to contemporary process theology.

Process theology challenges several classical theistic assumptions, viewing revelation as continuous, interactive, and co-creative, shaped by both divine persuasion and human active perception. This work further highlights the role of intuition in perceiving religious and moral values. Within this framework, revelation is not simply a top-down transmission of fixed truths but an interplay between divine lure and human cognitive faculties, including moral intuition, imagination, and reason.

By examining the epistemological and theological implications of this perspective, this dissertation explores its impact on contemporary Jewish thought and practice, offering a more dynamic and participatory understanding of divine-human interaction.

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Introduction

The term “revelation“ appears frequently in a variety of contexts and conveys different meanings: God’s manifestation, inspiration, communication of the divine will, giving of the Torah (text), revealing the propositions of religious truth, uncovering of the Godself, revelation of God’s acts or powers, original or historical revelation as opposed to continuous revelation, universal revelation in nature in contrast to special revelation, and revelation as a fundamental phenomenon of religious experience. All these instances differ in meaning and show a wide variety of theologies of revelation. The common element in descriptions of revelation is its supernatural character, as something that is not available or attainable through human cognitive ability alone but is given intentionally as a gift by God.

Revelation, therefore, is the reception of religiously significant information from a transcendent source. This suggests an inherent tension between revelation and reason, as revelation pertains to something, that transcends the limits of human reason. The term “revelation,” from the Latin *“revelatio,“* meaning “uncovering“ or “laying bare,“ denotes an act of commutation with the divine that results in the disclosure of information previously hidden and inaccessible, but made knowable by God. According to a common understanding, revelation is a necessary foundation of any religion, or at least for the Abrahamitic religions.

The term “revelation“ is used extensively in the writings of liberal Jewish theologians and the official statements of the movements. Among those, who align with

the stream of Judaism, which, depending on a local tradition, is called “Reform,“ “Liberal“ or “Progressive,“ revelation is often described with an attribute of “progressive,“ “ongoing“ or “continuous.“ Calling revelation “progressive“ or “ongoing“ the adherents of Progressive Judaism argue in favor of reexamination and reformulation of theological principles and of religious practice in particular. Since the revelation is ongoing or even progressive, the religious understanding and practices need a continues updating. Thus, religious reform is not only permissible, but is seen as a religious duty, it is an essence of the dynamic relationship with God. From this perspective, religious reform is not a compromise with or surrender to the tastes and believes of the current generation, it is not making religion more human, less divine, but fulfilling of a religious duty. Moreover, this implies that the change is justified not merely by rational deliberations of human individuals or committees, but by the belief in the continuous disclosure of information from a transcendent source, laying beyond the rational capacities of the human mind.

One would expect a profound discussion on the nature of revelation since it plays a central role in the justification of liberal Judaism. If revelation is ongoing, one should have a method to distinguish a piece of valid revelation from a piece of speculation of human mind. Indeed, the official document, describing the current doctrine of the Reform movement, *A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism,* adopted at the 1999 Pittsburgh Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis mentions revelation twice:

> God
> (…)
> We affirm that the Jewish people is bound to God by an eternal ברית (b'rit), covenant, as reflected in our varied understandings of Creation, Revelation and Redemption.
> (…)
> Torah
> (…)
> We cherish the truths revealed in Torah, God's ongoing revelation to our people and the record of our people's ongoing relationship with God.[1]

In the *Statement of Principles (1999)*, revelation is presented as a defining aspect of the covenant between the Jewish people and God, and it is explicitly equated with the Torah. This marks a shift from earlier platforms, where the use of the term "revelation" was not always self-evident. Notably, the *Pittsburgh Platform of 1885* omits any direct reference to "revelation." Although Kohler initially advocated for its inclusion,[2] the final version instead states:

> "We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as the priest of the one God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction."[3]

Subsequently, the *Columbus Platform of 1937* reintroduces the concept of revelation in Article 4, which addresses the Torah:

> "God reveals Himself not only in the majesty, beauty, and orderliness of nature, but also in the vision and moral striving of the human spirit. Revelation is a continuous process, confined to no one group and to no one age. Yet the people of Israel, through its prophets and sages, achieved unique insight in the realm of

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[1] *A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*. Adopted at the 1999 Pittsburgh Convention, Central Conference of American Rabbis, May 1999 – Sivan 5759, https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-statement-principles-reform-judaism/

[2] Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 268.

[3] *Declaration of Principles, „The Pittsburgh Platform",* 1885, Art. 2 https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-declaration-principles/

> religious truth. The Torah, both written and oral, enshrines Israel's ever-growing consciousness of God and of the moral law."[4]

This articulation presents revelation as an ongoing and universal phenomenon while affirming the distinct role of the Jewish people in its transmission.

However, the *San Francisco Platform of 1976* once again omits direct reference to revelation. Instead, in Article 3, it describes the Torah as emerging from the relationship between God and the Jewish people:

> "The records of our earliest confrontations are uniquely important to us. Lawgivers and prophets, historians and poets gave us a heritage whose study is a religious imperative and whose practice is our chief means to holiness. Rabbis and teachers, philosophers and mystics, gifted Jews in every age amplified the Torah tradition. For millennia, the creation of Torah has not ceased, and Jewish creativity in our time is adding to the chain of tradition."[5]

This language suggests an evolving and dynamic understanding of Torah while maintaining an ambiguous relationship to the concept of revelation.

Over time, these platforms demonstrate a fluctuating engagement with the notion of revelation, reflecting broader theological shifts within Reform Judaism regarding the nature of divine communication and human agency in interpreting religious tradition.[6]

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[4] *The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism, "The Columbus Platform",* 1937, https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-guiding-principles-reform-judaism/

[5] *Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective,* adopted in San Francisco, 1976, Art. 3. https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-reform-judaism-centenary-perspective/

[6] In comparison in Germany, the Guidelines for a Program for Liberal Judaism *(Richtlinien zu einem Progamm für das liberale Judentum)* of 1912 do not mention revelation *(Offenbarung)*, scripture is defined as "the historical foundation" *("die geschichliche Grundlage")* of Judaism (very similar to the spirit of the *Pittsburgh Platform of 1885*). The current guiding principles of the German Jewish liberal movement, which are mostly based on the Affirmations of Liberal Judaism (UK), mention revelation (translating the British formulation into German): "at Mount Sinai as

The *Statement of Principles (1999)* probably does not understand "Torah" in a narrow sense of the text of the Pentateuch but employs a wider definition including the text interpretation and Jewish religious teaching in general (Oral Torah). Nowhere in the *Statement* the Torah is defined clearly. The Commentary[7] endorsed by the CCAR explains:

> Creation, Revelation and Redemption. (…) Reform Jews interpret the phrase "standing together at Sinai" in different ways. For some, it is a metaphor expressing the belief that the Jewish people entered into a covenant with God together; for others it suggests the mystical experience of Jews receiving the Torah together. Some Reform Jews dislike the phrase entirely because it suggests a factual, geographic basis for an event which they see as primarily a spiritual reality.
> (…)
> God's ongoing revelation... our people's ongoing relationship. The Centenary Perspective said that "Torah results from the relationship between God and the Jewish people." The Pittsburgh Principles defined Torah as an ongoing dialogue between God's continuing revelation and Israel's continuing struggle to understand the ways of God, and to respond to God's presence and God's will. The Columbus Platform states that "revelation is a continuous process." The Third Draft of the Principles states that "the Reform movement believes that changing times affect the way we understand the mitzvot" and "what may seem outdated in one age may be redemptive in another." Using the word revelation reminds us that God has revealed truths to us; what we know, believe, and practice stem not only from our own thinking and experience, but insofar as they echo the truths of Torah, they also come from God (emphasis added).

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well as subsequently, through revelation and inspiration, reflection and discussion, our people gained an ever growing understanding of God's will, and that this is a continuing process." (*Affirmations of Liberal Judaism*, originally by John D. Rayner in 1992, revised in 2006, Liberal Judaism UK). The German version: *„Das Volk Israel erhielt am Sinai und in der darauffolgenden Zeit durch Offenbarung und Inspiration, durch Nachdenken und Diskussion ein zunehmendes Verständnis von Gottes Willen." („35 Grundsätze,"* Art. 5, 1997).

[7] Commentary on the Principles for Reform Judaism. CCAR. Oct. 27, 2004. https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-commentary-principles-reform-judaism/

The *Commentary*, written five years after the *Statement of Principles*, equates the Sinai event (mode, context) and the Torah (content) with revelation. It also emphasizes the key characteristic of revelation: it is God, who reveals truths to the (Reform) Jewish community. Reform Judaism's knowledge, belief and practice have their foundation in both divine revelation, under the condition that "they echo the truths of Torah," and in human cognitive capacity and experience.

The *Statement of Principles* uses the term "revelation" without clearly defining it. It seems that according to the *Commentary*, "God's revelation" is understood as God revealing truths to the members of the religious community. It is also acknowledged that there are different approaches to understand this process. It places further questions: how do we know that "what we know, believe, and practice not only from our own thinking and experience, but insofar as they echo the truths of Torah, they also come from God"? What makes us confident to say that Judaism, as we know it, reflects God's revelation? Is revelation understood as an uncovering of theological propositions?

Elsewhere, the *Statement of Principles* refers to the divine presence and the ways in which it may be experienced. The authors of the *Statement of Principles* appear to distinguish between revelation and an encounter with the divine presence. In this context, revelation is understood more narrowly, as the giving of the Torah, possibly encompassing its interpretation as well. The text does not clarify the relationship between "revelation" and "inspiration," nor does it adopt the widespread understanding of revelation as God's self-disclosure. For example, the Encyclopedia Judaica defines

revelation as "an act whereby the hidden, unknown God shows Himself to man."[8] Giving Torah, or revealing truths, is not identical with revealing Godself.

I took the example of the *Statement of Principles* completely aware of the difficulties and limits of any formulation of Jewish belief system in a short document, endorsed by a proudly pluralist and inclusive movement with a wide spectrum of theological opinions. Such doctrinal documents do not play a major role in the religious life of the people. It is not a creed (it is not sharply detailed enough) which can be used as a guideline of the belief system of a Reform Jew. The *Statement of Principles* uses careful language "We affirm," which is explained in the *Commentary* as follows:

> "Why affirm and not believe? A movement may affirm in that it teaches that something is right or true. Believe speaks of that which takes place within the individual. That a movement affirms a given statement or value does not mean that those who cannot or do not believe it are, ipso facto, outside the movement. Each resolution of the CCAR and each publication of a prayer book by the CCAR represents affirmation of values or truths. These principles follow those precedents as well as the precedents set by the earlier platforms."

Nevertheless, it reflects a widespread understanding of what people take for granted when they talk about revelation. Usually it is understood as the divine Torah or, in more general terms, divine disclosure of „truths," propositions or religious facts. But is this understanding complete or even adequate?

On the other hand, the use of the term "revelation" in the contemporary Reform context deliberately does not imply a candid belief in getting knowledge from "out there", but is a word from the religious lexicon to describe the product of human mind. "Revelation" is, therefore, a poetic code word not for some supernatural knowledge, but

[8] Edward Lipinski, "Revelation," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (Thomson Gale, 2007), 253.

a natural result of study, new insight, imagination, but especially of intuition. The contemporary references to revelation seem to be closely related to intuition, the ability to acquire knowledge without recourse to conscious reasoning.[9]

Musall, among others, claims that the overall belief in revelation plays an even less important role within the broader framework of what Judaism is in modern times.[10] On the one hand, this claim does not surprise due to secularization and widespread skepticism about definite truth, which revelation is expected to provide. On the other hand, considering the practice of Judaism, what are the consequences of this claim? Jewish liturgy takes revelation for granted, for example, in the blessing over the Torah. Revelation is the core element of the meaning of Shavuot. If the belief in revelation is less important or irrelevant, what do the relevant passages in the liturgy and Shavuot celebration mean for contemporary Jewish theology? What reformulation does the traditional concept of revelation need to become relevant for a contemporary Jew? Or better to say, what kind of religious epistemology is necessary? This dissertation shall attempt to answer this question.

Reform Judaism originated as a movement primarily focused on liturgical modifications driven by aesthetic considerations. Over time, however, it evolved into a robust theological tradition characterized by systematic and critical reflection. In alignment with the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment, Reform theology adopted

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[9] Seymour Epstein, "Demystifying Intuition: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Does It," *Psychological Inquiry* 21, no. 4 (November 30, 2010): 295–312, https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2010.523875.

[10] Frederek Musall, "The Concept of Revelation in Judaism," in *The Concept of Revelation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Georges Tamer, Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses, volume 1 (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 12.

reason as a guiding principle and embraced critical investigation as its primary methodological approach. This intellectual trajectory embedded Jewish Reform within broader European philosophical discourse. Notably, both Reform and Neo-Orthodox rabbis shared a common philosophical language, a result of their academic training in German universities.

For scholars such as Meyer, the Reform movement was not an insular Jewish phenomenon but rather part of a broader intellectual engagement with contemporary thought external to Judaism; as he puts it, "the Reform movement was not an internal Jewish development."[11] Recent academic discourse, however, has increasingly questioned explanatory models that depict cultural encounters in static and binary terms, such as "conflict," "resistance," "influence," "assimilation," "acculturation," or "appropriation."[12] Contemporary scholarship recognizes that Jewish identity and theology have always been dynamically negotiated within their surrounding cultures.

Using the example provided by Biale in his discussion of Jewish Italian history, he argues that Jews should not be perceived as external actors merely borrowing from Italian culture. Rather, they were integral participants in shaping that culture, albeit with their own distinct concerns and traditions. As Biale asserts, "The Jews were not so much 'influenced' by the Italians as they were one organ in a large cultural organism, a subculture..."[13]

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[11] Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, 9.
[12] Michael L. Satlow, "Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm," in *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext.*, ed. Anita Norich and Yaron Z Eliav, Brown Judaic Studies 349 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 38, http://qut.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=3118203.
[13] David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), xix.

This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of liberal Jewish theology, which has often been criticized for incorporating ideas from external sources, particularly Protestant theology. However, much like the Jewish experience in Italy, liberal German and American Jews did not passively adopt elements from the surrounding culture. Instead, they engaged with it as active contributors, shaping and being shaped by broader intellectual currents in an organic and reciprocal manner. Consequently, the terms "influence" and "borrowing" fail to capture the complexity of this dynamic, making them analytically inadequate for understanding the development of liberal Jewish thought.

While Satlow uses this approach for his work in ancient Jewish history, it is informative for a theological discussion as well. He highlights the ways in which Jews functioned as subjective agents fully embedded in their cultural environments. Consequently, modern scholarship on Jewish theology adopts three core methodological assumptions: (1) it prioritizes individuals and their agency over abstract concepts; (2) it acknowledges the fluidity of identity and the processes of identity formation; and (3) it assumes underlying similarities while seeking to explain points of divergence.[14]

Traditional theological paradigms often conceptualize Judaism as a "people apart," in a perpetual struggle with external cultures. This perspective parallels Christian theological frameworks that historically juxtaposed Judaism with Christianity. Such essentialist frameworks have had profound implications, influencing both Jewish theological discourse and modern Zionist thought. The historiographical trends that shaped modern Jewish theology, particularly within Conservative (Historical-Positivist)

[14] Satlow, "Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm," 40.

and Zionist traditions, emerged in 19th-century Germany. This period saw the rise of state nationalism, which in its more romantic forms, attributed a distinct and immutable essence to each *Volk* or people. Jewish historiography of the time mirrored these nationalistic trends, returning to biblical notions of 'Israel' as a uniquely distinct and self-contained nation.[15]

These essentialist narratives, however, have been increasingly scrutinized. Scholars such as Satlow emphasize the "quiet process of absorption" that characterizes Jewish cultural interactions, challenging simplistic oppositions between Judaism and external influences.[16] Satlow, for instance, critiques the notion of fixed cultural boundaries, arguing that the past two decades of scholarship have problematized the binary narratives of distinct cultures in conflict or conversation. Similarly, studies on Judaism and imperialism, as well as broader historiographical critiques, suggest that Jewish identity has historically been shaped through ongoing cultural negotiation rather than through rigid demarcations.[17]

Anderson's theory of "imagined communities" provides a useful framework for understanding the de-essentialized and continuously evolving nature of collective identities.[18] Applying this perspective to Jewish theology suggests a move towards a

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[15] David N. Myers, Re-inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History, Studies in Jewish History; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Ref. in Satlow, 46.
[16] Satlow, 38.
[17] Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E*, 3rd ed., Jews, Christians & Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, 5th ed., Hellenistic Culture and Society 31 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).
[18] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London New York: Verso, 2016).

socially constructed understanding of revelation, one that emphasizes individual searches for truth, authenticity, and relationships with the divine rather than static, inherited ideas.

A productive way forward in theological discourse involves assuming fundamental similarities between Jewish and non-Jewish cultural experiences while accounting for their distinct expressions. As Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*[19] suggests, Jewish life has always been embedded within broader social structures, simultaneously adapting and marking itself as distinct according to culturally negotiated norms. By integrating these perspectives, contemporary Jewish theology can move beyond essentialist paradigms and embrace a more nuanced understanding of identity, history, and religious experience.

I believe that the primary issue for Jewish theology today is not mere faithfulness to biblical or Talmudic formulations. Rather, theology must articulate concepts that meet contemporary needs, whether or not they can be directly derived from tradition. While historical sources provide inspiration and continuity, theological inquiry must distinguish between the history of ideas and their ongoing relevance. Ideas circulate and evolve, and rational theology has increasingly challenged traditional understandings of revelation and the authority of sacred texts and practices. This shift has blurred the boundaries between religious and scientific modes of thought, as evidenced by the

[19] „systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules..." (Pierre Bordieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.)

philosophical traditions of Kant and the contrasting approaches to theological discourse in Continental (*Wissenschaft*, science) and Anglo-Saxon (scholarship) traditions. A pressing concern for contemporary Jewish theology, then, is determining which traditional ideas regarding God, revelation, religious knowledge, ethics, and ritual remain relevant under scholarly scrutiny informed by reason and the scientific method.

Taking scripture seriously in the modern sense presents challenges beyond aligning Jewish practice and ethics with biblical law. It raises fundamental questions about whether biblical understandings of God, revelation, and prophecy can serve as viable expressions of religiosity today, rather than merely being preserved as historical artifacts. The act of reading scripture requires a conceptual framework, a theology, that determines how texts are prioritized, interpreted, and applied. Religious reading is inherently selective, and I argue that theology does not emerge from texts but from lived experience and the prevailing intellectual climate *(Zeitgeist)*. Theology should not appeal to historical revelation but rather describe reality as it is empirically apprehended.

Memory and tradition involve not only transmission but also selective forgetting, as Assmann has shown.[20] What remains in collective and individual memory shapes contemporary identity, blurring the boundaries between historical truth and ethnic honor. This raises the question: Is Judaism an ethnic religion, rooted in historical loyalty, or a pursuit of universal truth? Butler's assertion that values can remain Jewish only if they are not exclusively Jewish aligns with a fundamental principle of monotheism. She argues that Jewish values must extend beyond the Jewish framework, engaging with the

[20] Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens*, Fünfte Auflage, Historische Geisteswissenschaften, Band 9 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2020).

broader world. Jewish identity, therefore, is inherently relational, requiring continuous engagement with non-Jewish cultures.[21]

The insights of Deleuze further challenge conventional theological assumptions, suggesting that philosophy, and by extension theology, is a process of creation rather than discovery.[22] Philosophers may have believed they were uncovering universal truths, but they were, in reality, constructing ontological frameworks that helped their communities navigate an unknowable reality. Theology, from this perspective, is not the preservation or revelation of eternal truths but the creative response of specific communities to existential questions. The works of Maimonides, Spinoza, and Kaplan exemplify this dynamic, as each constructed theological systems that reflected the intellectual concerns of their time.

This dissertation examines revelation through the lens of process theology, a philosophical framework that challenges classical notions of divine immutability and omnipotence, instead emphasizing a dynamic and relational view of God. Engaging with key thinkers, including Maimonides, Spinoza, Kaplan, and Hartshorne, this study seeks to illuminate shifting understandings of revelation in Jewish thought and explore their implications for contemporary theology.

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[21] Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5. While I do not align myself with Judith Butler's overall approach to gender or her political activism, I find this assertion compelling.
[22] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Janis Tomlinson and Graham Burchell III, European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

The dissertation's structure reflects both historical development and thematic inquiry. Chapter One provides a systematic definition of revelation, establishing conceptual clarity for subsequent discussions.

Chapters Two through Five explore key figures – Maimonides, Spinoza, Kaplan, and Hartshorne – each representing a significant milestone in theology. The study begins with Maimonides' reconciliation of Aristotelian philosophy with Jewish theology, followed by Spinoza's radical critique, which reframes revelation in naturalistic terms. It then examines Kaplan's reconstruction of Jewish theology and concludes with Hartshorne's process-oriented perspective, which reimagines revelation as a dynamic interaction.

Chapter Six integrates process theology into Jewish discourse, reshaping traditional views on revelation. Chapter Seven explores its practical implications for Jewish life, particularly in prayer, and scriptural interpretation. By approaching revelation through process theology, this dissertation aims to offer a systematic footing for a meaningful contemporary theological reflection.

1. Definition of Revelation

Before delving into the thought of Maimonides, Spinoza, Kaplan, and Hartshorne, it is necessary to provide a systematic definition of the term "revelation." Establishing a clear and neutral understanding of this concept is essential for the subsequent analysis, as each of these thinkers engages with the notion of revelation in distinct ways. The following discussion will be guided by the framework proposed by Wahlberg,[23] emphasizing a definition that is as neutral and inclusive as possible. In doing so, I aim to develop an understanding that is not contingent upon any particular religious affiliation, thereby ensuring the argument's broad accessibility and acceptance. To maintain this neutrality, references to specifically Jewish thought will be minimized. Instead, the focus will be on widely circulating academic models that deepen the understanding of the concept of revelation and provide orientation within a broad range of interpretations.

Revelation, in its most general sense, involves making something previously hidden known. At its core, revelation contrasts with concealment, as it brings to light what was once obscured. The concept, however, carries a range of meanings and applications that span both religious and non-religious contexts, each connected through analogical relationships.

To clarify its usage, it is helpful to distinguish between two primary senses of the term: the process and the product. In one sense, "revelation" refers to the act or process of revealing – that is, the dynamic unfolding of previously unknown information. In

[23] Mats Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2024, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/divine-revelation/.

another sense, it denotes the content that is disclosed – the specific knowledge that becomes accessible.

Moreover, as Wahlberg highlights, the notion of agency varies depending on the context. In everyday language, one can experience a revelation as a sudden insight or realization without attributing it to an external agent (i.e., "I have a revelation").[24] Conversely, in religious contexts, revelation is typically understood as a relational event involving at least two parties: a revealer (God) and an audience. This relational dynamic emphasizes intentionality and communication, where knowledge is purposefully conveyed from one entity to another.

Mavrodes offers a useful framework for identifying the elements necessary for a revelatory claim: *m* reveals *a* to *n* by means of *k*.[25] According to this scheme, an act of revelation involves a revealer, i.e. God, (*m*), an audience (*n*), and content (*a*) that is made known or available to the audience through some means (*k*).

The nature of *a*, the content of the revelation, is a matter of debate. Some argue that the content consists of propositions about or related to God, while others contend that the content is Godself, or possibly both.

There is an ongoing debate regarding *n*, the audience of the revelation, particularly concerning its scope. The discussion centers on whether the audience consists solely of those who have actually acquired knowledge through the revelation or if it also includes individuals who had the potential to gain such knowledge but ultimately did not. This issue pertains to whether revelation inherently requires the effective communication and

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25 Mavrodes, *Revelation in Religious Belief*, 88–89.

adequate comprehension of knowledge or if it also encompasses instances where information is merely disclosed or made accessible, irrespective of whether it is understood or accepted.[26]

A common distinction concerning the audience (*n*) is between general (or universal) revelation and special (or particular) revelation. General revelation refers to knowledge made universally available to all people, whereas special revelation is directed (either directly or initially) to a specific, limited group of individuals.

General revelation is often equated with natural revelation (and rational theology), although the latter term pertains to "the means of revelation *(k)* rather than the audience." The natural world, including human beings, "is available to all" and is therefore considered the most plausible "means for a general revelation." However, it is also conceivable that God could communicate a general revelation through actions outside the natural order, such as "making miracles visible to everyone."[27]

To be precise, supernatural revelation, rather than special revelation, serves as the counterpart to natural revelation. The concept of the supernatural pertains to alleged divine interventions that go beyond God's routine activity of creating and upholding the world without suspending the laws of nature. However, in common discourse, the terms "general revelation" and "natural revelation" are often treated as synonymous, just as "special revelation" and "supernatural revelation" are frequently used interchangeably.[28]

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[26] For different views, see: Martijn Blaauw, "The Nature of Divine Revelation," *The Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 1 (2009): 2–12, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2008.00435.x.
[27] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[28] Wahlberg.

Our primary focus is on special revelation (or revealed theology). An important aspect of this concept is whether special revelation is considered closed (given once or during a specific period in the past) or ongoing (progressive). However, even among those who accept ongoing revelation, it is typically understood as dependent on a foundational event (e.g., Sinai) and not as introducing any radically new doctrinal content.[29]

Another relevant distinction in this context is between public and private revelation. Public revelation refers to knowledge that is recognized as revealed to the community. In contrast, private revelation consists of supernatural visions or mystical experiences granted to individuals, which are not necessarily acknowledged as revelatory by the wider community.

In relation to the means of revelation (*k*) there can be manifestational and non-manifestational revelation. Manifestational revelation occurs when someone shows or otherwise makes some reality apparent or visible. In comparison, non-manifestational revelation happens when something is revealed without being directly shown or manifested – such as through verbal communication.[30]

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[29] This does not mean that doctrines or religious norms cannot be changed or abrogated; rather, the possibility of such changes are typically integrated within the system itself. In Judaism, for example, it is recognized that "the abrogation of a law is sometimes equivalent to the maintenance of the law," meaning that setting aside a law can be as meritorious as upholding it (bMenachot 99b). Similarly, it is stated that "it is better that a single law be uprooted than that the whole Torah be forgotten" (bTemurah 14b). Additionally, "there are times when the duty of working for the glory of God requires the abolition of a law" (bBerachot 54a and 63a).

[30] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation.". See also, Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 26; Sameer Yadav, "Biblical Revelation and Biblical Inspiration," in *The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation*, ed. Balázs Mezei, Francesca Aran Murphy, and Kenneth Oakes (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2021), 35-49.

Mavrodes further divides non-manifestational revelation into two types: the "communication model" and the "causation model" (in addition to a "manifestation model" that corresponds to manifestational revelation). In the communication model, revelation is understood as a direct linguistic activity by God. In the causation model, revelation happens by God causing or implanting beliefs within individuals, either from the beginning of their existence or at a later point in time.[31] Mavrodes connects "causation model" with "innate theology", which is based on the idea that humans are originally equipped with the "innate" ability to acquire knowledge without empirical reference.[32]

Wahlberg observes, that in manifestational revelation, the means of revelation is "a direct presentation or manifestation of the very reality that God wishes to reveal," such as Godself. In this type of revelation, propositions are not involved. "God is not a proposition, nor does God possess a proposition as 'content.'" Therefore, a key difference between manifestational revelation and propositional (non-manifestational) revelation is that propositions play a significant role "in the means of the latter but not in the former."[33]

However, continues Wahlberg, this distinction does not seem to apply to the content of revelation. Propositions arguably form part of the content of both manifestational and propositional revelations. To illustrate this, consider the example of someone revealing an object by showing it to another person. This act not only reveals the object itself but

[31] Mavrodes, *Revelation in Religious Belief*, 73–74.
[32] Mavrodes, 40–41. He refers in this context to Plato, Descartes, Calvinist philosophers (like Plantinga, Wolterstorff), Noam Chomsky.
[33] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."

also conveys certain propositions about it. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand how the act qualifies as a revelation. Since revelation inherently involves an epistemic dimension, it must make something known or knowable. That necessarily includes "making at least some propositions known or knowable."[34]

It could be countered that knowledge by acquaintance exists and is not reducible to propositional knowledge. However, it is difficult to understand how one could have knowledge by acquaintance or personal knowledge of God without also possessing some propositional knowledge about God. For instance, how could someone know God by acquaintance without also knowing that this God exists (a piece of propositional knowledge)?[35]

For this reason, many argue that the supposed contrast between the revelation of propositions and divine self-revelation is misguided. God could not reveal Godself without simultaneously making knowable certain propositions about God. Therefore, propositions must be part of the content (*a*) of both propositional and manifestational revelations. However, in manifestational revelations, propositions do not function as the means (*k*).[36]

Another key difference between propositional and manifestational revelation lies in the need for interpretation. In manifestational revelation, the audience encounters raw material, such as Godself or a remarkable historical event. These forms of revelation are

[34] Mats Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 30–31.
[35] Ryan A Wellington, "Divine Revelation as Propositional," *Journal of Analytic Theology* 7 (July 19, 2019): 166, https://doi.org/10.12978/jat.2019-7.17-51-51220413.
[36] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."

rich with information, leaving it to the recipient to determine which aspects of the manifestation to focus on and how to interpret them.[37]

In contrast, propositional revelation presents the audience with words and sentences specifically crafted to convey a clear and definite message. Compared to manifestational revelation, this form allows for much less interpretative flexibility, as the linguistic medium is designed to communicate a more precise meaning.

A similar dynamic likely applies to cases where God directly communicates knowledge to a person's mind. Therefore, although interpretation plays a role in receiving both propositional and manifestational revelation, less interpretation is required for propositional revelation.[38] It follows, then, that if God intends to convey a relatively specific cognitive content, there would be a strong reason to use some form of propositional revelation, possibly alongside manifestational revelation.[39]

Some thinkers criticize the concept of propositional revelation, primarily due to concerns about its implications for interpretation of scripture. Although various critiques have been offered,[40] Dulles presents a common argument against propositional revelation:[41]

1. If propositional revelation exists, it is found in the Bible.
2. If propositional revelation is present in the Bible, it must be communicated through literal language that clearly expresses divinely revealed propositions.

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[37] Wahlberg.
[38] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 29.
[39] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[40] Paul Helm, "Revealed Propositions and Timeless Truths," *Religious Studies* 8, no. 2 (1972): 127–36, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500005643.
[41] Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 48–49.

3. However, this is unlikely because the Bible frequently uses metaphor and narrative rather than literal language. Additionally, the text contains problematic or erroneous claims, and historical-critical scholarship demonstrates that it is shaped by the historical, cultural, and political contexts of its human authors.
4. Therefore, the Bible does not contain propositional revelation.
5. Consequently, propositional revelation does not exist.

A straightforward response to this argument highlights its underlying assumption that either the entire or some parts of the Bible consist of propositional revelation, or none of it does. However, many proponents of propositional revelation reject this response. They maintain that it is reasonable to regard the whole Bible as authored by God and as conveying propositional revelation.

Wahlberg summarizes the defense arguments of proponents of divine authorship.[42] In response to premise 2, they maintain that propositions can be conveyed through metaphorical and other non-literal forms of language. Consequently, affirming a propositional model of biblical revelation does not necessitate a strictly literalist reading of the text.[43]

With regard to premise 3, these scholars further argue that divine authorship is not incompatible with the text reflecting the cultural and personal perspectives of its human authors. According to this view, God may have authored the Bible by utilizing human modes of discourse, thereby transforming human expressions or speech acts into tools of

[42] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[43] Samuel Fleischacker, "A Defence of Verbal Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology*, ed. Steven Kepnes, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 423–52; Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, Ch. 11-12.

divine communication.[44] If this is the case, biblical interpretation must carefully distinguish between the intentions and messages of the human authors and those of the divine author. While the former may incorporate errors or morally problematic perspectives, these elements are not necessarily endorsed by the divine author.[45]

The debate over propositional revelation in scripture raises important questions about God's inspirational role in the production of the text.[46]

Wahlberg shows differences between theories of "verbal inspiration," "content theories," and "social inspiration."[47] According to theories of "verbal inspiration," God exercises "detailed guidance controlling the authors' choice of words." However, this does not necessarily imply a process of divine dictation, which is better understood as a subset of verbal inspiration. In contrast, "content theories" propose that divine influence operates at the level of statements or propositions. These theories vary in scope, ranging from detailed guidance on specific propositions to more general inspiration limited to the main ideas of the text. It is also possible to imagine varying degrees and modes of inspiration across different parts of scripture. "Social inspiration" offers yet another perspective, emphasizing the complex historical development of the texts, which

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[44] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, Ch. 3; for criticism, see: Michael Levine, "God Speak," *Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (1998): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412597004162.
[45] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[46] Stephen T. Davies, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 41–44.
[47] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."

includes not only individual authors and editors but also processes of oral transmission within social contexts.[48]

A central challenge lies in determining whether a theory of inspiration (especially in the cases of verbal inspiration and content theories) can be sustained. Beyond the critiques posed by biblical criticism, such theories must also account for the coexistence of divine inspiration with the autonomy of human authors. Specifically, they must reconcile the notion of divine influence with the idea that human authors maintain genuine authorship, rather than functioning merely as passive instruments or marionettes.

The distinction between propositional and manifestational revelation is quite broad. To provide a more nuanced categorization of theories of manifestational revelation, Dulles proposes a useful typology. He classifies contemporary theological accounts of revelation into five major categories, based on their central understanding of how and where revelation occurs. In addition to propositional revelation, Dulles identifies four models of manifestational revelation.[49] [50]

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[48] Wahlberg. Ref. to Pierre Benoit, *Aspects of Biblical Inspiration* (Chicago: Priory Press, 1965), 24–26; James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, n.d.), 27.

[49] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 27.

[50] Brill expands on Dulles' four models of revelation by introducing two additional categories: "revelation without content" and "hermeneutical revelation." (Alan Brill, "Jewish Models of Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology*, ed. Steven Kepnes, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 335–41.). He confesses, that "revelation without content" is arguably not a form of revelation in the traditional sense at all (Brill, 335.). Brill places Martin Buber in this category, as Buber views revelation as presence rather than a transmission of content. In this perspective, revelation is an ineffable experience: "a pure form that carries not an iota of determinate or object-like conceptual or linguistic content". For Buber, revelation's purpose is relational rather than informational; it is the experience of "touching You" (Martin Buber, *I-Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's

"Revelation as History." This model associates revelation with God's significant actions in history, such as the Exodus. In this view, the Bible serves as a record of these divine acts but is not considered part of the revelation itself.[51] Some proponents of this model argue that supernatural cognitive assistance is required to interpret these historical events correctly,[52] while others contend that such assistance is not necessary.[53]

"Revelation as Inner Experience."[54] This model views revelation as a "privileged interior experience of grace or communion with God."[55] Some advocates argue that this experience is "pre-conceptual," occurring at a deep level of consciousness that transcends ordinary worldly experience. Others interpret these experiences as conceptually structured, resembling perceptual experiences.[56] The pre-conceptual perspective faces epistemological challenges, particularly regarding how non-conceptual

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Sons, 1958), 112.). He describes it as a pure moment of being: "That which reveals is that which reveals. That which has being is there, nothing more. The eternal strength streams, the eternal contact persists, the eternal voice sounds truth" (Buber, 150.). I would classify this perspective under "revelation as dialectical presence". The second model, "hermeneutical revelation," is linked by Brill to Emmanuel Levinas. However, I disagree with this categorization. Hermeneutics is not itself a form of divine revelation but rather a method for interpreting and understanding revelation, particularly in the context of scripture. Since hermeneutics is integral to any model of revelation, it should not be treated as a distinct category.

[51] Brill distinguishes between two versions of this model: "covenantal theology" and "existential revelation", attributing Jon Levenson as an example of the former, Eliezer Berkovits and Emil Fackenheim of the later. (Brill, "Jewish Models of Revelation," 323–25.)

[52] John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 65. Ref. in Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."

[53] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Dogmatische Thesen Zur Lehre von Der Offenbarung," in *Offenbarung Als Geschichte*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg, 5th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 91–115. Ref. in Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."

[54] According to Brill, Abraham J. Heschel, Aryeh Kaplan, Abraham Isaac Kook can be associated with this model. (Brill, "Jewish Models of Revelation," 330–31.).

[55] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 27.

[56] William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

inner events can justify beliefs about God or how such experiences can be about God at all.

"Revelation as Dialectical Presence."[57] In this model, scripture is not considered revelation itself but rather the medium through which revelation flows whenever God chooses to make it occur. Given that God is understood as radically Other and thus inherently unknowable to humans, revelation is portrayed as a dialectic of simultaneous "veiling" and "unveiling." The aim of this model is to reconcile the paradox that, on one hand, revelation communicates real, objective knowledge of God, yet on the other hand, that God transcends all human categories and created means of communication.

"Revelation as New Awareness."[58] This model interprets revelation as a transformation of human subjectivity, described as the "fulfillment of the inner drive of the human spirit toward fuller consciousness." Rather than revealing God as an "object," this approach suggests that God may be "mysteriously present as the transcendent dimension of human engagement in creative endeavors." Fundamentally, revelation in this context involves a renewed perception of the self and the world, rather than direct knowledge of God.[59]

Dulles's models are theoretical constructs, and it is possible to combine elements from different models. Fackre notes that an individual thinker may employ different models depending on the context and purpose.[60] However, neither individually nor in

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[57] Brill sees Aharon Lichtenstein, Joseph Dov Soloveitchik and Yeshayahu Leibowitz as representatives of this model. (Brill, "Jewish Models of Revelation," 325–28.).
[58] Jacob B. Agus, Bernard Bamberger, Harold M. Schulweis, Louis Jacobs could be seen as representatives of this model. (Brill, 332–35.).
[59] Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 98, 99, 28.
[60] Gabriel Fackre, *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997).

combination can the manifestational models outlined above adequately explain how knowledge of God's properties (e.g., omnipotence) is acquired.[61]

Wahlberg emphasizes, that the presence of revelatory claims across various religions and within different groups of the same religion prompts the question of epistemic justification: Can these claims be justified, and if so, how?[62] Here, "being justified" is understood in light of Plantinga, in the sense of possessing "positive epistemic status" – that is, being "right, proper, acceptable, approvable, or meeting an appropriate standard."[63] I agree with Plantinga, who nevertheless acknowledges that "what you properly take to be rational or warranted depends upon what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt."[64]

Wahlberg reviews non-inferential, inferential (evidentialist) and sui generis models of justification for revelatory claims.[65]

A claim is non-inferentially justified when its positive epistemic status arises from basic beliefs,[66] rather than from an inferential process based on evidence. Non-inferential approaches to justification exist for both general (natural) and special revelation.

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[61] Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study*, Ch. 3.
[62] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[63] Alvin Plantinga, "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): 1, https://doi.org/10.2307/2214067.
[64] Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 40.
[65] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[66] Examples of basic beliefs: "I feel pain in my back.", a belief that is formed directly from the sensory experiences and is typically accepted without the need for further justification. "I did not have breakfast this morning.", a belief based on memory. "2+2=4", a mathematical truth. "My son is happy when he smiles", a belief based on social interactions. "The physical world exists independently of my perception.", a belief of the reality of the external world.

As Wahlberg reports,[67] some philosophers have proposed a perceptual interpretation of natural revelation, suggesting that "intentional design" can be directly perceived in nature, much like it can be inferred from human behavior. Since the perception of intentional design implies the existence of a designer, this view positions nature itself as a medium through which divine reality is revealed. In this context, experiences of natural world could provide immediate, non-inferential knowledge of a creator, thus functioning as a form of general revelation.[68]

Psychological research further complicates this picture by suggesting that humans exhibit a natural tendency toward teleological beliefs about nature. This inclination may predispose individuals to religious interpretation of the world, potentially supporting the plausibility of natural revelation.[69] However, a critical distinction must be made between a general belief in God and the acceptance of specific revelations, based on textual or oral tradition.

Dawkins challenges the notion that religiosity, and by extension receptivity to revelation, is innate. He argues that the human tendency to attribute purpose and agency

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[67] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[68] Mats Wahlberg, *Reshaping Natural Theology: Seeing Nature as Creation* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really LiesScience, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Ch. 8, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199812097.001.0001; C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199217168.001.0001.
[69] For example, Barret claims, „belief in God is an almost inevitable consequence of the kind of minds we have. Most of what we believe comes from mental tools working below our conscious awareness. And what we believe consciously is in large part driven by these unconscious beliefs."; "that beliefs in gods match up well with these automatic assumptions; beliefs in an all-knowing, all-powerful God match up even better." Justin L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 31.

to the world arises not from a built-in religious instinct but rather a byproduct of the evolution of cognitive mechanisms developed for survival. According to Dawkins, the Hyper-Active Agency Detection Device (HADD)[70] evolved to help early humans recognize threats by attributing agency to ambiguous stimuli (e.g., assuming that a rustling in the bushes signals a predator), which results in an excessive number of false beliefs.[71] While this bias may predispose individuals to believe in supernatural agents, Dawkins contends it does not constitute reliable grounds for belief in revelation. Rather he views religious ideas as culturally transmitted memes,[72] and emphasizes that children adopt religious beliefs primarily due to their natural deference to authority, not because of an innate sensitivity to the supernatural.[73]

The question remains whether evolutionary explanations of religious belief necessarily undermine the possibility of supernatural revelation. Dawkins maintains that evolution theory undercuts the credibility of the perception of the indented design and by extension, natural revelation.[74] Others, however, propose that evolution could itself be the medium of divine self-disclosure. According to theistic view on evolution, God may

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[70] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2007), 214.
[71] The term "Hyper-Active Agency Detection Device" (HADD) – the tendency to attribute agency and intentionality where it does not exist or is unlikely to exist – was coined by Barret (Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?*). Note that Barret and Dawkins make opposite conclusions.
[72] Meme is "an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture." ("Meme." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme. Accessed 2 Mar. 2025.).
[73] Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 222–34.
[74] "The metaphysical worldview one adopts has significant ramifications for one's conceptualization of the intersection between cognitive science and natural theology. If metaphysical naturalism is right, the intuitions that underlie natural theology are incorrect; if theism is right, they are correct." (Helen Cruz and Johan De Smedt, *A Natural History of Natural Theology: The Cognitive Science of Theology and Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 4–5.).

act indirectly through evolutionary process, guiding outcomes in ways that reflect divine intentionality. If so, the contingent unfolding of nature could be interpreted as revelatory of divine will.

Furthermore, one could object to the thesis of direct cognition of intentional design by arguing that forming beliefs about design requires a complex conceptual background. Consequently, design beliefs cannot be regarded as purely perceptual.

Also, in the context of special revelation, some theories propose the possibility of direct, perceptual justification. Alston[75] argues that God could be perceived in a nonsensory manner, and that such "mystical perception" can justify beliefs about God. Different religions maintain distinct, socially established "doxastic practices" (belief-forming habits) grounded in alleged experiences of the divine. Beliefs produced by rational doxastic practices can be challenged by "over-rider" systems intrinsic to the practices themselves. In the case of "mystical perception," this includes a religion's doctrinal teachings, which evaluate the authenticity of mystical experiences. Alston contends that the "Christian mystical practice," which provides substantial self-support by effectively "predicting" or guiding spiritual growth, can be rationally followed and, therefore, generate justified beliefs about God.[76]

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[75] Alston is particularly noteworthy in the context of this dissertation as a former student of Hartshorne, yet his theological stance diverges significantly. While he acknowledges aspects of Hartshorne's neoclassical, dipolar theism, where God is unchanging in some respects (e.g., existence) but dynamic in others (e.g., responding to suffering creatures), he largely adheres to a monopolar theism. This means he prioritizes one side of conceptual contrasts over the other, aligning more closely with classical theism. He affirms God's omnipotence, omniscience (including foreknowledge of future contingencies), and eternal existence, understood as being beyond time and space. See: Daniel A. Dombrowski, "Alston and Hartshorne on the Concept of God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 36 (1994): 129–46.

[76] Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*.

The principal challenge to the notion of direct perceptual encounters with God lies in the existence of religious diversity and the apparent contradictions among the outcomes of competing mystical practices. Alston acknowledges the existence of genuine disagreements between religions and suggests that certain realms of reality may be so challenging to perceive that achieving widespread consensus is exceedingly difficult or even impossible, even if some accurate cognition of that realm is attained.[77]

Turning now to evidentialist justifications, one of the most influential accounts of the evidentialist justification of revelatory claims, according to Wahlberg,[78] is presented by Swinburne. His argument is based on probability calculus and Bayes' Theorem.[79] According to Swinburne, rational acceptance of a revelatory claim must be grounded in evidence, with the required strength of evidence depending on one's background beliefs. If there are strong reasons to believe, independently of any claimed revelation, that God exists and that a revelation from God is likely, then rational acceptance of a revelatory claim can rely on more modest evidence than would otherwise be necessary. Consequently, Swinburne places significant emphasis on building a case for the existence of God through natural theology and then determining the probability of a revelation through *a priori* reasoning about God's likely actions.

Swinburne argues that natural theological arguments make God's existence at least as probable as God's non-existence and that *a priori* reasoning about God suggests that a revelation is to be expected. According to Swinburne, a God who creates rational beings

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[77] Alston, 267.
[78] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[79] Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 345–56.

would naturally desire to interact with them. For meaningful interaction, these beings would need knowledge about God's nature and character that goes beyond what is naturally accessible. Additionally, it would be beneficial for humans to receive moral guidance and encouragement to lead morally good lives. Given God's goodness, these considerations make a revelation likely.

Swinburne further contends that a divine revelation would not be accompanied by overwhelming evidence, as this would negate the need for human effort in seeking truth. By requiring some degree of searching, the revelation would promote human cooperation, shared responsibility, and a genuine desire for the goal of salvation. Moreover, since the message of revelation would need to be translated across cultures and time periods, it would necessarily include a means of continuing guidance, namely, a religious authority capable of ensuring accurate interpretation and transmission.[80]

Swinburne, assuming that revelation is likely, proposes four criteria for evaluating revelatory claims: [81]

1. Content: the revelation must concern matters crucial to human well-being and not be highly improbable based on independent grounds.
2. Miracle: a divine revelation should be accompanied by a unique divine signature, such as a miracle that violates natural laws.
3. Interpretation: a true revelation must establish a legitimate interpretive authority whose interpretations align plausibly with the original message.

[80] Swinburne, 103–4.
[81] Swinburne, Ch. 6.

4. Plausibility: the authority's interpretations should not be highly implausible based on other independent considerations.

Applying these tests, Swinburne concludes that Christianity is the only viable candidate for genuine revelation.[82] A common critique is that his framework relies on Christian assumptions rather than neutral, *a priori* reasoning. For instance, he asserts that divine incarnation and atonement are likely, making them part of the content test – an argument many see as biased and retroactively shaped by Christian doctrine.[83]

Wahlberg[84] brings in Plantinga's critique, who argues that complex inferential cases for Christianity, like Swinburne's, are doomed to fail. Such arguments rely on a chain of logically independent propositions, most of which are only probable rather than certain. Since probabilities must be multiplied at each step, the overall likelihood of the conclusion decreases. Even with generous estimates (such as assigning a 0.9 probability to God's existence) the final probability of Christian revelation remains below 0.5. Thus, Plantinga concludes that such arguments cannot establish warranted belief in Christianity, at best showing only that its core teachings are not highly improbable.[85]

This critique challenges the entire inferential approach, but a counterargument suggests it proves too much. All historical arguments, secular or religious, involve probabilistic chains, and if Plantinga's principle holds universally, no historical

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[82] Swinburne, 337.
[83] Eleonore Stump, "Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy, by Richard Swinburne," *The Philosophical Review* 103, no. 4 (1994): 739, https://doi.org/10.2307/2186116.
[84] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[85] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 271, https://doi.org/10.1093/0195131932.001.0001.

argument could ever succeed. While he acknowledges some objections, he ultimately maintains his position.[86]

Wahlberg mentions[87] Menssen and Sullivan, who respond to the dwindling probabilities objection by defending an inferential approach similar to Swinburne's but with a more holistic perspective.[88] They agree that a complex proposition cannot have a higher probability than any of its components but argue that it can "still be more believable*"* in certain cases.[89] They illustrate this with the discovery of Neptune: scientists did not first prove the weaker claim that "a planet exists beyond Uranus" and then the stronger claim that "a planet is perturbing Uranus's orbit." Instead, they confirmed the weaker claim by establishing the stronger one.

Applying this reasoning to religious belief, they argue that revelatory claims should not be contingent on first proving God's existence through traditional natural theology. Instead, investigating revelation should be part of the broader case for theism, provided the existence of a world-creator is not highly unlikely. They further claim that rejecting the existence of a good God is unjustified unless leading revelatory claims have been seriously considered.[90]

Their argument for God's existence rests on the idea that something must have existed eternally. Since no one consistently accepts uncaused events, denying an eternal

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[86] Alvin Plantinga, "Replies to My Commentators," in *Plantinga's "Warranted Christian Belief": Critical Essays with a Reply by Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Dieter Schönecker (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 271, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110430202.
[87] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[88] Sandra Menssen and Thomas D. Sullivan, *The Agnostic Inquirer: Revelation from a Philosophical Standpoint* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 55–56.
[89] Menssen and Sullivan, 61.
[90] Menssen and Sullivan, 63.

existence is intellectually dishonest. Given the possibility of a world-creator, special revelation deserves serious attention, as it provides knowledge beyond human capabilities, particularly about our moral duties, and how to fulfill them.

According to Menssen and Sullivan, rejecting the potential of revelation before establishing God's existence would be akin to refusing to "listen to the voice of the accused." They illustrate their claim with an analogy: imagine receiving a letter from someone who claims they are willing to die for you. If asked whether such a person exists, you would reasonably affirm their existence on the basis of the letter itself, without needing to search the entire world to verify its authorship, the letter functions as self-authenticating evidence of the author's existence and intent.

The issue with this approach is that numerous "letters" exist, each claiming different and often contradictory truths. How do we determine which revelation to accept and which to dismiss? Applying the same analogy, what if the letter not only asserts that someone is willing to die for you but also claims that this being is a "square-circle" (or other logical impossibility)? Would we still believe in the existence of this person, or would we instead conclude that the letter is a hoax or deception?[91]

Some critics argue that Swinburne overlooks the influence of emotions, desires, and will in the process of coming to faith.[92] Is belief in divine revelation purely a matter of Bayesian probability calculations? This issue in Swinburne's reasoning, and in

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[91] Owen Anderson, "The Agnostic Inquirer: Revelation from a Philosophical Standpoint, by Sandra Menssen and Thomas D. Sullivan," *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 16, no. 4 (2009): 604.

[92] Martha Nussbaum argues that emotions are not irrational impulses but deeply cognitive responses that play a crucial role in reasoning. (Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2001), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840715.)

evidentialist approaches more broadly, has been addressed by Moser, who incorporates "an existential-affective dimension in the inferential project."[93] He contends that our ability to perceive evidence for God's existence may be shaped by our volitional and emotional states. He argues that other approaches (skepticism, scientific naturalism, fideism, natural theology) fail to account for the purposive nature of divine self-revelation and the importance of human willingness to be transformed.[94]

Moser contends that evidence for God's existence is not merely passively available but purposively available, meaning it is presented in a way that aligns with God's intent in self-revelation. Rather than being abstract or purely intellectual, this evidence is deeply personal, morally and existentially challenging, non-coercive yet authoritative, and ultimately aimed at transforming human purposes to align with the divine.

At the core of Moser's framework is the idea of "personifying evidence of God," which suggests that divine evidence must be embodied in intentional agents, specifically, humans who willingly receive and reflect God's moral character. This transformation, he argues, serves as intrinsic evidence of God's existence.[95]

Moser develops an argument based on the reception of what he calls a "transformative gift":

1. If a person has been offered and has "willingly unselfishly" received the transformative gift, it is the result of God's power.

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[93] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."
[94] Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511499012; Paul K. Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511817731.
[95] Moser, *The Evidence for God*, Ch. 4.

2. The recipient has been offered and has "willingly unselfishly" received this transformative gift.
3. Therefore, God exists.[96]

While I find this argument lacking in evidential value for anyone other than the individual who experiences the transformative gift: it seems unlikely to persuade anyone who is not already convinced of God's existence. Moser's approach carries significant implications. First, it shifts the emphasis from intellect to the human will in receiving evidence of God. Second, it reframes divine hiddenness as an expected aspect of God's purposive revelation rather than a reason for skepticism. Finally, it reorients philosophical inquiry from a detached discussion mode to an obedience mode, where the pursuit of truth is inseparable from a willingness to be personally transformed by it.

An alternative perspective and the last that has yet to be explored with the help of Wahlberg[97] is that belief in divine revelation eludes epistemological explanation. On this view, humans are not equipped to develop knowledge of God, rendering such knowledge inaccessible within any standard epistemological framework. Rather, it is God who imparts this knowledge directly, wholly unconstrained by conventional epistemic criteria.

This chapter has sought to establish a systematic and inclusive definition of revelation, clarifying its conceptual scope across philosophical and theological discourse. In this study, revelation is understood as a movement from concealment to the disclosure of truth, referring either to the process of revealing or to the content revealed

[96] Moser, *The Elusive God*, 135.
[97] Wahlberg, "Divine Revelation."

by God. Revelation is conceived as a relational event, wherein God intentionally communicates with a human audience through various means. This definition accommodates multiple forms of revelation, including propositional (focused on statements or doctrines) and manifestational (involving experiential or historical disclosure), as well as distinctions such as general and special revelation, public and private revelation, and natural and supernatural modes. Moreover, it recognizes diverse epistemological models for justifying revelatory claims, ranging from non-inferential and evidentialist approaches to those that conceive of revelation as a non-epistemic event. Throughout this work, revelation will be examined from the dual perspectives of divine intentional communication and human interpretive response.

Having laid this conceptual groundwork, the next chapters will turn to the Jewish philosophical tradition, examining how pre-modern and modern thinkers have interpreted revelation in ways that both reflect and challenge these broader theoretical frameworks.

2. Premodern Views on Revelation: Maimonides

The concept of revelation has been central to Jewish theology from its earliest expressions in the Hebrew Bible through the interpretive frameworks of rabbinic literature, medieval philosophy, and mystical traditions. This chapter explores premodern Jewish understandings of revelation focusing on Maimonides. In this context, Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) is perceived as a highly influential, although not typical, representative of premodern Jewish thought on revelation. His works, particularly *"The Guide for the Perplexed"*, enriched the discourse on revelation by framing it in reference to Aristotelian philosophy and Islamic Kalam. While Maimonides' rationalist approach diverged from more traditional or mystical views prevalent in his time, his ideas have profoundly shaped subsequent Jewish thought until today.

Maimonides' theory of revelation is characterized by an approach that seeks to reconcile divine perfection with the limitations of human understanding. While Maimonides' influence is undeniable, his ideas were not universally accepted. Many premodern Jewish thinkers approached revelation from perspectives that prioritized other dimensions: the historical narrative of divine action, the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, or the esoteric symbolism of mystical traditions. For instance, figures like Saadia Gaon (882-942), Judah Halevi (c.1074-1141), and the authors of the Zohar (13-14th cent.) each articulated distinct visions of revelation that diverged from Maimonides' approach.

For Maimonides, as for other Scholastics, Scripture and its divine origin serve as the foundation for all intellectual inquiry, analogous to *ta endoxa* (reputable and authoritative views) in Aristotelian thought.[98] Therefore, the belief in revelation for him is essential in order to have any meaningful discussion not only about the divine, i.e. supernatural, realm (metaphysics), but also the natural order of the universe (physics). While philosophy and rational discourse are important, they are insufficient for understanding fundamental existential questions, such as the origin of the universe, the attributes of God, and the nature of humanity.

Maimonides asserts that God cannot be defined and is beyond human comprehension and language.[99] While the highest form of devotion is silence, as reflected in the phrase "silence is praise to You" (Psalm 65:2), Maimonides acknowledges that a religion based solely on silent reflection would not succeed.[100] It is necessary to use language when discussing God; however, this language must be purified through philosophical analysis, particularly to interpret the figurative language of Scripture, which often employs anthropomorphic and corporeal metaphors. Maimonides argues in favor of negative (or apophatic) theology: using negative attributes in reference to God (e.g., incorporeal, undivided) is more accurate and careful than making any positive statement about God. Knowledge of God's essence is inaccessible, what we can know and discuss is God's

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[98] Daniel H. Frank, "Divine Law and Human Practices," in Steven M. Nadler, ed., *From Antiquity through the Seventeenth Century*, The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 795. Cit. in Robert J. Dobie, *Thinking through Revelation: Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Washington (D.C.): Catholic university of America press, 2019), 105..
[99] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed: Volume I*, ed. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), I.52, Pines 115.
[100] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed: Volume II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), III.32, Pines 526.

actions in the world, which can be compared to the human actions. God is "merciful" in the sense that His actions in the world resemble the human actions, which we would describe as "merciful": "The meaning here is not that He possesses moral qualities, but that He performs actions resembling the actions that in us proceed from moral qualities."[101] And further, the goal of human existence is *imitatio Dei*: "The utmost virtue of man is to become liken unto Him, may He be exalted, as far as he is able; which means that we should make our actions like unto His, as the Sages made clear when interpreting the verse, 'You shall be holy.' They said: 'He is gracious, so be you also gracious; He is merciful, so be you also merciful."[102]

Two key concepts are crucial to understanding Maimonides' perspective on revelation: the creation of the world and the parable of the Fall in Genesis 3.

Maimonides contends that the world was created at a specific moment (*de novo*) and from nothing (*ex nihilo*) by God.[103] He acknowledges[104] that this belief cannot be demonstrated rationally; instead, he relies on the creation narrative in Scripture (Genesis 1–2) as the primary authoritative source. Beginnings of the universe cannot be explained by science, although Maimonides admits that scientific progress is possible, i.e. an issue that is not yet satisfactorily explained scientifically could be explained in the future. Nevertheless, Maimonides is skeptical of scientific progress in cosmology or in understanding of remote heavenly bodies. Accordingly, the belief in creation, though not demonstrated scientifically, will always be preferable to eternal existence of the

[101] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54, Pines 124.
[102] Maimonides, I.54, Pines 128.
[103] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.13, Pines 281.
[104] Maimonides, II.24, Pines 322.

universe.[105] Since the world was created willingly by God *de novo* and *ex nihilo*, the world's existence is not necessary, but contingent upon the will of God, the Creator. The natural order could be otherwise, if God choses so. Therefore, knowledge of the world will depend on God's will to reveal it. It cannot be completely discerned rationally or empirically, because the natural order can be changed by God anytime.[106]

The first humans, Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Maimonides understands the divine likeness of the first humans as being capable of pure and immediate intellectual contemplation of God:

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[105] Maimonides, II.25, Pines 327-330.

[106] My assumption is that Maimonides has a consistent position on creation, at least when it is related to the question of revelation. Some scholars question the consistency of Maimonides' conception of creation, pointing to his secret or "esoteric" views. For example, Davidson concludes that "Maimonides may have secretly countenanced or embraced the doctrine of creation from a preexisting matter. If so, he believed – or countenanced the belief – that matter is eternal and that at a given moment God, through an act of will, emanated the incorporeal part of the universe; the incorporeal part of the universe would immediately organize matter into the physical part of the universe.", which is rather in line with the Platonic thought, that Maimonides explicitly rejects in Guide II, 13. (Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," in *Studies in Mediaval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 36). See also Kreisel, Howard "Maimonides on the Eternity of the World." In *Judaism as Philosophy: Studies in Maimonides and the Medieval Jewish Philosophers of Provence*, 40–70. Academic Studies Press, 2015. Lorberbaum, Yair. "On Contradictions, Rationality, Dialectics, and Esotericism in Maimonides's 'Guide of the Perplexed.'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 55, no. 4 (2002): 711–50. Kenneth Seeskin, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World*, Cambridge University Press, 2006. While I acknowledge the value of scholarship aimed at uncovering and understanding Maimonides' esoteric views, I find it problematic to delve into such interpretations within the context of this thesis. First, such discussions are inherently speculative, and second, they do not align with how Maimonides has been read and understood through the centuries. The goal of this chapter is to present Maimonides as a representative of premodern Jewish thought whose explicitly expressed ideas significantly influenced subsequent discussions. This approach focuses on how Maimonides is generally perceived, emphasizing his overt teachings rather than esoteric interpretations. A deeper exploration of Maimonides' esoteric ideas falls outside the scope of this thesis.

> "For the intellect that God made overflow unto man and that is the latter's ultimate perfection, was that which Adam had been provided with before he disobeyed. It was because of this that it was said of him that he was created in the image of God and in His likeness. It was likewise on account of it that he was addressed by God and given commandments, as it says: And the Lord God commanded, and so on (Genesis 2:16). For commandments are no given to beasts and beings devoid of intellect. Through the intellect one distinguishes between truth and falsehood, and that was found in [Adam] in its perfection and integrity. Fine and bad, on the other hand, belong to the things generally accepted as known, not to those cognized by the intellect."

Maimonides interprets the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve allegorically, focusing on the transition from a state of pure intellectual knowledge to one dominated by sensory perception and ethical discernment. Before the Fall, Adam is depicted as possessing perfect metaphysical knowledge, an ideal state where he comprehends eternal truths and God's nature without mediation. This state represents human perfection, which Maimonides equates with intellectual development. The act of eating the forbidden fruit symbolizes a shift from this intellectual perfection to a more corporeal existence, where judgment is clouded by sensory experiences and moral dilemmas. Maimonides sees this as a metaphor for humanity's loss of direct intellectual connection with God, necessitating a reliance on divine revelation to regain understanding.

Maimonides starts the discussion of the Fall[107] by clarifying the meaning of the word *"elohim"* in Genesis 3:5.[108] Although the Hebrew word *"elohim"* may mean "God", "angels, divine beings" or "judges, rulers"[109], he maintains that the correct translation in

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[107] Maimonides, I.2, Pines 23.

[108] וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחָשׁ אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה לֹא־מָוֹת תְּמֻתוּן: כִּי יֹדֵעַ אֱ֠לֹהִים כִּי בְּיוֹם֙ אֲכָלְכֶ֣ם מִמֶּ֔נּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ֙ עֵֽינֵיכֶ֔ם וִהְיִיתֶ֥ם כֵּ֖אלֹהִ֑ים **יֹדְעֵ֥י** טֹ֖וב וָרָֽע׃

Genesis 3:4-5 (JPS 2023): And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like **divine beings** who know good and bad." (my emphasis)

[109] e.g. Exodus 21:6, where the meaning is "judges".

Genesis 3:5 is "rulers", following the opinion of Onkelos. Accordingly, if Adam and Eve would partake of the forbidden fruit, their knowledge of good and evil will be on the level of rulers of the cities. Thus, Maimonides objects two claims, which assume that *"elohim"* means "God" or "divine beings", namely: (1) by disobeying the commandment Adam and Eve gained a greater quality of knowledge and (2) the biblical narrative is no better than pagan narratives which glorify rebellion against gods. According to Maimonides, in consequence to disobeying the commandment, Adam and Eve lost access to the highest quality of knowledge and were reduced to speculative knowledge compatible with the one of the city rulers.

It should be noted that Maimonides ignores that in Genesis 3:22 God says: "Now that humankind has become like any of us, knowing good and bad...". Here God acknowledges, that after the Fall humans became "like us", i.e. divine being(s), "knowing good and bad". Compared with Genesis 3:22 his interpretation of *"elohim"* in Genesis 3:5 is inconsistent. Although Maimonides refers to Onkelos to substantiate his interpretation, Onkelos translates Genesis 3:5 as "and you shall be like great ones, deciding between good and evil." Apparently, as Berman explains, Maimonides' interpretation follows from the word "deciding" *("chakimim")*, for rulers or judges *("chukkam")*. Maimonides alludes to the allegorical meaning of the story without going into details.[110]

Maimonides, like other medieval philosophers, makes a distinction between intellect *(intellectus)* and reason *(ratio)*. Intellect is insight, intuition, the ability to grasp

[110] Lawrence V. Berman, "Maimonides on the Fall of Man," *AJS Review* 5 (April 1980): 5, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009400000040.

some point without any apparent mental process; it is a higher, fundamental type of knowledge, axioms on which all other knowledge is faithfully built; these are coming from God.[111] Reason, in contrast, is thinking discursively. After the Fall humans can think independently only on the level of reason. According to Maimonides the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood is more advanced than to distinguish between good and bad. Because of the Fall, humans were reduced to the level of an animal calculating between good and evil.[112] [113] For Maimonides human reason is not completely corrupt, humans are capable of grasping important truths about God, but this truth is incomplete without revelation. Therefore, the purification of language by philosophy is not enough, cultivation of the character based on the revealed religion is essential for refining the intellect to the pre-Fall condition, which in turn makes humans able to apprehend and ultimately love God.[114] To achieve it the Torah communicates its elevated truths through human language, in a way accessible to the fallen human intellect.

[111] Dobie, *Thinking through Revelation*, 9.
[112] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.2, Pines 26.
[113] Here Maimonides follows the notion, particularly developed by Avicenna, that both humans and animals can estimate good and bad (Deborah L. Black, "Estimation (*Wahm*) in Avicenna: The Logical and Psychological Dimensions," *Dialogue* 32, no. 2 (1993): 219–58, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217300014414.) That recalls the current discussion on „speciesism", a term coined by Peter Singer, which denotes a practice of privileging humans over other animals. Singer claims that the boundary between human and animal is arbitrary and argues for the expansion of the utilitarian principle of "the greatest good of the greatest number" to include all sentient beings (Gruen, Lori and Susana Monsó, "The Moral Status of Animals", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/moral-animal/>).
[114] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.34, Pines 76-77.

Consequently, the role of the prophets is vital in elevating the human intellect from its fallen state; they serve as the sole channels through which revelation reaches humanity. According to Maimonides prophets are people of supreme intellectual and moral quality and Moses is the perfect example. But this quality is still not enough for them to gain divine knowledge independently of God's act of revelation. In other words, prophecy is only possible, if God so wishes. There is no direct access to the truth without an explicit consent from God: even the first humans in their state of perfection, before the Fall, needed the divine overflow.[115] Since the rational order of creation is not necessary in itself and is contingent upon the will of God, the Creator, the natural order could be otherwise, if God choses so. Therefore, the prophetic intellection is subject to what the divine will chooses to reveal.

Since God is not corporeal, God cannot be understood as "speaking" in the sense of using human-like speech. The revelation ("overflow") therefore happens in the mind of the prophet. Moses' prophecy was purely intellectual and unaffected by imagination or sensory faculties, unlike the prophecy of other prophets.[116] Nevertheless, any text, any legislation must involve imaginations, i.e. be a product by the means of human culture. The law follows from the prophecy of Moses but is not identical to it,[117] it translates divine truths into legislation. Kalman Bland explains:

> "The Mosaic law and other laws are conventional... laws... Since the laws are conventional, they cannot be ascribed to God unequivocally. (...) Maimonides denies that the Mosaic law is natural law, and therefore we may deduce that Maimonides did not think that it existed as such in God's mind. (...) Maimonides... does not believe that Moses ever received the particulars of his Law in revelation... According to the logic of his arguments, Maimonides does

[115] Maimonides, I.2, Pines 24.
[116] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.36, Pines 373; II.45, Pines 403.
[117] Maimonides, II.37, Pines 375; II.40, Pines 382-83; III.27, Pines 511.

> not believe that God could have transmitted the particulars of the Law to Moses... Maimonides considered Moses to have been the direct author of the Law."[118]

Maimonides' argument rests on the assumption that the revelation communicated through Moses reflects eternal and unchangeable truths, articulated in human language. This serves as the foundational axiom upon which all subsequent speculation is based. It is self-evident, not through rational reasoning, but as an article of faith shared by the Jewish community. This belief has several internal and external difficulties.

Due to Maimonides' definition of perfect prophecy, it seems necessary to believe that Moses achieved the highest level of perfection. If it were otherwise, we would not have received revelation through him. His intellect was uncorrupted by the material concerns, therefore the revelation based on Moses' perception of the Divine is trustworthy and authoritative.

The difficulty of this assumption of Moses' character lies in its lack of proof. Maimonides assumes the perfection of Moses as a dogmatic article of faith.[119] There are no external criteria by means of which we can measure the truth or falsity of this thesis. The Torah itself cannot be taken as a proof, because it would describe its author as perfect, which is a cyclical argument. But even from the description of Moses in the

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[118] Kalman Bland „Moses and the Law According to Maimonides." In Jehuda Reinharz and Alexander Altmann, eds., *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 5 (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1982), 62–63. Cit. in Benjamin D. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition*, The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven (Conn.): Yale University press, 2015), 85.

[119] The distinction between Moses and other prophets pre-dates Maimonides. See bYevamot 49b.

Torah it is not obvious that he is a person of perfect character and intellect. On the opposite, according to the Torah's literal meaning, Moses is not perfect in any sense. He makes a mistake grievous enough to ban his entry into the promised land. He needs some advice from a non-Jew Jethro, who did not participate in the Mt. Sinai event, to improve the judicial system, an advice that shows Moses' inadequacy of leading a nation; in contrast any school-aged child would understand the necessity for a hierarchy of decision-making bodies. His excessive punishment of the people, whom he leaves with poor leadership, for the sin of the Golden Calf and his violent suppression of the Korach rebellion do not present him as a compassionate and wise leader. Moses of the Torah is no better than any other biblical figure, he is not principally different from an Ancient Near East king claiming divine source of his power.

Maimonides admits that prophetic revelation did not come to Moses "in the way that revelation used to come before" after the event of the spies until the whole generation of Exodus died, because he suffered, and the general rule is that prophetic revelation ceases when prophets are angry or depressed. Moses did not experience the highest level of prophecy during the forty years of wandering, although "the imaginative faculty did not enter into his prophecy... as the intellect overflowed toward him without its intermediation".[120] That brings additional difficulties in discerning which part of the Torah text was inspired by revelation of the highest level and which part was of a lower level. In sum, there is neither rational nor scriptural reason to believe that because of the quality of Moses' character, the divine revelation experienced by him is particularly trustworthy.

[120] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.37, Pines 372-73.

The additional problem with the revelation through Moses is its inaccessibility. The only record of it we have is the text of the Torah, which by Maimonides' qualification is not the revelation itself, but a medium describing revelation through the conventions of human language situated in a specific human culture of a specific age. It seems that the whole discussion on revelation might have no practical value: it is not accessible directly anyway, even if one would believe in the unique value of Moses's communication. Direct knowledge of God is not possible, access to the divine revelation is not possible, even the clear understanding of the record of the divine revelation is not possible. Consequently, the only way to gain any religiously meaningful knowledge would be by using natural cognitive human abilities without appeal to the supernatural influence from outside.

Furthermore, Maimonides develops his concept of revelation on two premises: (1) creation of the world *de novo* and *ex nihilo* and (2) fallen nature of human intellect because of Adam's Fall. These premises are not necessarily undisputable, even if one treats the text of the Torah as an authoritative source for these beliefs.

Neither Genesis 1 nor Genesis 2 explicitly describe the creation of the world as *creatio de novo* and *ex nihilo.* The first verse of Genesis 1 can be understood at least in three ways:

1. As a statement that the universe had an absolute beginning: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth*.
2. As a statement describing the condition of the world when God began creating: *When in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was untamed and shapeless*.

3. As background information: *When in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth being untamed and shapeless, God said, Let there be light!*

The Torah itself does not provide direct information about the time and mode of creation. To interpret this verse as Maimonides does, one lets personal philosophical background influence the reading, a fact that Maimonides seems to blur. On the one hand, he believes that Scripture must be decoded with the help of philosophy. On the other hand, he postulates that the question of creation of the world cannot be resolved philosophically and therefore turns to presumably plain meaning of the revealed Scripture.[121] The clarity in the concept of creation is essential, because other elements of Maimonides' argument in favor of revelation depend on it. If God created the world out of nothing and out of God's free will at a certain point in time, it might also be plausible that God controls the distribution of knowledge. Alternatively, if the world exists eternally, then there might be no compelling reason to believe that revelation is essentially necessary.

Contemporary science made tremendous progress in understanding the beginning of the universe, which for Maimonides was beyond imagination. One of the reasons he rejects the Aristotelian theory of the eternal universe that exists by necessity is that there are issues in astronomy that resist scientific explanation (at his time) and thus appear to be contingent in the sense that they were chosen rather than necessitated.[122] Today this argument cannot be taken seriously by the scientific community. The question of the eternity of the universe remains unsettled until today. Certainly, science cannot explain

[121] Maimonides, II.15, 21, 25.
[122] Maimonides, II.19-24.

every anomaly, but science is still a more reputable source of knowledge about the cosmology than scripture. Science might not explain the moral reason for the existence of the universe, but it offers compelling theories of how the universe came into existence and how it develops further.

Maimonides does not simply postulate that God created the world, he is certain that the world was created at a certain moment, out of nothing and is contingent on divine will; this certainty is based on his understanding of scripture. For Maimonides the affirmation of *creatio de novo* is one of the foundations for the existence of the revealed religion.[123] For if everything were the outcome of an eternal emanation from God, then God would in principle be knowable by human reason, without the help of divine revelation, simply by deducing the effects from the cause.[124] This would presuppose that our intellect is not fallen and does not require repair and redemption through a revealed law. The solution to the question whether the world exists eternally or was created by

[123] Maimonides, II.13, Pines 282.

[124] Compare to Saadia's view, who understands revelation as a shortcut to knowledge, that in principle could be attained by rational speculation: "It may be asked: If the doctrines of religion can be discovered by rational inquiry and speculation, as God has told us, how can it be reconciled with His wisdom that He announced them to us by way of prophetic revelation and verified them by proofs and signs of a visible character, and not by rational arguments? To this we will give a complete answer with the help of God. We say: God knew in His wisdom that the final propositions which result from the labor of speculation can only be attained in a certain measure of time. Had He, therefore, made us depend on speculation for religious knowledge, we should have existed without religion for some time until the work of speculation was completed and our labor had come to an end. Perhaps many of us would never have completed the work because of their inability and never have finished their labor because of their lack of patience; or doubts may have come upon them, and confused and bewildered their minds. From all these troubles God (be He exalted and glorified) saved us quickly by sending us His messenger, announcing through him the Tradition." Seʿadyah, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, ed. Daniel H. Frank, trans. Alexander Altmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publ. Co, 2002), 163.

God at a certain moment in time is theologically not obvious. Therefore, it is not sufficient to use the argument *creatio de novo* in the justification of the necessity of divine revelation.

Furthermore, according to Maimonides, the belief in *creatio ex nihilo* shall support the argument of divine omnipotence, since only omnipotent being can create out of nothing. Since neither Scripture in Genesis 1-2, nor "philosophy" or science do undisputably support creation out of nothing, other reasons must be found for supporting or rejecting the belief in divine omnipotence. For Hartshorne the belief in divine omnipotence is one of the theological mistakes with grave consequences for ethics and theodicy, which will be shown later in this paper.

Let us now turn to the Maimonidean understanding of the "Fall" in Genesis 3 as it underlies the second premise of his concept of revelation, namely, the fallen nature of the human intellect resulting from Adam's transgression. The widespread opinion within the Jewish community today is that the Fall does not play an important role in Jewish theology, it is a foreign, Christian doctrine. Jews do not believe in "original sin" or pay much attention to the story of the Fall and its consequences.[125]

Nevertheless, the doctrine of original sin is not foreign to Jewish thought.[126] For example, bYevamot 103b (also in bShabbat 146a, bAvodah Zarah 22b):

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[125] For example, Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology, Systematically and Historically Considered* (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Riverdale Press, 1943). Ch. XXXVIII The Meaning of Sin, pp. 81-84; Silver, Abba Hillel "Where Judaism Differed, Philadelphia, JPS, 1957, pp. 158-59.

[126] Matthew Wade Umbarger, "Yeṣer Ha-Ra' and Original Sin," *Religions* 14, no. 6 (June 1, 2023): 733, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060733. Samuel Solomon Cohon, *Essays in Jewish Theology* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1987), 219. Alan Cooper, "A Medieval Jewish Version of Original Sin: Ephraim of Luntshits on

דְּאָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁבָּא נָחָשׁ עַל חַוָּה הֵטִיל בָּהּ זוּהֲמָא. יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁעָמְדוּ עַל הַר סִינַי - פָּסְקָה זוּהֲמָתָן. גּוֹיִם, שֶׁלֹּא עָמְדוּ בְּהַר סִינַי - לֹא פָּסְקָה זוּהֲמָתָן.

"R. Johanan stated: When the serpent copulated with Eve, he infused her with filth. The filth of the Israelites who stood at Mount Sinai, came to an end, the filth of the idolaters who did not stand at Mount Sinai did not come to an end."[127]

Shmuel Eidels (Maharsha) on bYevamot 103b explains that Adam was created in God's image, perfect in body and soul and free of all spiritual contamination; by causing Eve to sin, the serpent infected the human beings with the spiritual impurity that is the root of all sin. Accordingly, without the revelation at Sinai there is no purification from the "filth" inherited from Eve, the mother of all humanity.[128] Apparently, "during the rabbinic period, contrary to the mainstream opinion, some Jews had a notion of original sin that included the idea that the first sin was transmitted from Adam and Eve to their descendants"[129] and the Medieval Judaism developed its own version of the concept of the original sin, Maimonides can be seen as an example of that development.

Leviticus 12," *Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 4 (October 2004): 445–59, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816004000781.

[127] Koren (Steinsaltz) is even more explicit on the hereditary moral contamination: **"As Rabbi Yoḥanan** also **said**, based on his understanding that the serpent seduced Eve into having sexual relations with him: **When the serpent came upon Eve, he infected her with** moral **contamination**, and this contamination remained in all human beings. **When the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai their contamination ceased**, whereas with regard to **gentiles, who did not stand at Mount Sinai, their contamination never ceased.**". Soncino prefers to translate the key term as "lust".

[128] Law as antidote to human sin as a polemic against the Christian belief in Jesus "who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2), see Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge, Maa: Harvard University Press, 1987), 421–36.

[129] Cooper, "A Medieval Jewish Version of Original Sin," 447. With references to Israel Lévi, *Le péché originel dans les anciennes sources Juives* (Paris: École pratique des hautes études, 1907) 13. Joel Kaminsky "Paradise Regained: Rabbinic Reflections on Israel at Sinai," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* [ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky; SBL Symposium Series 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000] 15–43, at 17).

Maimonides argues that after the "Fall" Adam and Eve could know good and evil, but he rejects it as an improvement; before it was "true" or "false", which is superior to "good" or "evil". As Berman sums it up:

> "The fall of man consisted in a change of priorities, from an interest in the things of the mind to becoming interested in the things of the body; from being a philosopher, a master of his passions, to becoming a beast in human form, mastered by his passions; from being a solitary thinker,[130] to becoming a ruler of cities, being informed by the imagination only."[131]

Maimonides' concept relies heavily on interpreting the narrative in Genesis 3 as a deterioration of human cognitive nature, an event that affects all subsequent generations and renders humanity incapable of accessing truth independently of divine revelation. Nonetheless there are more convincing approaches to interpret Genesis 3, for example by Erik Erikson[132] and Carl G. Jung.[133]

According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, the story can be viewed through the lens of the stages of development, particularly focusing on the stage of Initiative vs. Guilt. This stage is characterized by a child's growing sense of initiative, which can lead to feelings of guilt when their actions conflict with expected norms. Adam and Eve's act

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[130] Isadore Twersky, editor, *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1972), p.1.: "Maimonides' biography immediately suggests a profound paradox. A philosopher by temperament and ideology, a zealous devotee of the contemplative life who eloquently portrayed and yearned for the serenity of solitude and the spiritual exuberance of meditation, he nevertheless led a relentlessly active life that regularly brought him to the brink of exhaustion."

[131] Berman, "Maimonides on the Fall of Man," 8.

[132] Alexander P. Zhitnik, "Eden and Erikson: Psychosocial Theory and the Garden of Eden," *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice* 6, no. 1 (2014): 142–52.

[133] David James Stewart, "The Emergence of Consciousness in Genesis 1–3: Jung's Depth Psychology and Theological Anthropology"," *Zygon* 49, no. 2 (June 2014): 509–29, https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12086.

of eating the forbidden fruit can be seen as an analogy for an assertion of autonomy and initiative, challenging divine authority. Their subsequent feelings of shame and guilt upon realizing their nakedness align with Erikson's idea that guilt emerges when one's actions transgress established boundaries. The expulsion from Eden symbolizes a necessary transition from the innocence of early life to the responsibilities and challenges of adulthood, mirroring Erikson's view that such transitions are essential for personal development.

Carl G. Jung offers another perspective by interpreting Genesis 3 through the lens of archetypes and the emergence of consciousness. Jungian analysis suggests that the narrative represents a fundamental shift in human consciousness, from a state of unconscious unity with nature to a differentiated ego-consciousness. This transition is symbolized by Adam and Eve's acquisition of knowledge after eating the fruit, leading to their awareness of good and evil. Jung views this awakening as a necessary step towards individuation, where individuals become aware of their distinct selves and begin integrating various aspects of their personality. The themes of exile and return in Genesis 3 resonate with Jung's concept of individuation as a journey towards reintegration with the Self and, ultimately, with the Divine. This interpretation suggests that Adam and Eve's "Fall" was not a moral failure but an essential development in human consciousness.

To conclude, Maimonides' concept of revelation is predicated on certain theological assumptions, such as creation *de novo et ex nihilo*, the limitations of the human intellect after the "Fall," and divine omnipotence. If these doctrines are neither exegetically nor logically plausible, the foundation of his concept of revelation is weakened.

Maimonides presents a sophisticated understanding of revelation that surpasses simplistic, stenographic notions. His caution about ascribing attributes to God highlights the limitations of human language in describing the divine, even if his negative theology does not entirely resolve the issue. Crucially, Maimonides justifies theology beyond the narrow confines of Jewish thought by advocating engagement with contemporary philosophy (in his case the Aristotelian tradition of his time). He goes further, asserting that without such philosophical engagement, the true meaning of the Torah remains inaccessible.

My reading of Maimonides is that the Torah's meaning is radically open and contingent, shaped by ongoing interpretations grounded in the best available understanding of truth.[134] If truth and scripture cannot contradict each other, then scripture must be interpreted through the lens of contemporary epistemology. This implies that engaging with the philosophy of one's time is not merely an intellectual exercise but a vital means of remaining faithful to the Torah's essence. In this sense, studying contemporary philosophy is not a diversion from classical Jewish thought but a profound expression of loyalty to it, as exemplified by Maimonides himself.

Following his model, we too must integrate contemporary philosophy and science into Jewish theology, reformulating classical concepts for our time. Just as Maimonides synthesized and reformulated classical theological concepts in light of the knowledge of his time, we too can draw on modern insights to update and reinterpret Jewish thought.

[134] Fleischacker makes a similar claim, but with a different conclusion in Samuel Fleischacker, "Making Sense of the Revelation at Sinai," *TheTorah.Com* (blog), 2014, https://thetorah.com/article/making-sense-of-the-revelation-at-sinai.

His openness to external influences and his refusal to remain fixated on the past inspire a dynamic, evolving engagement with the timeless truths of the Torah.

Maimonides' concept of revelation stands as a sophisticated attempt to reconcile divine communication with rational philosophy. In contrast to mystical or literalist understandings, he grounds revelation in the metaphysical and epistemological framework of Aristotelian thought, portraying it as an intellectual "overflow" that reaches only the most perfected human minds. For Maimonides, prophecy is not an interruption of natural law but its highest expression, accessible only to those whose intellect and character are sufficiently refined. Yet, as rigorous as his philosophical model is, it remains tethered to a set of theological assumptions: the creation of the world *de novo* and *ex nihilo*, the contingency of nature upon divine will, and the fallibility of human intellect after Adam's "Fall". These premises shape his insistence that revelation is necessary to elevate human understanding, providing a bridge between divine wisdom and human reason.

However, as the next chapter will explore, Spinoza fundamentally overturns these assumptions. Where Maimonides carefully balanced revelation and rationality, Spinoza dismisses supernatural revelation altogether, reducing it to a historical and psychological phenomenon. Spinoza's radical naturalism challenges the very notion that divine knowledge must be transmitted through prophets, replacing it with an immanent view of God as identical with nature itself. In doing so, he severs the link between revelation and external divine will, asserting that truth is accessible through human reason alone, independent of scriptural authority.

This transition – from Maimonides' synthesis of faith and reason to Spinoza's outright rejection of supernatural revelation – marks a pivotal shift in Jewish thought. Yet, while Spinoza's critique may seem like a direct repudiation of Maimonides, it also builds upon his legacy. Maimonides had already de-emphasized the supernatural aspects of revelation, presenting it as a natural process tied to human intellect. Spinoza takes this logic to its extreme conclusion, eliminating any need for divine intervention.

Thus, the trajectory from Maimonides to Spinoza reflects a broader development in Jewish philosophy: from a medieval view that sees revelation as necessary for human knowledge to a modern view that seeks to replace revelation with autonomous reason. This shift raises fundamental questions about the nature of divine knowledge, the authority of sacred texts, and the role of religious experience in an age of rationalism – questions that will continue to unfold in the subsequent discussions on Spinoza and, later, on Mordecai Kaplan's reconstruction of revelation as a dynamic, human-centered process.

3. Baruch Spinoza on Revelation

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), one of the fathers of modern philosophy, challenges long-standing dichotomies between faith and reason, divine revelation and human knowledge. His critique of supernatural revelation as a direct intentional intervention of a personal providential God into human affairs paves the way for a more rationalistic and naturalistic understanding of knowledge. Spinoza's engagement with revelation represents a bold attempt to reconcile religious texts with the emerging scientific worldview of the 17th century.[135]

In *The Ethics* Spinoza postulates that all of existence is substance and its modes. Substance is "what is in itself, and is conceived through itself [...] that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception."[136] A mode is "the modifications of substance, or that which exists in, and is conceived through, something other than itself."[137] God is "a being absolutely infinite – that is, a substance consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality."[138] God is an infinite, eternal, necessary, self-caused, indivisible being. He equates substance with God: "An actual intellect [...] must comprehend God's attributes and God's affections, and nothing else. [...] in nature [...] there is only one substance, namely God, and there are no affections other than those which are in God [...] and which can neither be nor be

[135] For a discussion of this theme, see Theo Verbeek, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise: Exploring "The Will of God"* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2003).
[136] Benedict Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. E. M. Curley, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), E 1D3.
[137] Spinoza, E 1D5.
[138] Spinoza, E 1D6.

conceived without God [...] Therefore, an actual intellect [...] must comprehend God's attributes and God's affections, and nothing else."[139] According to Spinoza, God's essence *is* his power itself, not that God *has* power: "God's power is his essence itself. [...] For from the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself [...] and of all things. Therefore, God's power, by which he and all things are and act, is his essence itself."[140] Essentially, to say that God *is* means to say that God *acts*.

In the classical Jewish view, as exemplified by thinkers like Maimonides, God is a transcendent creator – a being who brings a world into existence that is distinct from himself, creating it out of nothing. This act of creation is the result of God's spontaneous and free will, meaning that God could just as easily have chosen not to create anything at all. In contrast, Spinoza conceives of God as the cause of all things, but in a very different sense: all things arise necessarily and causally from the divine nature:

> "In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way."[141]
> "Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced."[142]

For Spinoza, the existence of the world is as inevitable as a mathematical truth – it is impossible for God to exist without the world also existing. However, this necessity does not imply that something external to God forces him to create the world. Spinoza maintains that God is free in the sense that no external constraints act upon him. Yet, he

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[139] Spinoza, E 1P30. See also E 1P14, E 1P15.
[140] Spinoza, E 1P34.
[141] Spinoza, E 1P29.
[142] Spinoza, E 1P33.

rejects the idea that God's creation is an arbitrary or undetermined act of free will. God could not have created the world differently, nor could any other possible worlds exist. There is no contingency or spontaneity in the world as Spinoza sees it; everything in existence is absolutely and necessarily determined, leaving no room for alternatives or the possibility that anything could have been otherwise.

Spinoza's deterministic philosophy, while dominant in his time, has faced significant challenges in light of modern scientific understanding. Nevertheless, his proposition that "The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God"[143] suggests an openness to refinement based on new knowledge. This allows for a potential reinterpretation of his framework in the context of contemporary scientific insights, which recognize the role of chance and probability in nature. Contemporary scientific understanding has shifted away from strict determinism towards a more nuanced view that incorporates probabilistic elements. In quantum mechanics, at the subatomic level, events are governed by probability rather than strict causality. According to chaos theory complex systems exhibit sensitive dependence on initial conditions, making long-term predictions impossible in practice. In evolutionary biology random genetic mutations play a crucial role in driving evolutionary change. These scientific developments suggest that chance and indeterminacy are fundamental aspects of nature, not merely reflections of our ignorance. These developments challenge Spinoza's conception of a fully determined universe.

Process philosophers, particularly Charles Hartshorne, are critics of Spinoza's strict determinism. Hartshorne argues that Spinoza's system, while impressive in its

[143] Spinoza, E 5P24.

coherence, fails to account for the genuine novelty and creativity observed in nature. He contends that a more dynamic view of reality, incorporating elements of chance and spontaneity, better aligns with our experience and scientific observations.[144]

While Spinoza's determinism may seem at odds with contemporary scientific understanding informed by quantum mechanics and chaos theory, his system's emphasis on the unity of nature and the pursuit of knowledge remains relevant. By reinterpreting Spinoza's concept of "God or Nature" as encompassing both deterministic and probabilistic elements, we can potentially bridge the gap between his philosophy and modern scientific insights.

Di Poppa[145] suggests that Spinoza's metaphysics can be fruitfully understood in terms of process ontology, where processes or activities, rather than substances, are considered the most basic entities. While not claiming this is the only valid interpretation, she argues it offers several advantages over traditional substance-based readings.

Di Poppa shows, that for Spinoza God's attributes are not properties, but *"*express*ings"* of God's activities and whose *"*express*ions"* are modes.[146] Therefore, God *is* his activities. Furthermore, Spinoza argues that "God acts solely by the laws of his own nature."[147] The laws of God are his nature: God's activity (his power) is his

[144] Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 21–23, 122–23.
[145] Francesca Di Poppa, "Spinoza and Process Ontology," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 3 (September 2010): 272–94, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.2010.00031.x.
[146] Di Poppa, 280.
[147] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 1P17.

essence.[148] God or substance in Spinoza's system can be understood as structured, self-sustaining power or activity rather than a thing-like entity.

Finite modes (individual things) can be interpreted as stable patterns of activity or processes rather than property-bearing objects. There is no absolute individuation for Spinoza: a mode cannot be individuated independently of its causal interactions. Each mode depends on God and on infinite other modes. Spinoza's concept of *conatus* (striving to persevere in being)[149] aligns well with a process-based view of individuals as dynamic, persistent patterns of activity. What a person *is* is what a person does and vice versa – being is dynamic, a person is a bundle of activities, striving to persist while interacting with other individuals.[150] Nature, including human beings, according to this view is an infinite organism composed of an infinite number of modes interacting with each other. This Spinoza's perspective is "closely allied" with the philosophy of organism as is noted by Whitehead.[151]

Spinoza emphasizes that nature has two distinct aspects. The first is the active, creative dimension of the universe – God and his attributes – from which everything else originates. Spinoza refers to this as *natura naturans*, or "naturing nature". This aspect is, strictly speaking, identical with God. The second aspect is what is produced and sustained by this active creative force, which Spinoza calls *natura naturata*, or "natured nature."

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[148] Di Poppa, "Spinoza and Process Ontology," 282.
[149] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 3P6–7.
[150] Di Poppa, "Spinoza and Process Ontology," 287–88.
[151] Alfred North Whitehead, ed. David Ray Griffin, and Donald W. Sherburne, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology: Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh during the Session 1927-28*, Corr. ed., first Free Press paperback edition (New York: Free Press, 1985), 7.

> By *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from any of God's attributes, i.e., all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things that are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God.[152]

While Spinoza is often labeled a pantheist, some scholars argue that his philosophy might be better characterized as panentheistic.[153] Spinoza does not use the terms "pantheism" or "pantheist" to describe his own philosophy. The Latin word *"pantheismus"* was first introduced in 1697, about twenty years after Spinoza died, by Joseph Raphson in his work *De Spatio Reali seu Ente Infinito*, in reference to Spinoza's thought.[154]

Petrufová Joppová argues that Spinoza's philosophy can be interpreted through two distinct models: a systemic pantheistic model and a relational panentheistic model, each addressing different conceptual domains.

Pantheism identifies God with the entirety of existence, asserting that "everything is divine." Spinoza's concept of God as an infinite being forms the basis of his pantheism. The pantheistic model does not allow for a relational distinction between the divine and the non-divine; everything is unified within God. In contrast, panentheism posits that all

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[152] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 1P29S.
[153] Michaela Petrufová Joppová, "Spinoza's Model of God: Pantheism or Panentheism?," *Pro-Fil* 24, no. 1 (June 20, 2023), https://doi.org/10.5817/pf23-1-32960. She names some scholars who openly identify Spinoza as a panentheist: Arne Naess (*Einstein, Spinoza, and God*, 1983), Tania Norell (*A Comprehension of Spinoza's God*, 2015), Richard Mather (*Judaism, panentheism and Spinoza's intellectual love of God*, 2017), Yitzhak Y. Melamed in his most recent works (e.g., *Cohen, Spinoza and the nature of pantheism*, 2018); Philip Clayton (*The Problem of God in Modern Thought,* 2000), John W. Cooper (*Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers. From Plato to the Present,* 2014). Richard Mason (*The God of Spinoza*, 1997) denies Spinoza's pantheism but proposes immanentism instead of panentheism as an alternative.
[154] Bron Raymond Taylor et al., *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 1341–42.

things exist in God but maintains a relational distinction between God and the world. There are elements of the relational panentheistic model in Spinoza's thought, namely his concept of immanent causation, where God is the cause of all things within himself, emphasizing an intimate connection without collapsing the distinction between God and the world.

Petrufová Joppová suggests that Spinoza incorporates both models: systemic pantheism to explain the metaphysical unity of existence and relational panentheism to articulate the relationship between God and finite beings (modes). These models are not competing but complementary, addressing different aspects of theological inquiry. The pantheistic model focuses on substance-mode relations, emphasizing ontological unity. The panentheistic model relies on infinite-finite dynamics and immanent causation to explain how finite entities exist within and relate to God's essence.

Compared to Maimonides, who holds that God's essence is beyond the grasp of human intellect, Spinoza contends that God's essence is epistemologically accessible to the intellect. He asserts that it is possible to form an adequate idea of this essence by conceiving a being whose essence can be understood solely as existing.[155] God's essence serves as the basis for all that exists. This essence is not separate from God but a conceptual framework through which God and the world relate. Finite entities are understood as determinate expressions of God's infinite essence. This conceptual link ensures that everything is "in" God while maintaining individual distinctions. Spinoza likens the immanence of God to the immanence of the intellect by affirming that the immanent cause "[…] by no means produces anything outside itself, as is exemplified

[155] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 1D1.

by the understanding (*intellectus*), which is the cause of its ideas. And that is why I called the understanding (insofar as, or because, its ideas depend on it) a *cause*; and on the other hand, since it consists of its ideas, a *whole*: so also *God is both an immanent Cause with reference to his works or creatures and also a whole...*" (emphasis added).[156]

Thus, Spinoza combines a systemic pantheistic model with a relational panentheistic framework. The pantheistic aspect is built upon the concept of God as an absolutely infinite being, while the panentheistic element delves into relational theology by examining definitional connections (immanent causations) within this system. One absolute infinity encompasses both the infinite and the finite. Within this system, all beings and concepts are encompassed within the definition of God while retaining their unique, distinct identities. Moreover, it is possible to both conceptualize and experience the intrinsic interconnectedness of all things within the divine, while still perceiving ourselves as distinct, tangible individuals who, by their very definition, are neither entirely divine nor identical to the world.[157] As Spinoza explains:

> "[...] our mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on *ad infinitum*, with the result that they all together constitute the eternal and infinite intellect of God."[158]

Spinoza suggests that all finite ideas, along with the finite "minds" they form, are contained in the divine infinite intellect:

> "[...] that the human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God; thus when we say, that the human mind perceives this or that, we make the assertion, that God

[156] Benedict Spinoza, "Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being," in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 47.
[157] Petrufová Joppová, "Spinoza's Model of God," 9.
[158] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 5P40C.

> has this or that idea, not in so far as he is infinite, but in so far as he is displayed through the nature of the human mind, or in so far as he constitutes the essence of the human mind; and when we say that God has this or that idea, not only in so far as he constitutes the essence of the human mind, but also in so far as he, simultaneously with the human mind, has the further idea of another thing, we assert that the human mind perceives a thing in part or inadequately."[159]

As a result, humans can experience the divine just like everything else: "The more we understand particular things, the more do we understand God."[160] Through a true understanding of the world – and of God – humans do not only perceive God's essence intellectually, but also actively participate in it through their engagement with the world. In contrast, a world created by a wholly transcendent God cannot be understood in terms of God or God's essence. It is impossible to deduce the nature of such a God from the world, or vice versa, including the moral order of the world. This type of theology often leads to conceptual and ethical ambiguities, requiring external guidance, revelation "from above". Such a God might command love, hatred, violence, or acts of mercy and charity, leaving no intrinsic logic to determine which should be followed without a form of "revelation." In Spinoza's pantheistic-panentheistic system, however, truth is inherent in both God's essence and the world, derived from logical reasoning rather than external revelation. The truth is accessible to human intellect without intermediaries. It is discovered naturally, without requiring sanctification or divine intervention, as it is already eternally divine, self-evident, and self-explanatory. The truth of a concept lies in its coherence and necessity within the framework of God's infinite attributes. In contrast to theologies emphasizing God's transcendence, where truth often depends on divine

[159] Spinoza, E 2P11C.
[160] Spinoza, E 5P24.

revelation or authority, Spinoza's criteria are embedded in the rational structure of existence.

Moreover, Spinoza's philosophy includes a form of panpsychism, which is "the view that mentality or consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world."[161] Spinoza argues that all things, not only humans, to varying degrees, possess some form of mentality:

> "[...] the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate. For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way as he is of the [human mind]."[162]

This implies that everything in nature has an associated idea or mental aspect, though the complexity and degree of consciousness varies.[163]

Spinoza's epistemology is deeply rooted in his monistic metaphysics. He categorizes human knowledge into three types:

1. Imagination (knowledge from sensory experience): This is the lowest form of knowledge, often leading to error and superstition.[164]

2. Reason (knowledge through adequate ideas): Reason allows individuals to grasp universal truths about nature and its laws.[165]

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[161] Goff, Philip, William Seager, and Sean Allen-Hermanson, "Panpsychism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/panpsychism/>.
[162] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 2 P13C.
[163] Przemyslaw Gut, "Why Panpsychism Matters for Spinoza," *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 3 (2017): 463–72; Harry A. Wolfson, "Spinoza's Mechanism, Attributes, and Panpsychism," *The Philosophical Review* 46, no. 3 (May 1937): 307, https://doi.org/10.2307/2181088.
[164] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 2P17S, 2P41D.
[165] Spinoza, E 2P41, 2P42.

3. Intuitive knowledge (knowledge of the essence of things): The highest form of knowledge, enabling a direct understanding of the unity of God or Nature.[166]

Intuition, or *scientia intuitiva*, is central to Spinoza's epistemology.[167] It represents a form of immediate knowledge that aligns with the intellect's understanding of God's essence. Through this intuitive knowledge, individuals perceive their inherent connection to God and recognize their eternal aspect as part of the divine intellect. This epistemological approach transforms the God-world relationship into an experiential and cognitive unity, where humans "feel and experience that we are eternal."[168]

Spinoza views intuition as a form of immediate, non-discursive understanding that proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to adequate knowledge of the essence of things. While both intuition and reason are adequate ways of knowing, intuition is considered superior. It differs from reason not only in its method of cognition but also in its content. Intuitive knowledge, unlike reason, can grasp the unique essences of particular things. Reason provides universal knowledge, while intuition descends to a level of particularity. Spinoza links intuitive knowledge to the highest form of virtue and human perfection.[169]

Spinoza rejects the idea that worshipful awe or religious reverence is an appropriate response to God or nature. He argues that nature is neither holy nor sacred and should

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[166] Spinoza, E 2P40.
[167] Hasana Sharp, "'Nemo Non Videt': Intuitive Knowledge and the Question of Spinoza's Elitism," in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. Carlos Fraenkel, Dario Perinetti, and Justin E. H. Smith (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2010), 101–22, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9385-1_7.
[168] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 5P23S.
[169] Sanem Soyarslan, "Reason and Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza's 'Ethics': Two Ways of Knowing, Two Ways of Living" (2011, Duke University, n.d.), https://hdl.handle.net/10161/4961.

not be viewed as the object of religious experience. Instead, one should seek to understand God or nature through clear, adequate intellectual knowledge, which reveals nature's fundamental truths and its essential dependence on higher natural causes. For Spinoza, the path to discovering and experiencing God lies in philosophy and science, not in religious awe or worship. The latter only fosters superstition and subjugation to ecclesiastical authority, whereas the former promotes enlightenment, freedom, and true blessedness – peace of mind.

Spinoza's treatment of revelation has profound political implications. By demystifying revelation, Spinoza challenges the authority of religious institutions that claim exclusive access to the divine will, and this aligns with Spinoza's broader project of promoting freedom of thought and separating religion from politics. Spinoza envisions a society where religious authority is subordinated to the state, ensuring that religious doctrines do not undermine civic harmony. Revelation, in this context, serves as a tool for ethical instruction rather than a basis for political power.

Spinoza reinterprets divine revelation not as a miraculous disclosure of God's will but as a product of the natural workings of the human mind under divine causation. In *The Theological-Political Treatise*, he argues that prophets' insights arise from their heightened imagination and moral clarity, rather than supernatural intervention. Prophecy is a product of the imagination alone, like dreams and madness,[170] whereas true philosophy is produced by the intellect. Prophecy and philosophy are as much opposed to each other as truth and falsehood. As a cognitive or epistemological category

[170] Benedict Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, vol. 1 Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891), Ch. 1-2, https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/elwes-the-chief-works-of-benedict-de-spinoza-vol-1.

revelation is completely irrelevant because nothing can be against or above reason.[171] He believes that if revelation were knowledge of things divine, philosophy could be termed "revelation" as well.[172]

In comparison, Maimonides also emphasizes the high moral character of prophets but sees revelation as contingent upon divine will. Revelation, according to Spinoza, is relative to the cultural and linguistic frameworks of its recipients, reflecting human capacities rather than transcendent truths.

This view undermines the traditional understanding of Scripture as the literal word of God ("stenographic theory of revelation"). For Spinoza, Scripture's value lies in its ethical teachings and its ability to guide human behavior toward justice and piety, rather than as a source of metaphysical or scientific truth. Spinoza's hermeneutics aim to strip Scripture of its supernatural appearance, declaring it as a product of human culture.

For Spinoza, it was evident that a purely rational ethics was beyond the grasp of most people. He believes that virtues like charity and love of one's neighbor required the backing of divine revelation to provide them with "moral certainty". This is where religion served its pedagogical function – guiding the masses who could not be led by reason alone. At the same time, Spinoza is deeply critical of prophetic authority, seeing it as a form of prejudice that he sought to dismantle in favor of individual rational autonomy. While Scripture offers comfort to the common people, his true aim in the Tractatus is not to reinforce religious teachings but to replace them with a new moral and political doctrine rooted in liberty rather than blind faith. Spinoza strategically

[171] Spinoza, 1 Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Ch. 6.
[172] Spinoza, 1 Tractatus Theologico-Politicus:13.

employes biblical references in his arguments, using Scripture to persuade his contemporaries. He defends the moral lessons of the Bible, but only as a means to an end – ultimately, he views them as products of the imagination, designed for the uneducated and childish. While such teachings could still serve a practical role in shaping the moral and political life of the masses (under the control of the state), Spinoza's ultimate objective is to shift the foundation of authority away from religious texts and toward individual critical reason and the sovereignty of the people.

Spinoza's God does not "speak" in a literal sense but manifests continuously through the immutable laws of nature, not through episodic miracles. There is no contingency in nature; everything is determined by the necessity of the divine nature. Due to the necessity inherent in nature, the universe contains no teleology. God does not act with specific ends in mind, nor do things exist for predetermined purposes. God does not perform actions for the sake of achieving anything; rather, the order of things unfolds inevitably from God's essence with firm determinism. Any discussion of God's purposes, intentions, goals, preferences, or aims is merely an anthropomorphic fiction.[173]

Although Spinoza uses the term "law" to describe the functioning of the universe, he is aware of the ambiguity of the term. The common understanding of "law" is aligned with a commanding will of a lawgiver and consequences for its disobedience. He uses "law" to apply to natural phenomena figuratively, as patterns of existence. Natural laws are devoid of a lawgiver with the power to require obedience:[174] "By God's guidance I

[173] Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, E 1 Appendix.
[174] Benedict Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, vol. 1 Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891), 58, https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/elwes-the-chief-works-of-benedict-de-spinoza-vol-1.

understand the fixed and immutable order of nature, or the connection of natural things."[175]

An interesting parallel to contemporary biblical scholarship emerges here: the idea of God as a lawgiver is a significant biblical innovation, not to be taken for granted in the context of the Ancient Near East. Schmid[176] examines the historical development of the concept of divine law in ancient Israel, focusing on the shift from king-based law to God-based law. In the ANE, laws are typically attributed to kings, not deities. Deities would commission kings to establish laws but would not legislate themselves. The idea of God as a lawgiver is a unique innovation in ancient Israel. This transformation did not happen overnight but unfolded gradually. First, the idea of YHWH as a king evolved over time. Initially, he was seen as a ruler of the heavenly realm, but this concept expanded, and he came to be understood as the ultimate sovereign over all creation. Alongside this shift, YHWH underwent a process of "solarization," where he was increasingly associated with justice and cosmic order – qualities often attributed to solar deities in the ANE.[177] Another significant change came through a reinterpretation of Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties. These treaties, which once bound subject nations to the Assyrian king, were reimagined in a radical way: instead of pledging loyalty to an

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[175] Spinoza, 1 Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, 45.
[176] Konrad Schmid, "Gott als Gesetzgeber," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 118, no. 3 (2021): 267, https://doi.org/10.1628/zthk-2021-0014.
[177] The identification of YHWH as a sun deity by many ancient Israelites is well attested in biblical scholarship: John G. Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 111; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Bernd Janowski, "JHWH und der Sonnengott. Aspekte der Solarisierung JHWHs in vorexilischer Zeit," in *Die rettende Gerechtigkeit* (vol.2 of *Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag 1999) 192-219. There are also references in the Bible: 2 Kgs 23:11 and Ezek 6:1-7, 8:16 criticize sun worship in the Jerusalem temple.

earthly ruler, the people of Israel were now seen as bound to YHWH himself in a covenantal relationship. Finally, the loss of Israel's monarchy played a decisive role. Without a human king to establish and enforce laws, legal authority had to be anchored elsewhere, and it was ultimately transferred to God. In this way, divine law became the new foundation of Israelite identity and governance.

Wright[178] places even greater emphasis on the role of imperial contexts and the need to maintain Israelite distinctiveness as driving forces behind this theological innovation. He argues that the Hebrew Bible, including its legal sections, emerged largely as a response to military defeats and political crises, especially the Babylonian exile. He contends that the biblical authors crafted a new vision of Israelite identity centered on covenant, law, and ethical monotheism as a way to maintain group cohesion and cultural distinctiveness in the face of imperial domination. In this perspective, the concept of divine law played a crucial role in shaping Israelite society, serving multiple purposes. First, it offered a new source of authority at a time when the monarchy had been lost. By attributing laws directly to God, the biblical writers ensured that their legal system could endure even without a king or political independence. More than just a legal framework, divine law also became a powerful tool for identity formation. Instead of relying on traditional markers like land or monarchy, the Israelites defined themselves through their adherence to God's commandments. This shift allowed them to maintain a strong sense of unity, even in diaspora. Beyond identity, divine law provided ethical and social guidelines that could function across different contexts. Whether under foreign rule or

[178] Jacob L. Wright, *Why the Bible Began: An Alternative History of Scripture and Its Origins*, First edition (Cambridge New York (N.Y.): Cambridge University Press, 2023).

dispersed among other nations, Israelites had a consistent framework for organizing their communities. Moreover, by presenting their laws as divinely ordained, they elevated them above the legal codes of surrounding empires, giving them both prestige and authority. Finally, divine law served as a subtle yet powerful means of resistance. By appealing to a higher divine authority, it provided a way to critique and push back against the rule of foreign powers, reinforcing the idea that true sovereignty belonged not to earthly rulers, but to God alone.

While Wright and Spinoza both recognize the political motivations behind "divine law", Wright sees it as a strategy for preserving Israelite identity, whereas Spinoza dismisses its ongoing relevance outside its original historical context. Wright emphasizes how divine law replaced monarchy to sustain a nation, while Spinoza argues that divine law was always contingent on the existence of that nation.

Spinoza's appeal epitomizes the turn from supernatural authority to reason, from interpretation to argument. All authority is of human origin. A reference to authority outside a strictly political context is meaningless, e.g. the expression "Authority of Scripture" is meaningless, if it implies that that source of this authority is God, since God is not a lawgiver. A prophet, in the classical concept of revelation, does not explain the revealed to him but merely communicates it; the acceptance of the revealed depends on the trust in prophet's divine commission, not on his rational arguments in favor of the revealed.

Spinoza's radical redefinition of revelation marks a significant contribution to the modern Jewish thought, standing at the crossroads between medieval and modern philosophical frameworks. Unlike Maimonides, who seeks to reconcile supernatural

revelation with rational thought, Spinoza systematically strips revelation of its supernatural dimensions, recasting it as a product of human imagination rather than divine intervention. For him, scripture is not a source of metaphysical truth but a tool for moral and political instruction, an instrument designed to maintain social cohesion rather than to disclose ultimate reality. His emphasis on natural law and rational inquiry as the sole means of accessing truth challenged centuries of theological tradition, shifting authority from divine command to human reason. His emphasis on reason and natural law as the true manifestation of divine wisdom resonates with aspects of process theology, particularly in its rejection of interventionist miracles and its focus on the immanence of the divine in natural processes.

Yet, as this study moves forward to examine Kaplan's concept of revelation, we see that Spinoza's rejection of supernaturalism was not the end of the discourse but a catalyst for new theological possibilities. Kaplan, like Spinoza, dismisses the idea of revelation as a miraculous event but reconstructs it within a naturalistic framework, emphasizing its ongoing, evolutionary nature within human experience. However, where Spinoza reduces revelation to a historical and psychological phenomenon, Kaplan reclaims it as an active, communal process – an unfolding dialogue between human beings and the moral ideals they cultivate over time. In this sense, Kaplan can be seen as bridging Spinoza's rationalism with a more dynamic, process-oriented understanding of divine-human interaction, aligning more closely with Hartshorne's process theology.

Thus, Spinoza's critique of revelation serves both as a challenge and an invitation. It challenges traditional notions of divine law as immutable and externally imposed, demanding a reevaluation of how religious authority is justified. At the same time, it

invites further theological innovation, opening the door for thinkers like Kaplan to reimagine revelation not as a fixed historical event but as an ongoing, participatory process. In this way, the trajectory from Maimonides to Spinoza to Kaplan reflects a broader evolution in Jewish thought – from a transcendent lawgiver to a pantheistic natural order to a dynamic, evolving process in which human agency plays a central role.

This transition, as I will explore in the next chapter, marks a significant shift in the understanding of revelation – not as a singular, divine act but as an ongoing human endeavor to interpret and refine moral and spiritual truths in an ever-changing world.

4. Mordecai Kaplan on Revelation

Mordecai Kaplan (1881–1983) is among the most influential and innovative Jewish thinkers and rabbis of the twentieth century. He left a tremendous amount of writing, including published works, but most importantly his diary, which he meticulously kept during sixty-five years, starting in 1913 at the age of thirty-two until 1978 when he was ninety-seven. This monumental corpus, comprising twenty-seven volumes, each containing 350–400 handwritten pages,[179] is challenging to study not only because of its extraordinary length but also because Kaplan is not a systematic theologian. While it is natural to expect the development, growth, and refinement of ideas, including contradictions and their resolution, in the work of any thinker who lived such a long and active life, Kaplan appears not to have sought to construct a coherent system of thought. Scult, the major scholar of Kaplan's legacy, defines Kaplan's mode of thinking as "theology of mood", rather than a rigorous and coherent system of ideas[180]. Kaplan himself writes:

> "Reconstructionism[181] is a *method*, rather than a series of affirmations or conclusions concerning Jewish life or thought. (...) It is a method of dealing with Judaism, or with that what unites Jews in time and space, and differentiates them as a group from non-Jews."[182]

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[179] Mel Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, The Modern Jewish Experience (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), xvii.
[180] Scult, 199.
[181] Kaplan borrows "reconstruction" as a philosophical term from Dewey. (John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston, 1948)) Shaul Magid, "The Spinozistic Spirit in Mordecai Kaplan's Revaluation of Judaism," *Modern Judaism* Vol. 20, no. No. 2 (May 2000): 162.
[182] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1956), 81.

Kaplan is aware of inconsistencies and fluidity in his theology, while emphasizing the continuous search for meaning and being more focused on the method, than on the results.

Kaplan describes the Jewish traditional method of theologizing as "transvaluation", in which the meaning of a concept is changed consciously or unconsciously by the predominant values of the rabbis, in a way that could not have been meant by the authors.[183] In other words, rabbis read their own ideas into a biblical passage or a sage's saying, often resulting in forced interpretations distant from the literal meaning of a passage or its cultural context. He claims that transvaluation, an effort to "introduce radically new values under the guise of ancient tradition," is employed both by Reform Judaism, which appeals to the prophetic tradition, and by Orthodoxy, which seeks to justify halakhah as an intrinsic aspect of Judaism predating the rabbinic period.[184] Since all interpretation is inherently contextual, any claim that an interpretation is identical to the meaning of what is being interpreted constitutes an act of transvaluation.[185]

Kaplan argues in favor of "revaluation", i.e., an interpretation in terms of finding a contemporary idea or norm corresponding to the value behind the traditional teaching:

> "When we revaluate, we analyze or break up the traditional values into their implications and single out for acceptance those implications which can help us meet our own moral and spiritual needs; the rest can be relegated to archeology."[186]

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[183] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 3.
[184] Kaplan, 3.
[185] Magid, "The Spinozistic Spirit in Mordecai Kaplan's Revaluation of Judaism," 161.
[186] Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, 6.

This focus on method, on development of an idea rather than on the result, a preference for *becoming* than for *being* underline the notion of process, which is central to Kaplan's ideas, making him one of the process thinkers.[187] Process philosophy is founded on "the premise that being is dynamic and that the dynamic nature of being should be the primary focus of any comprehensive philosophical account of reality and our place within it."[188] One of the human challenges, according to Kaplan, is the tendency to turn processes into things, or as he calls it "to thingify"[189] processes.

Kaplan was deeply influenced by American Pragmatists such as John Dewey (1859–1952) and William James (1842–1910), as well as by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), Matthew Arnold (1820–1888), Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), and Ahad Ha'am (1858–1927). He was also familiar with some of Alfred North Whitehead's (1861–1947) writings, though he has shown little interest in Whitehead's metaphysics.[190]

Until Kaplan read Whitehead's *"The Function of Reason"* (1929) in the late 1920s, he tended to think of religion predominantly as a group phenomenon.[191] In one of his later writings, he comments on Whitehead's famous statement "religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness"[192] as follows: "The truth is that public religion

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[187] William E. Kaufman, "Mordecai M. Kaplan and Process Theology: Metaphysical and Pragmatic Perspectives," *Process Studies* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 192–203.
[188] Johanna Seibt, "Process Philosophy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/process-philosophy/.
[189] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Soterics*, RCC, 41. Cit. in Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 119.
[190] William E. Kaufman, "Kaplan's Approach to Metaphysics," in *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 271–82.
[191] Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 136.
[192] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16.

is as much a prerequisite to personal religion as conversation is to individual thought. (...) Public religion (...) is the matrix of the most exalted and inspired achievements in individual religion."[193] Kaplan is often perceived as a religious sociologist highlighting the crucial importance of community. However, Kaplan often experienced loneliness, felt being misunderstood, or rejected.[194] It seems that his longing for community, was rather an aspiration than a description of the reality he lived in.

Another misconception of Kaplan is related to his ideas about God. He is often criticized for being too much a sociologist, having no or little interest in a thorough discussion about God, or not believing in God.[195] In fact, Kaplan not only devoted a whole book to the definition of God, *The Meaning or God in Modern Jewish Religion*, (1937), he was God-searching all his life and could not imagine a legitimate rabbi without a belief in God.[196] Kaplan writes,

> "The purpose in the various attempts to reinterpret the God idea is not to dissolve the God idea into ethics. It is to identify those experiences which should present for us the actual working of what we understand by the conception of God. Without the actual awareness of His presence, experienced as beatitude and inner illumination, we are likely to be content with the humanist interpretation of life. But this interpretation is inadequate, because it fails to express and to foster the feeling that man's ethical aspirations are part of a cosmic urge, by obeying which man makes himself at home in the universe."[197]

Kaplan's innovation for Jewish theology is not in abandoning God, but in thinking of God as a power or process, devoid of personality: the process leading to salvation, the

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[193] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Not So Random Thoughts: Witty and Profound Observations on Society, Religion and Jewish Life by America's Leading Jewish Thinker* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1966), 131. (Cit. in Scult, 171).
[194] Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 7–27.
[195] Scult, 110.
[196] Scult, 145.
[197] Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, 244.

power that makes for salvation:[198] "(...) God is conceived as the functioning in nature of the eternally creative process, which by bringing order out of chaos and good out of evil, actuates man to self-fulfillment."[199] Kaplan is perceived as a thinker who does not believe in personal God. But as I mentioned in the beginning, Kaplan is not a systematic theologian. Several instances witness that Kaplan keeps some traces of a belief in personal God or is struggling in the process of trying to find an adequate reinterpretation of traditional ideas around God, especially in liturgy.[200]

Kaplan aligns closely with religious naturalists,[201] asserting that genuine religiosity need not rely on supernatural concepts. He thinks of God and of revelation in non-supernatural terms:

> "(...) the tenets of any religion are the product of the intuitive insights of the spiritual leaders of a People, in their attempt to give meaning to the group life to which they belong. Without predicating any miraculous event, or series of such events, Reconstructionism assumes that divine grace is manifest in those powers of the human mind which enable it gradually to discover the laws on which man's salvation depends. These laws represent the will of God. This man's

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[198] This idea was originally expressed by Matthew Arnold as "power that makes for righteousness" (Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 28.) and was highly appreciated by Kaplan. He replaced "righteousness" with "salvation." Scult observes that this change emerged out of Kaplan's own thought development, without a reference to a book or thinker. (Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 46, 63–64, 157.) Kaplan was not the only rabbi to use Arnold's formulation, Emil G. Hisch referred to it in his definition of God, keeping Arnold's formulation intact. (Emil G. Hirsch, *My Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 273, 334; Ref. in Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, 275.)

[199] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood: Judaism's Contribution to World Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 10.

[200] Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 124-25, 253.

[201] Strictly speaking, Kaplan defined himself as a "transnaturalist". According to him, strict naturalism is inadequate because it is incapable of dealing with the phenomena of mind, personality, purpose, ideals, values, and meanings (Mordecai M. Kaplan. *Judaism Without Supernaturalism.* New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1958. 10.).

> discovery of these laws and God's revelation of them are but the obverse and reverse of the same process."[202]

In other words, revelation is nothing else than human discovery, intuitive insight, not a supernatural event. The laws of moral improvement are God's will, discovered by humans through intuition and cognition. "Spiritual religion affirms that it is unnecessary to resort to supernatural revelation for experiencing the reality of God. Man's experience of God is as real as his experience of his own personality."[203] Here Kaplan and Spinoza agree.[204]

In pre-modern times, belief in supernatural revelation was nearly universal, as the authority of a teaching depended on its source and the context of its revelation, including the time, place, and audience. In the modern world people evaluate a teaching by its content and role in the overall process of becoming fully human,[205] therefore the circumstances of its origin are not essential for the value of a given teaching. At the same time, Kaplan wants to keep the term "revelation" in the religious vocabulary:

> "There is a sense in which we not only can, but have to, speak of divine revelation, if we want to maintain our continuity with the Jewish past and to assume our responsibility for the Jewish future. The ancients expressed themselves in terms of the world as they knew it. We must express ourselves in terms of the world as we know it, for only in that way can anything have meaning for us. When our forefathers declared an idea to be divinely revealed, it was because, in the light of their faith in God and of their conception of Him, they were convinced that such an idea was somehow related to God's purpose, and to the fulfillment of their destiny as individuals, as Jews, and as human beings. We today, who look upon God as the Power that prods man to become fully human, must regard as divinely revealed any idea that helps individuals and

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[202] Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, 426–27.
[203] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 192.
[204] Magid, "The Spinozistic Spirit in Mordecai Kaplan's Revaluation of Judaism," 172.
[205] Kaplan, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood: Judaism's Contribution to World Peace*, 8, 58–59.

> groups to achieve the full stature of their humanity. *Man's discovery of religious truth is God's revelation of it, since the very process of that discovery implies the activity of God.* That is the sense in which the concept of revelation is indispensable in modern religious thinking."[206]

He believes, that "What the modern person experiences as a relentless inner urge the ancients experienced as a compulsion coming from some outside mysterious being – usually the god they worshipped."[207] Therefore, "The Bible is a collection of divinely inspired human writings. (...) Their being divinely inspired implies that their general purpose is to help us become fully human, or as the Torah puts it, "in the image of God."[208] The task of a modern Jew is to find a contemporary expression to this noble idea of becoming fully human.

Kaplan distinguishes between "archaeological truth", which is based on empirical evidence, and "historical truth", which he equated with mythological truth.[209] Accordingly, the Sinai event mythologically tells the lesson, that ethics is woven into the fabric of the universe.[210] We ought to reinterpret, revaluate Sinai, not ignore it.

The application of terms like "God's will" or "divine will" to a deity conceptualized as a power or process may initially seem paradoxical. Strictly speaking only persons have a will, which is usually associated with the cognitive function of the human mind enabling a particular action or commitment. Since "God's will" is understood by Kaplan in terms of a collection of ethical laws, it is by the fact of its bare existence not coercive,

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[206] Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, 154–55.
[207] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 357.
[208] Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, 192.
[209] Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 122.
[210] Scult, 123.

it does not demand obedience and does not punish for disobedience. At the same time, it has a capacity to inspire humans for action towards ethical life. There is something divine in us, that is receptive to the divine, "the divine in us fashions personality".[211] At first glance, this inspiration is an inner process, not a coercion from outside. But for Kaplan religion ultimately is a collective phenomenon. Norms are discovered in and by the collective, the collective monitors its observance, ideally through persuasion and democratic process of decision making.[212]

Ideas can have supreme value even if they do not originate in a deity. Kaplan thinks of God as a collection of values, values to be discovered by humans. At the same time, according to Kaplan, God is more than that, God exists apart from the society's beliefs, God is "not a being, but Reality viewed as an ordered universe".[213] He prefers to follow predicate theology,[214] calling an idea divine, instead of describing the divine by an idea: love is God, instead of God is love;[215] "... when we say God loves, forgives, acts justly, we should understand it to mean that the process of loving, forgiving, and acting justly are divine or God".[216] Predicate theology treats ideals as transcendent and of supreme value, even if they are not revealed by a personal, supernatural God.[217]

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[211] Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, 282.
[212] Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 172.
[213] Kaplan diaries, October 13, 1922, JTS, box 1, vol. 2. Cit. in Scult, 57.
[214] Harold M. Schulweis, "From God to Godliness: Proposal for a Predicate Theology," *The Reconstructionist*, February 1975, https://hmsi.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/from-god-to-godliness-proposal-for-predicate-theology.pdf.
[215] Kaplan diaries, September 3, 1922, JTS, box 1, vol. 2. Cit. in Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 135.
[216] Kaplan diaries, November 6, 1952, JTS, box 5, vol. 16. Cit. in Scult, 135.
[217] John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 38, 61–62, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.90386/mode/2up?q=ideals.

As for Dewey, for Kaplan any idea that has a potential to assist human perfection or salvation is divine. Thus, he expands the definition of divine and the definition of Israel, as people that identify with the divine and the process of perfection. Since any people can identify with the process leading to salvation, any people can be Israel or Israel-like.[218]

Since "God's will", or the laws of ethics are objective and universal, "[r]eligions differ not in the degree of truth that they express," Kaplan maintains, "but in the group *sancta* resulting from the specific group experiences which they interpret as having been revealed by God, or as revealing Him."[219] Sancta include symbols, events, persons, places, texts, that inspire feelings of reverence, pride or meaning. Sancta are unique, but ethical laws are not a possession of one group, they belong to all humanity. Therefore no one group of people can see itself elected, exclusively chosen recipients of the divine truth. Kaplan prefers to talk about "calling" instead of "election", because all humanity is called to embark on the journey to actualize their full humanity.[220] Unlike the traditional view that holiness is an attribute of an act or object because of its distinctiveness by divine decree, Kaplan believes that intention *(kavanah)* creates holiness. Holiness is defined by a relation to the worshipper and is grounded in the purpose of salvation. For Kaplan, memory in the sense of historical consciousness and awareness of the collective identity is the primary function of the ritual.[221]

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[218] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Torah and Salvation*, 1920s, 30. Unpublished manuscript. Cit. in Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 135.
[219] Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, 431.
[220] Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 201–2.
[221] Magid, "The Spinozistic Spirit in Mordecai Kaplan's Revaluation of Judaism," 172.

Since revelation is not a supernatural event, but a human-driven process of exploration of divine truths, the idea of education in its classical German term *Bildung,* or its Emersonian equivalent "self-culture" is of crucial importance for Kaplan.[222]

Building on the ideas of Arnold, who sees *Bildung* and religion as synonymous,[223] [224] Kaplan sees it essential for his idea of salvation. *Bildung* is striving for perfection of character, through education and grounding in the collective culture, which in turn is constructed in such a way that it enables flourishing of each member of the society. Literature plays a central role in *Bildung*. Torah is a process, not a document, therefore any literature that can inspire is Torah in the wide sense of the term.[225] Kaplan especially highlights the role of poetry in religious life.[226]

In summary, Scult articulates the Reconstructionist commitment in the following words:

> "To be a Jew you must identify with the great drama that is the life of the Jewish people. To be part of that drama, you must converse with the Jews of the past; you must use their experience and their wisdom to transcend yourself. You must make their experience your experience. You must recreate it so that you may restore and renew yourself. Make it part of your world – of your play and of your everyday. Make it work for you."[227]

Although Kaplan is a radical thinker, he earnestly seeks to root his ideas in Jewish tradition, maintaining a connection to collective Jewish lore and demonstrating its

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[222] Scult, 33, 59.
[223] Scult, 59.
[224] Martha Moore Crowley, *Literature and Education: Recalling Matthew Arnold. (PhD Dissertation, Columnia University, Unpublished)*, 2012.
[225] Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, 136.
[226] Scult, 127.
[227] Scult, Mel. *Scult on Kaplan's Philosophy*, https://kaplancenter.org/scult-on-kaplans-philosophy/ [retrieved on 10.02.2025].

relevance for the Jewish future. Although he uses terms from the traditional vocabulary like “God”, “God’s will”, “God’s image”, “revelation”, “salvation”, “prayer” he infuses them with an innovative meaning. When reading Kaplan one has to constantly bear in mind the Kaplanian technical language, where “God” is not a person with will as a faculty of mind, but an impersonal process, dynamic power, collection of contingent societal values; where “revelation” is not an uncovering or passive receptance of the divine or divine will by humans, but an active search for values that can be called divine, which inspire us for action; where “salvation” is not supernatural bliss in the world to come, but a state of being fully human in here and now.

Kaplan tries to redefine the religious vocabulary to make tradition, with its texts and rituals adequate for modernity. In case of revelation, my main concern in this paper, it is a question whether Kaplan succeeds in the redefinition of revelation in relation to natural knowledge. If revelation is understood as a human quest for meaning, knowledge, intuition, and the rational exploration of ethical laws, it may no longer qualify as revelation in the traditional sense.

Theologically, from revelation one expects something else than natural human cognitive-intuitive process. There is no need for an extra term “revelation” if all its meaning can be transmitted by other, religiously neutral words; it is redundant. Whitehead is also difficult to understand due to his technical language, for example, the way he uses “feeling” in describing behavior of electrons, but he uses it due to its basic meaning and expands it.[228] Kaplan reformulates the core meaning of “revelation,”

[228] C. Robert Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (West Conshohocken, Pa: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 34–35.

rendering it virtually indistinguishable from human knowledge. Conventionally, revelation's essence lies in its supernatural or extraordinary nature, as it involves the disclosure of something previously concealed and inaccessible through natural human faculties.

Revelation is a religious term which causes emotional reactions. Kaplan probably understands that and therefore it is important to him to keep it in his theology: "we not only can, but have to, speak of divine revelation, if we want to maintain our continuity with the Jewish past and to assume our responsibility for the Jewish future."[229]

Kaplan's approach to revelation represents a significant evolution in Jewish thought, bridging the gap between Spinoza's radical naturalism and traditional Jewish theology.[230] While Kaplan, like Spinoza, rejects the notion of supernatural revelation, he does not abandon the concept entirely. Instead, drawing heavily from Hermann Cohen – who is himself highly critical of Spinoza – Kaplan envisions God not as an immanent force synonymous with nature but as a transcendent ideal that shapes human moral and spiritual development.

Kaplan's concept of revelation as a process of human discovery and intuitive insight aligns closely with his broader philosophy of religious naturalism. In this view, revelation is not a one-time, miraculous event but an ongoing dialogue between human beings and the moral ideals they cultivate over time. This perspective represents a significant departure from Maimonides' understanding of revelation as contingent upon

[229] Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, 154.
[230] On relation of Kaplan to Spinoza, see Magid, "The Spinozistic Spirit in Mordecai Kaplan's Revaluation of Judaism."

divine will, and even from Spinoza's reduction of revelation to a purely historical and psychological phenomenon.

However, Kaplan's retention of traditional religious terminology, including "revelation", raises important questions about the coherence and consistency of his approach. While he seeks to maintain continuity with Jewish tradition, his redefinition of key concepts like revelation, God's will, and divine inspiration blurs the lines between religious and secular terminology to such an extent that the distinctiveness of religious language becomes questionable.

Kaplan's emphasis on the collective nature of religious experience and the role of community in shaping religious understanding offers a counterpoint to both Maimonides' focus on individual prophetic experience and Spinoza's emphasis on individual rational autonomy. This communal aspect of Kaplan's thought provides a bridge to more recent developments in process theology, which often emphasize the relational nature of reality and the importance of community in religious life.

As I transition to examining Charles Hartshorne's process theology in the next chapter, Kaplan's work serves as a crucial steppingstone. Like Kaplan, Hartshorne will emphasize the dynamic, evolving nature of divine-human interaction. However, Hartshorne's more systematic approach to metaphysics and his nuanced understanding of divine power and knowledge will provide a more robust philosophical framework for understanding revelation as a process.

My presentation of Hartshorne's process theology will build upon Kaplan's insights while addressing some of the tensions in Kaplan's thought. Where Kaplan sometimes struggled to articulate a coherent concept of God that was neither fully personal nor

entirely impersonal, Hartshorne will offer a more sophisticated model of divine reality that incorporates both change and permanence, both transcendence and immanence.

Moreover, Hartshorne's work will provide a metaphysical grounding for many of Kaplan's intuitions about the nature of reality and human knowledge. His concept of divine persuasion rather than coercion aligns well with Kaplan's emphasis on human agency in the process of revelation, while his understanding of God as affected by and responsive to the world resonates with Kaplan's view of an evolving divine-human relationship.

As I move forward, the challenge will be to integrate these diverse perspectives into a coherent understanding of revelation that respects both the integrity of Jewish tradition and the insights of modern thought. Hartshorne's process theology, with its emphasis on becoming rather than static being, offers a promising framework for this integration, potentially reconciling the seeming contradictions between divine revelation and human knowledge that have troubled Jewish thought for ages.

5. Charles Hartshorne's Process Theology and Revelation

Charles Hartshorne[231] (1897–2000) develops a vision of God that emphasizes relationality, change, and dynamic becoming. Deeply influenced by Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947),[232] Henri Bergson (1859-1941), and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), he integrates their insights on metaphysics and logic into his philosophical framework. While firmly within the process tradition, Hartshorne's philosophy significantly diverges from Whitehead's. Unlike other process thinkers such as John B. Cobb Jr. (1925-2024) and David Ray Griffin (1939-2022), who further explored process thought in relation to Christian theology, Hartshorne's focus remains on the philosophical coherence of God. Although the son of an Episcopal minister, he did not identify as Christian, emphasizing instead a broader metaphysical perspective.[233]

Hartshorne's guiding "intuitive clue" in philosophy is the idea that "God is love."[234] For him the only deity worthy of worship is one described as "Love divine, all loves excelling."[235]

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[231] Pronounced "Harts-horne".
[232] It would be a mistake though to consider Harshorne as Whitehead's disciple, since he departed from Whitehead in a number of points, especially in the concept and existence of God, which is most relevant for this paper. (Donald Wayne Viney and George W Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne: A Critical Examination* (Anoka, Minnesota: Process Century Press, 2020), 145.)
[233] Viney and Shields, 146.
[234] Viney and Shields, vi. Referred to Randall E. Auxier and Mark Y.A. Davies, eds., *Hartshorne and Brightman on God, Process, and Persons: The Correspondence, 1922-1945* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), 14. Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1970), xviii.
[235] Charles Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy*, ed. Mohammad Valady (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1997), 167.

Following the pragmatic tradition, Hartshorne emphasizes the importance of considering the practical effects of philosophical concepts, arguing that the value of an idea lies in its experiential consequences and its impact on human life. For Hartshorne, philosophy should not be an abstract exercise detached from lived reality but should inform and enrich human experience. He maintains that the meaning and truth of a concept are best understood by examining how it influences thought, behavior, and social relations.

This pragmatic approach shapes his theology, particularly his understanding of God and religious experience. For instance, Hartshorne argues that the idea of God should not merely be analyzed for logical consistency but evaluated for its implications on moral responsibility, community, and individual flourishing. A concept of God that promotes compassion, creativity, and meaningful engagement with the world is, in his view, more valuable than one that leads to passivity or fear.

Consequently, Hartshorne identifies "six common mistakes about God" that he believes were prevalent in traditional Western theology:[236]

1. God is absolutely perfect and therefore unchangeable.
2. God's omnipotence (all-powerful).
3. God's omniscience (all-knowing).
4. God's unsympathetic goodness.
5. Immortality as a career after death.
6. Revelation is infallible.

[236] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 2–6.

Hartshorne's identification of these theological mistakes formed the foundation of his process theology and neoclassical theism. By challenging these traditional concepts, he develops a more logically coherent and existentially satisfying understanding of God and the divine-world relationship. He seeks language that avoids two extremes: either language is entirely inadequate to describe God, or it can do so with complete certainty and clarity.[237]

Although our knowledge of the Divine is extremely limited, and negations may play a significant role in religious discourse, Hartshorne argues that relying solely on negative theology is a form of false modesty.[238] Negative theologians, such as Maimonides (my example), emphasize what cannot be known or said about God. However, this intellectual modesty masks the fact that they assume sufficient understanding of divine reality to determine what cannot be attributed to it. Furthermore, their use of negations is based on problematic contrasts – finite is deemed inferior to infinite, the changeable to the unchangeable, the temporal to the eternal, and so on. However, reducing these characteristics to simple dichotomies of superior and inferior is overly simplistic. For instance,[239] both being affected by others (passibility) and being unaffected (impassibility) have better and worse expressions. Excessive identification with others' suffering can be harmful to one's own well-being and may even hinder the ability to help, while complete detachment from others' suffering reflects a flaw of

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[237] Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 157–64.
[238] Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 2. print (New Haven Lodnon: Yale University Press, 1964), 35. Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967), 77.
[239] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 151.

insensitivity. According to Hartshorne, theologians should not focus on negations when describing the Divine. Instead, they should seek to attribute to God the highest and most meaningful qualities from both sides of any given contrast, capturing what is truly worthy of worship. Ultimately, we worship God not because of what God is not or lacks, but because of God's "positive and all-encompassing love and beauty."[240]

Hartshorne's rejection of classical theism centers on its portrayal of God as an unchanging (immutable) and impassible being – a view he deems logically inconsistent and existentially inadequate. Classical theism, rooted in Aristotelian thought, postulates divine immutability as a hallmark of perfection.[241] Because anything that undergoes change must do so for either improvement or decline. If it improves, it was not yet perfect; if it deteriorates, it is no longer perfect. Therefore, change inherently signifies imperfection. Since God is perfect, God's essence remains unaffected by temporal processes.[242] God promotes the well-being of the creatures nonetheless remains unaffected by their circumstances. Hartshorne argues this conception reduces God to a distant static monarch incapable of genuine relationship with the world, rendering divine love and responsiveness incoherent.[243]

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[240] Charles Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1965), 69.
[241] Michael Olson, "Aristotle on God: Divine Nous as Unmoved Mover," in *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, ed. Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 101–11.
[242] Benjamin Jowett, trans., *The Republic of Plato* (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), bk2, 380e–81. Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 432–33.
[243] Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 13–14. Charles Hartshorne, *The Darkness and the Light: A Philosopher Reflects Upon His Fortunate Career and Those Who Made It Possible* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 232–33.

His critique of divine immutability raises several fundamental concerns.[244] First, he argues that the concept is logically incoherent. If God is truly unchanging, then divine knowledge of a dynamic, ever-evolving world becomes paradoxical. A timeless God could not know contingent, evolving realities. A God who cannot change would seemingly be incapable of responding to new realities. Knowledge contributes something real to the knowing agent, even if that knowing agent is God. If the object known is contingent, then God's knowledge must have a contingent aspect.

Second, immutability is seen as making God ethically irrelevant. A God who is unaffected by the world and who cannot change appears indifferent to suffering, detached from the struggles of human existence. Moreover, this view clashes with the biblical portrayal of a compassionate and responsive deity who hears prayers, feels sorrow, and acts in history.

Third, Hartshorne objects that immutability is an ideal, arguing that growth, creativity, and development are essential aspects of perfection rather than contradictions to it.[245] According to Hartshorne, perfection lies not in static independence but in "ideal responsiveness", namely in God's capacity to integrate all experiences into the divine life. Rather than being aloof and unaffected, God is deeply involved, evolving alongside creation in a relationship of love and reciprocity.

Finally, he challenges immutability on metaphysical grounds. In line with process philosophy, Hartshorne argues that reality itself is characterized by change and

[244] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 6–10.
[245] Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, 310.

relationality. To exist is to interact, to be shaped by relationships. If God is in all sense immutable, God would be more like an abstract principle than a living presence.

Hartshorne highlights ambiguity in the concept of perfection.[246] Something is perfect if nothing surpasses it, but in relation to whom or what? Clearly, it must be unsurpassable by others. God's perfection, however, is not based on immutability but in being unsurpassed by anything or anyone else. But God may still surpass Godself, making God "the self-surpassing surpasser of all."[247]

Hartshorne thus dismisses classical theism's "monopolar prejudice," which prioritizes absolutes like immutability while neglecting the relational dimensions of divinity.[248] He terms his approach "neoclassical theism" to signal both continuity with and departure from classical traditions.[249] While retaining classical attributes like divine necessity and transcendence, he reinterprets them through a process lens.[250]

Hartshorne describes God as dipolar, i.e. God is not defined by rigid opposites but by a balance of complementary qualities. God is both necessary and contingent, eternal and temporal, absolute and relative. This duality allows for a richer, more nuanced understanding of the divine nature. Hartshorne builds upon Whitehead's two aspects of God: primordial and consequent.

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[246] Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 243–57.
[247] Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 20.
[248] Hartshorne and Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God*, 8, 14, 81, 146.
[249] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, ix.
[250] Daniel A. Dombrowski, *History of the Concept of God: A Process Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

The primordial nature of God represents the eternal and abstract aspect of divinity, namely the wellspring of all possibilities and the organizing principle of reality. This is where divine necessity resides, providing the stable framework that ensures order in the universe. But rather than dictating a fixed plan, God's primordial nature acts as a lure toward novelty, inviting creation into ever-new expressions of beauty, harmony, and complexity.

In contrast, the consequent nature of God is deeply immersed in the temporal flow of existence. This is God's concrete and responsive side, where the experiences of the world are gathered and woven into the divine life. Here, God does not stand apart from creation but fully engages with it, "feeling the feelings" of every creature. In dialogue with Abraham Heschel, Hartshorne affirmed and amended Heschel's view of God as "the Most Moved Mover" [251] stating that God is "the most, *and* best, moved mover."[252] Through this relational participation, God evolves – not in essence, but in experience – integrating the joys, sorrows, and struggles of the world into an ever-deepening divine reality. In this context Hartshorne writes of creatures as "part-creator of God."[253] [254]

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[251] "If we put aside the categories and logic of Greek philosophy and try to understand biblical religion in its own terms, we will soon discover that the God of the bible is not Aristotle's impassive, unmoved mover at all; he can only be described as 'the Most Moved Mover.' … According to the Bible, the single most important thing about God is not his perfection but his concern for the world." Abraham J. Heschel, *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism from the Writings of Abraham J. Heschel*, ed. Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959), 24.
[252] Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy*, 6, 39.
[253] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 157. Referred to Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Chicago: Willet, Clark & Company, 1941), 109.
[254] Cf. Whitehead: „It is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the World creates God." Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348. In other words, God "is not *before* but *with* all creation." Whitehead, 343.

This middle-ground approach allows Hartshorne to uphold divine perfection without reducing God to an inert, static being. Together, these two dimensions form a vision of God that is both steadfast and dynamic, providing both the foundation for existence and the loving presence that walks alongside creation. Unlike Whitehead,[255] Hartshorne emphasizes God's personal unity across these poles. God is not a single actual entity but a "personally ordered society" of occasions, ensuring coherence amid change.[256]

Hartshorne argues that God is not merely a person but the supreme example of personhood. This perspective highlights that God's personhood is infinitely more perfect and complete than human personhood.[257] He argues that because God possesses the highest level of awareness and relationality within the world that is characterized by a hierarchy of consciousness, God exemplifies the fullest sense of personhood.[258]

Unlike classical theism, which often separates God from creation, neoclassical theism is characterized as panentheism. According to panentheism the universe exists within God, however God is not confined by it. God both transcends the material world and actively participates in it. It is as true to say that the universe is ensouled as to say that God is embodied.[259] Hartshorne's basic argument in support of panentheism is that if God is the greatest conceivable reality, then God must encompass all that is valuable

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[255] "Thus religious experience cannot be taken as contributing to metaphysics any direct evidence for a personal God in any sense transcendent or creative." Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 74.
[256] Charles Hartshorne, "Is Whitehead's God the God of Religion?," *Ethics* 53, no. 3 (April 1943): 219–27, https://doi.org/10.1086/290356.
[257] Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 142–43.
[258] Randall E. Auxier, "God, Process, and Persons: Charles Hartshorne and Personalism," *Process Studies* 27, no. 3–4 (1998): 175–99.
[259] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 86.

in the universe. Otherwise, a greater reality would exist, namely, the universe-plus-God, contradicting the very notion of divine supremacy.[260]

There are three advantages of panentheism, according to Hartshorne.[261] First, it provides a strong argument in favor of monotheism.[262]

Second, it addresses the empiricist challenge of identifying the referent of the term "God." Empiricism holds that knowledge comes primarily from experience and observation. Classical theism often describes God as wholly transcendent, beyond space, time, and direct experience. This raises a problem for empiricism: if God is beyond all human perception, how can we meaningfully refer to or identify God? In contrast panentheism asserts that while God is more than the universe, God is also immanent within it, actively participating in its processes. If God is in constant interaction with the world, then divine presence can be observed in the natural order, experiences of value, moral consciousness, or creative novelty in history and nature. God is not an isolated, unknowable entity but the deepest reality that encompasses and interacts with the cosmos. This gives empirical grounding to the term "God" by linking it to real-world processes and experiences rather than a wholly abstract concept.

Third, it highlights a reciprocal relationship between God and creation, showing that not only God is integral to the good of the creatures but also that the good of the creatures is integral to the divine good. Hartshornian God is a God who cares and, thus

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[260] Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 19.
[261] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 183.
[262] The argument for monotheism goes as follows. God is all-inclusive. If God is an all-inclusive reality, then there can be only one God because there can be only one all-inclusive reality. Viney and Shields, 183.

God can be disappointed or hurt by the actions of the creatures.[263] Ultimately, Hartshorne agrees with the Whitehead postulate that "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification."[264]

Hartshorne argues that the classical concept of divine omniscience is problematic for several reasons.[265] Hartshorne contends that perfect knowledge should reflect reality as it actually is. Since the future is partly indeterminate, God's knowledge of the future should also reflect this indeterminacy.[266] He proposes that omniscience must be temporal, knowing new facts as they come into existence rather than knowing all facts, including future ones, simultaneously.[267] Hartshorne emphasizes that God's knowledge should be conceived as a form of direct awareness or "knowledge by acquaintance" rather than merely propositional knowledge.[268] The classical view of omniscience, according to Hartshorne, is incompatible with genuine human freedom and contingency.

Hartshorne offers an alternative understanding of divine omniscience.[269] God knows perfectly everything that is knowable at any given moment, including the past as determinate and the future as partly indeterminate. God's knowledge is not static but dynamic, changing as new events unfold in the world. Divine knowledge involves a form of participation in the feelings and experiences of creatures, aligning with the

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[263] Viney and Shields, 147.
[264] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 521.
[265] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 26–27.
[266] Donald W. Viney, "Does Omniscience Imply Foreknowledge? Craig on Hartshorne," *Process Studies* 18, no. 1 (1989): 30–37.
[267] Viney.
[268] Viney.
[269] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 26.

process philosophy view of reality. While God may have extensive knowledge of future possibilities and probabilities, this knowledge is not absolute or deterministic.

Hartshorne's critique and reconceptualization of divine omniscience have several important implications. By limiting God's foreknowledge, Hartshorne's view aims to preserve genuine creaturely freedom and self-creativity. This perspective offers a different approach to the problem of evil by limiting God's responsibility for future events. Hartshorne's view of omniscience is closely tied to his panentheistic conception of God's relationship to the world.

Hartshorne's rethinking of divine omnipotence challenges classical theism's foundational claim that God possesses absolute, unilateral power over creation. Hartshorne argues that traditional notions of omnipotence are logically incoherent, ethically untenable, and incompatible with a dynamic, relational universe. His critique reshapes theological discourse by redefining divine power as persuasive rather than coercive, offering a framework that reconciles divine influence with creaturely freedom and the reality of evil.[270]

Hartshorne agrees that for God to be worthy of worship "God must in power excel all others," i.e. "The highest conceivable form of power must be the divine power."[271] "Is it the highest ideal of power," asks Hartshorne, "to rule over puppets who are permitted to think they make decisions but who are really made by another to do exactly what they do? For twenty centuries we have had theologians who seem to say yes to this question."[272] Hartshorne argues, if God monopolizes all power, creatures are rendered

[270] Hartshorne, 10–26.
[271] Hartshorne, 10.
[272] Hartshorne, 12.

powerless, contradicting the empirical reality of self-determining entities. He aligns with Plato's Sophist, asserting that being is power, i.e. every entity, however small, possesses some capacity to act and be acted upon.[273] Thus, a wholly powerless creature is a contradiction. Moreover:

> "Omnipotence as usually conceived is a false or indeed absurd ideal, which in truth limits God, denies to him any world worth talking about: a world of living, that is to say, significantly decision-making, agents. It is the tradition which did indeed terribly limit divine power, the power to foster creativity even in the least of the creatures".[274]

Classical omnipotence implies God could unilaterally eradicate evil, yet suffering persists. Hartshorne argues this creates an insoluble theodicy problem. If God controls all outcomes, divine benevolence becomes indefensible. Instead, Hartshorne posits that evil arises from the inherent risks of a universe where creatures exercise genuine freedom.[275]

Hartshorne finds traditional attempts to reconcile God's omnipotence and benevolence with the existence of evil unsatisfactory.[276] One common approach suggests that God does not choose to cause an evil act but rather chooses not to prevent it, thereby permitting evil to occur. Hartshorne challenges this view by noting that, ordinarily, when an agent (X) grants permission to another (Y) to perform an action, there are always aspects of the action that are not explicitly specified by X. This is due to the limitations of human language, which can only outline events in broad terms without conveying

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[273] Daniel A. Dombrowski, "Being Is Power," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (1995): 299–314.
[274] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 17–18.
[275] Hartshorne, 12.
[276] Hartshorne, 11–13.

every detail. However, omnipotence is typically understood as the capacity to exercise absolute control over all events.

Another approach posits that God determines that a creature will perform a specific act, yet decrees that the act will be carried out freely. In this view, the creature's actions are predetermined, but the creature is still considered to act freely. Hartshorne rejects this explanation, arguing that such a conception of power is manipulative, resembles despotism and is incompatible with the notion of divine benevolence.

A further strategy proposes that although God possesses the power to determine all events, God chooses to create humans with a degree of freedom, valuing the existence of free creatures. According to this view, evil arises when human beings misuse their granted freedom. Hartshorne challenges this explanation by pointing out that numerous evils, such as natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes), cannot reasonably be attributed to human free will.

An alternative perspective of Kaplan on theodicy would advise shifting the focus from abstract theological speculation to concrete action. Rather than attempting to rationalize suffering or justify the existence of evil, he suggests reframing the question entirely: "Instead of asking, 'How can life be considered good when there is so much evil in it?' let us ask, 'What must I do to make the world better?"[277] By turning the problem of evil into a call to moral responsibility, this approach acknowledges pain without resorting to explanations. It invites the suffering person to channel pain into acts of meaning, compassion, and justice, reinforcing the idea that human agency plays a central role in shaping a better world.

[277] Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, 236.

Hartshorne rejects the view, held by thinkers like Kaplan, that the problem of evil is purely existential or practical. Instead, he argues that if human suffering is deeply intertwined with our theoretical beliefs, then any effort to address and overcome evil must also engage with its intellectual and philosophical dimensions. For Hartshorne, confronting evil is not only a matter of ethical action but also of refining our understanding of God, the world, and the nature of suffering itself.

A further strategy is to appeal to an afterlife, in order to maintain the coherence of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence while addressing the reality of evil and suffering in the present world. Hartshorne critiques the notion of an afterlife as a solution to the problem of theodicy on several grounds.[278] He argues that appealing to an afterlife to justify the existence of evil in the present world raises more philosophical and theological issues than it resolves.

Firstly, Hartshorne contends that compensating for earthly suffering with rewards in an afterlife does not actually negate the reality of suffering. Even if individuals receive bliss in the afterlife, the pain and injustice they experienced still occurred and cannot be undone. Thus, the existence of suffering remains a problem for a benevolent and omnipotent God.

Secondly, Hartshorne challenges the moral implications of using an afterlife to justify present suffering. He argues that this approach risks treating individuals as mere means to an end, undermining their intrinsic value. If suffering is permitted solely for the sake of later reward, it suggests a utilitarian calculus that is incompatible with genuine benevolence.

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[278] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 32–37.

Thirdly, Hartshorne questions the coherence of justice being fully realized only in an afterlife. He argues that moral and existential significance is rooted in temporal, embodied experiences. Thus, deferring justice to a post-mortem state diminishes the importance of justice and goodness in the present world.

Finally, Hartshorne critiques the speculative nature of afterlife solutions. He maintains that grounding theodicy in unverifiable claims about an afterlife is philosophically weak, as it relies on metaphysical assertions that lack empirical support. Consequently, he argues for a theodicy that addresses the reality of suffering within the framework of this world, rather than deferring resolution to a hypothetical afterlife.

Even though God does not erase past suffering, Hartshorne offers hope through objective immortality. Every experience, including pain and loss, is eternally preserved in God's consequent nature, in God's memory. But rather than remaining as raw wounds, these experiences are transformed, woven into a greater aesthetic and moral harmony within the divine life. In this way, while evil is not undone, it is ultimately given meaning within God's ongoing creative process.[279]

Coercive omnipotence negates moral responsibility. If God determines all actions, human choices are illusory. Hartshorne asserts that creativity is distributed: all beings, from subatomic particles to humans, possess self-determining power. Divine power must therefore be relational, not absolute.

Hartshorne's critique of the problem of evil shifts the focus from divine responsibility to the nature of freedom itself. He argues that evil is the risk of freedom: suffering arises not from divine neglect but from the misuse of creaturely autonomy. For

[279] Hartshorne, 32–37.

love and personal growth to be meaningful, beings must have genuine freedom, and with that freedom comes the possibility of harm. A world where God unilaterally prevented all evil would be a world devoid of true independence, reducing creation to mere puppetry.

Rather than exercising absolute control, God works through persuasion, not coercion. God presents the best possible ideals, guiding creation toward goodness, but cannot force their adoption. As Hartshorne puts it, "possibilities are rooted in the history of actual occasions"; divine influence is not imposed from above but unfolds dynamically within the ever-changing realities of the world. For Hartshorne, God's greatness lies not in domination but in the capacity to "maximize value in a world of free agents" – a paradigm shift that redefines both divinity and human responsibility. Hartshorne quotes Whitehead: "God's power is the worship he inspires."[280] "We feel the divine beauty and cannot but respond accordingly."[281] Not only humans respond, but all animals also feel it.

Building on this relational view of divinity, Hartshorne contends that God's love is not merely abstract benevolence but involves real participation in creaturely experiences. God feels the feelings of all creatures, including their sufferings. Divine love entails both action for the welfare of others and sympathetic participation in their experiences. God is the "great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands."[282]

Schulweis apparently misunderstands Hartshorne's notion of divine love. He challenges Hartshorne claiming that he states, that "God literally loves all and

[280] Hartshorne, 14.
[281] Hartshorne, 14.
[282] Hartshorne, 14.

'appreciates the qualities of all things-period.'[283] Therefore, He cannot wish the sick child well without caring about the woes of the bacteria. It is not that God views the whole of things impassively. Unlike the solid impassibility of the scholastic Deity, Hartshorne's sensitive God grieves in all griefs. There is no callousness in not destroying the bacteria to save the child. 'He merely has other values to consider also.'"[284] [285]

According to Hartshorne, while all entities have intrinsic value, they are not equal. Applying to the example of Schulweis, in a conflict between bacteria and a sick child God is on the side of the sick child. According to Hartshorne, there is a rising continuum of value among creatures, based on their complexity and capacity for experience. The value of a creature is determined by its ability to contribute rich and diverse experiences to God. He boldly states, "I hold that the ultimate value of human life, or of anything else, consists *entirely* in the contribution it makes to the divine life."[286] But Hartshorne warns against anthropocentrism. Every creature, not only humans, make some contribution to the divine life:

"It is likely that God takes no delight whatsoever in the more than a million other living forms on this planet, yet does delight in, derive value from contemplating, the one human species lately emergent on the planet? If such an idea is not sheer

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[283] Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962), 142.
[284] Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism*, 105.
[285] Harold M. Schulweis, "Charles Hartshorne and the Defenders of Heschel," *Judaism* 24, no. 1 (1975): 58–62.
[286] Charles Hartshorne, *Wisdom as Moderation: A Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 118.

anthropomorphic bias, what would be such bias?"[287] Therefore, "To the extent that we fail to love life in its myriad forms, to that extent is our being outside our love for God."[288]

This hierarchy of value is grounded in several key factors that distinguish humans from other creatures.[289] Foremost among these is the capacity for rationality and moral sensitivity. Humans are situated at the pinnacle of this continuum because of their unique ability to engage in complex reasoning and moral reflection, enabling them to discern ethical principles and make value judgments.

Closely linked to this is the human capacity for language and abstract thinking. Unlike other creatures, humans can comprehend abstract concepts and express them symbolically through language. This ability to communicate nuanced ideas and represent intangible realities is regarded as a remarkable intellectual achievement, further elevating humanity's place within the hierarchy.

Additionally, humans are recognized for their exceptional creativity and diversity. They exhibit an unparalleled inventiveness and adaptability, demonstrated by the vast array of cultural practices, artistic expressions, and technological advancements they produce. This creative diversity is seen as a testament to the richness of human experience and agency.

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[287] Hartshorne, 118.
[288] Charles Hartshorne, "Foundations for a Humane Ethics: What Human Beings Have in Common with Other Higher Animals," in *On the Fifth Day: Animal Rights and Human Ethics*, ed. Richard K. Morris and Michael W. Fox (Washington D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1978), 169.
[289] Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics*, 242; Charles Hartshorne, *Creativity in American Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 153.

Finally, the complexity of human experience is emphasized as a defining factor. Humans possess the unique capacity for self-reflection and the appreciation of aesthetic values. This ability to not only perceive beauty but to contemplate and enjoy it in a self-aware manner is considered a profound enhancement of experiential depth. As a result, humans are perceived as contributing richer, more varied experiences to the world compared to creatures with simpler modes of existence.

Furthermore, Hartshorne strongly emphasizes the difference between actual and potential value. He argues that a potential person (such as a fetus) has only potential contributions, while an actual person is an actual contributor to the Divine life and therefore far more valuable.[290]

From the perspective of process philosophy reality is not a static collection of objects but a dynamic process of becoming. This insight reshapes our understanding of existence, knowledge, and divinity. At the heart of this view lies the concept of creative synthesis, a framework developed by Hartshorne and influenced by Alfred North Whitehead's notion of concrescence.

For Hartshorne, creativity is the "ultimate category" of reality. To exist is to create: every moment integrates past experiences into a novel unity, shaped by freedom and emotional valuation. This "synthetic moment" unifies diverse influences – perceptions, memories, causal factors – into a coherent experience. Unlike deterministic models, such as Spinoza's, Hartshorne's process is pluralistic; reality is a tapestry of self-determining

[290] Anita Miller Chancy, "Rationality, Contributionism, and the Value of Love: Hartshorne on Abortion," *Process Studies* 28, no. 1–2 (1999): 85–97.

acts that "enrich the sum of actualities." The perfection of power is in the ability to foster creativity in others.[291]

In Hartshorne's thought, the concept of concrescence (from Latin *concretescere*, "to grow together") is central to his understanding of how reality and knowledge are formed. Borrowing and developing this idea from Whitehead,[292] Hartshorne uses the concept of concrescence to describe the process by which potentialities become actualized in concrete experiences. It refers to the way individual moments of experience or "actual occasions" come together to form a unified, complex whole.[293]

Concrescence is the process of synthesis where diverse possibilities and influences are integrated into a singular, concrete experience. In this view, reality is not static but is continuously in the process of becoming. Each moment is a culmination of influences from the past, the present environment, and divine persuasion. For Hartshorne, this process is not merely mechanical but involves creativity and novelty, as each occasion contributes something new to the unfolding of reality.[294]

In Hartshorne's epistemology, knowledge is grounded in experience. Since each moment of concrescence synthesizes multiple perspectives and experiences, knowledge emerges as a product of this integrative process. It highlights the interconnectedness of all experiences and suggests that understanding is always contextual and relational.

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[291] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 17–18.
[292] Donald W. Sherburne, ed., *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 36–72.
[293] Andre Cloots, "The Metaphysical Significance of Whitehead's Creativity," *Process Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 36–54.
[294] William J. Garland, "The Mystery of Creativity," in *The Whitehead Encyclopedia*, ed. Brian G. Henning and Joseph Petek, n.d., http://encyclopedia.whiteheadresearch.org/entries/thematic/metaphysics/the-mystery-of-creativity/.

Concrescence underscores the idea that knowledge is not static but dynamic and evolving. As each moment integrates new experiences, our understanding of reality also evolves. This aligns with Hartshorne's emphasis on process and change as fundamental aspects of existence. Through concrescence, knowledge is seen as holistic rather than fragmented. Since each occasion of experience integrates influences from the entire cosmos, knowledge is inherently relational and contextual, resisting reductionism and simplistic explanations.

According to Hartshorne, God is the ultimate *concrescent* being who integrates all experiences without losing divine identity. God knows the world perfectly because God feels the feelings of all creatures, participating in the concrescence of every actual occasion. Thus, divine knowledge is relational and sympathetic rather than detached and absolute.

Human cognition mirrors creative synthesis. Each act of understanding is not passive reception but an active integration of past insights and present data. For Hartshorne, even divine revelation must be interpreted through this lens: truths are not fixed but dynamically actualized through human engagement. Revelation becomes a collaborative process where divine influence meets human agency.[295]

As in other matters, Hartshorne, in the question of revelation, advocates for a middle way between two extremes: on the one hand, the belief that there exists "an absolutely infallible, yet humanly accessible, special source of knowledge in religion," and on the other hand, the view that "there is no source of such knowledge deserving any trust or

[295] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 37–44.

confidence whatsoever." He rejects both the notion of absolute, unerring revealed text and the idea that all texts can be treated as religiously insightful.

Between the extremes of no revelation and absolutely certain and infallible revelation,[296] there exist many possible gradations. Scripture, or any text claiming divine revelation, cannot be infallible, for if it were, the human authors would have had to be entirely controlled by divine power at the moment of writing.[297] This, however, contradicts Hartshorne's rejection of classical omnipotence, which he sees as incompatible with genuine freedom and relationality. A God who coerces human authors into producing an error-free text would undermine their agency, reducing revelation to a mechanical dictation rather than an authentic interaction between the divine and the human.

Furthermore, even if God had exercised absolute control over the writers, ensuring their words were perfectly aligned with divine truth at a given moment, such a revelation would still lose its universal and eternal relevance. Since reality is dynamic and ever-changing, a text dictated under one set of historical and cultural conditions would quickly become outdated as new circumstances arise. At best, it would serve as a historical record of divine communication at a specific point in time rather than a timeless and unalterable deposit of divine knowledge.

Thus, for Hartshorne, revelation is not a static, once-and-for-all event but an ongoing process of divine-human interaction. Religious texts may contain profound insights into

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[296] Hartshorne was fully aware of fundamentalism's popular appeal. He spent the last forty-five years of his life in the so-called "America's Bible Belt" (seven years in Atlanta, Georgia, and thirty-eight in Austin, Texas). (Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 255.)

[297] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 41.

divine reality, but they must be interpreted dynamically, with an awareness that truth unfolds in relationship with an evolving world. Instead of seeking absolute certainty in scripture, faith should embrace a living, dialogical engagement with divine wisdom – one that is open to reinterpretation, growth, and deeper understanding over time.

Building on the previous discussion, religious knowledge is not a static or infallible entity but a continuously unfolding process, shaped by human experience, ethical reflection, and communal engagement. Rather than being fixed once and for all, religious insights evolve, adapting to new contexts and deepening over time. The acceptance of a particular religious concept, therefore, can be evaluated based on several key criteria:

1. Coherence. Religious knowledge must align with the accumulated wisdom of human experience and ethical ideals. This means that claims about the divine cannot be at odds with reason, morality, or the evolving understanding of justice and human dignity.

2. Transformative Power. Genuine religious insights must inspire change, growth, and the pursuit of justice, wholeness, or what might be called “salvation” in a broad, non-dogmatic sense. It must contribute to the creative advance of individuals and communities, leading to greater wisdom and ethical living.

3. Communal Validation. Religious knowledge is not merely individualistic; it is shaped, tested, and refined through communal engagement, interpretation, and practice. Just as in science and philosophy, individuals must develop methods of cooperation and mutual correction to move closer to truth. Fostering dialogue, mutual respect,

compromise, and kindness is essential for harmonizing conflicting perspectives and goals, ensuring that differences are navigated with minimal frustration and harm.[298]

This process-oriented understanding of revelation resonates deeply with Mordecai Kaplan's rejection of the idea of revelation as a supernatural event and instead saw it as an ongoing, natural process emerging from the collective experience of the Jewish people. He argued that religious ideas must be evaluated based on their relevance, ethical soundness, and capacity to foster human flourishing – closely mirroring the criteria outlined above. Kaplan and Hartshorne both emphasize that religious truth is measured by its fruitfulness – its ability to inspire justice, wisdom, and growth. For Kaplan, revelation arises from humanity's self-conscious will to ethical growth, rejecting supernaturalism in favor of collaborative creativity.

In contrast, Spinoza's universe is a deterministic nexus where nothing is contingent. Divine revelation, for Spinoza, aligns with natural knowledge – either *ratio* (reason) or *scientia intuitiva* (intuition). While reason deduces truths from axioms, intuition grasps essences directly, seeing particulars "under a species of eternity."[299] Unlike Hartshorne's open process, Spinoza's system leaves no room for novelty; all is prefigured in God/Nature's necessity.

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[298] Hartshorne, 41.
[299] Sanem Soyarslan, "The Distinction between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics," *European Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (March 2016): 27–54, https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12052.

In contrast to Spinoza, while Hartshorne occasionally speaks of intuition,[300] his predominant view is that philosophical concepts are generated through dialectical argument rather than direct introspection.

Hartshorne observes that a consequence of his dipolar theism, which embraces the notion of God's omnipresence, is that God is directly experienced, i.e. directly felt, by all creatures. According to Hartshorne, denying the experience of God is "no less paradoxical than the contradictory claim," as God's presence is intrinsically woven into all experiences.[301]

According to Whitehead,[302] religious intuition encompasses two key aspects: singularity and rationality. It involves a direct, immediate experience that cannot be fully explained through rational analysis or metaphysical reasoning but can only be personally encountered. Consequently, religious intuition resists complete conceptualization, as it is anchored in the uniqueness of the experience, standing in contrast to general abstract concepts.[303]

Despite arising under unique conditions, religious intuitions must undergo a process of communicability to be accessible to others. This requires theoretical transformation and rationalization, allowing the uniquely new insights introduced by intuitions to be shared and understood within a broader context. Although religious intuitions bring forth

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[300] Charles Hartshorne, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 154. Charles Hartshorne, "Mysticism and Rationalistic Metaphysics," *The Monist* 59, no. 4 (October 1976): 14. Charles Hartshorne, *Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers: An Evaluation of Western Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 111.
[301] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 152.
[302] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 65.
[303] Roland Faber, "On the Unique Origin of Revelation, Religious Intuition, and Theology," *Process Studies* 28, no. 3–4 (1999): 196.

novel experiences, they must be rationalized to be integrated into collective human understanding.[304]

Therefore, Hartshorne cautions that mystics interpret and articulate their direct experiences (intuitions) from within the framework of the specific religious or cultural tradition in which they were raised. This context shapes not only the language they use but also the conceptual categories through which they understand and express their experiences. Consequently, claims of direct, unmediated experience of the divine should be approached with caution, as they are inevitably influenced by the mystic's historical and cultural background[305].

Moreover, Hartshorne argues that recognizing this contextual influence does not invalidate mystical experiences but rather encourages a more nuanced understanding of their significance.[306] It invites a comparative approach, where mystical accounts from diverse traditions are examined side by side, revealing both universal elements and culturally specific interpretations. This, in turn, contributes to a more comprehensive and pluralistic understanding of religious experience. Hartshorne suggests that such an approach calls for a balance between analytical inquiry and contemplative practice,

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[304] Faber, 197.
[305] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 153. Referred to Hartshorne, "Mysticism and Rationalistic Metaphysics," October 1976, 468. Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 470.
[306] Cf. Whitehead: "Religion requires a metaphysical backing for its authority is endangered by the intensity of the emotions which it generates. Such emotions are evidence of some vivid experience; but they are a very poor guarantee for its correct interpretation." Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 71.

noting that, "Possibly we need to devote more time to meditation and less (though at present it is no vast amount) to rationalistic metaphysics."[307]

The criteria for revelation – coherence, transformation, and communal validation – reflect the ethical and relational core of process thought. Whether through Spinoza's intuitive grasp of eternal truths or Kaplan's evolving religious praxis, reality remains a collaborative artistry, where divine and human agencies weave a shared narrative of becoming. In a universe of creative synthesis, every moment is both an end and a beginning – a concrescence of the past and a gateway to futures yet uncharted. As Hartshorne reminds us, "To be is to create," and in that act, we participate in the divine drama of existence.

Human agency and context shape revelation. Since God's knowledge includes the totality of creaturely experiences (past and present), revelation emerges dialogically, reflecting the interplay of divine aims and human interpretation. By rejecting omnipotence, Hartshorne frames revelation as persuasive rather than coercive. God's ideals (primordial nature) are eternally relevant, but their realization depends on creaturely cooperation, acknowledging the risks of freedom.

Hartshorne's dipolar theism redefines divine revelation as an ongoing, interactive process. By affirming God's dual transcendence and immanence, it bridges the gap between eternal truth and temporal experience. Revelation ceases to be a fixed deposit of knowledge and becomes a dynamic exchange, where God's primordial ideals adapt to the contingencies of history through the consequent nature. This framework not only

[307] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 233. Referred to Hartshorne, "Mysticism and Rationalistic Metaphysics," October 1976, 469.

addresses classical theism's logical shortcomings but also revitalizes theological discourse by centering relationality as the essence of divine perfection.

Hartshorne's vision thus invites theology to embrace a God who is "the most, and best moved mover" a being whose greatness lies in empathetic engagement rather than detached sovereignty.

6. Revelation from a Jewish Process-Theological Perspective

In this chapter, I explore Jewish reflections on revelation through the lens of Charles Hartshorne's process theology. Before engaging with this discussion, it is important to remind of the definition of revelation as it was developed in chapter 1. Revelation is typically understood as a relational event, involving at least two parties: a divine revealer and a human audience. It refers to both the process of making something previously hidden known and the content of what is revealed. Revelation stands in contrast to concealment. What distinguishes revelation from other forms of knowledge is that it pertains to insights or truths that are not independently attainable by the human mind, i.e. this type of knowledge is a gift of (a supernatural) God.

A preliminary note on epistemology and metaphysics is crucial for framing this discussion. As Plantinga observes, "what you properly take to be rational or warranted depends upon what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt."[308] In other words, what one considers to be legitimate religious knowledge is deeply influenced by one's underlying metaphysical commitments. This insight resonates with Hartshorne's perspective, which asserts that neither religious experience nor its interpretation can be properly understood without a coherent metaphysical foundation.[309]

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[308] Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 40. Similar: "Philosophy is an affair of character rather than of logic: the philosopher believes not according to evidence, but according to his own temperament; and his thinking merely serves to make reasonable what his instinct regards as true." W. Somerset Maugham, "The Philosopher", in *On A Chinese Screen* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1922), 164, cit. Levine, "God Speak," 15.
[309] Charles Hartshorne, "Mysticism and Rationalistic Metaphysics," *The Monist* 59, no. 4 (October 1976): 468.

Hartshorne seeks a theological language that navigates between two extremes: the idea that human language is entirely inadequate to describe God[310] and the belief that it can do so with absolute certainty and clarity.

His critique of classical theism revolves around its depiction of God as an eternal, unchanging (immutable), impassible, omnipotent, and omniscient being in all aspects (a qualification he considers essential). Rejecting this rigid framework, Hartshorne advocates for dipolar theism, a view in which God is not defined by absolute, static attributes but by a balance of complementary qualities.

According to this model, God is immutable and impassible in certain respects – such as in divine character, commitment to goodness, and moral perfection – but remains contingent, relational, and responsive in others. God actively "feels the feelings" of creatures, meaning that divine experience is enriched and shaped by the unfolding reality of the world. Likewise, while God possesses perfect knowledge of the past and present, the future remains open and unknowable in a fixed sense, as it is continually shaped by the free actions of creatures.

This dynamic and relational understanding of God aligns with panentheism, the belief that the world exists within God, yet God transcends the world. Hartshorne uses

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[310] For critique of the impossibility of God reference see: Cass Fisher, "Theological Reference and Theological Creativity in Judaism," in *The Craft of Innovative Theology: Arguments and Process*, ed. John A. Knight and Ian S. Markham (Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 226–44; Cass Fisher, "Religion without God? Approaches to Theological Reference in Modern and Contemporary Jewish Thought," *Religions* 10, no. 1 (January 18, 2019): 62, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10010062; Cass Fisher, "The Posthumous Conversion of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Future of Jewish (Anti-)Theology," *AJS Review* 39, no. 2 (November 2015): 333–65, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009415000082; Fleischacker, "A Defence of Verbal Revelation"; Steven Kepnes, "Revelation as Torah: From an Existential to a Postliberal Judaism," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 10 (2000): 205–37.

the metaphor of God as the soul of the world, emphasizing divine interconnectedness with all existence.

Unlike Whitehead's concept of God, which is more abstract and impersonal, Hartshorne insists on a personal God – one who actively engages with creation, responds and participates in the emotional and experiential reality of the world.[311]

Hartshorne acknowledges that while divine influence is universal, its reception varies among individuals. He argues that some people possess greater religious insight than others,[312] as all creatures prehend God at some level, though the intensity of this awareness differs. While God is free from error, every act of receiving divine revelation (lure) must pass through the fallible filter of the human mind, as well as the limitations of language and culture. As a result, infallible revelation is impossible.

He strongly critiques the idea of scriptural inerrancy, stating:

> "From an infallible God to an infallible book (to an infallible reader of the book?) is a gigantic step. For many of us, it is a step from rational faith to idolatry. No book in a human language written by human hands, translated by human brains into another language, can literally be divine, 'the word of God.' What we know is that it is the word of human beings about God. The beings may be divinely inspired, but they are still human." [313]

This perspective leads Hartshorne to a pluralistic view of religious knowledge. He maintains that humans prehend God unconsciously in every moment of existence, which explains why spiritual or religious genius can emerge in any place, time, or culture.

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[311] According to Hartshorne, a consequence of divine personality is that God does not exist outside time, because a person's existence requires days, months and years. (Hartshorne, *Creativity in American Philosophy*, 242.)
[312] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 37.
[313] Hartshorne, 41. Cf. Michael Fishbane: „Human speaking brings something of the ineffable divine truth to expression." (Michael A. Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 39.)

Revelation is not exclusive to any one tradition but arises universally, as different religious traditions reflect partial insights into divine reality, shaped by their historical and cultural contexts.

Hartshorne also emphasizes religious change, arguing that religions can outgrow the beliefs and practices in which they were once expressed. He frequently cites Henri Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion,*[314] particularly Bergson's distinction between static and dynamic religion.

According to Bergson, static religion serves to maintain social cohesion and tradition, while dynamic religion arises from the insights of religious visionaries who challenge and transform inherited beliefs. Hartshorne's process theology aligns with this dynamic model of religion, suggesting that religions must evolve in response to new revelations, ethical sensibilities, and expanding human understanding.

In this dissertation, my focus is not on God's general activity in the world but rather on how divine revelation is recognized as a source of knowledge and how the Torah can be seen as adequate representation of this knowledge.

Revelation, in this context, has two distinct yet interconnected aspects. Ontologically, it exists, as Hartshorne's process philosophy affirms that God is continuously active in and revealed through the world. On the other hand, the epistemic access to revelation, i.e. how humans come to know or understand this divine activity, is

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[314] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 256. Ref. to Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics*, 15; Hartshorne, *Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers: An Evaluation of Western Philosophy*, 6; Hartshorne, *The Darkness and the Light: A Philosopher Reflects Upon His Fortunate Career and Those Who Made It Possible*, 393; Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy*, 14, 57, 67, 75.

inherently conditioned. Our interpretations are influenced by personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, historical contexts, and the limitations of our cognitive and emotional faculties. This makes the epistemological status of revelation less certain and more contested. In effect, while revelation might exist objectively, it remains an open question whether revelation, as traditionally conceived, is a viable or useful concept in an epistemic sense.[315]

The concept of special revelation – the idea that God has uniquely revealed divine truth to Israel – has been a central pillar of traditional Jewish theology. However, modern Jewish thinkers critically reexamine its implications. I would like to focus on four interrelated key challenges associated with special revelation addressing Jewish chosenness, divine command, ethics, and scriptural authority.

The doctrine of the election of Israel is one of the most contested aspects of special revelation. Spinoza challenges this notion, arguing that Jewish particularism was historically contingent rather than divinely ordained. Kaplan seeks to reframe the concept by substituting "chosenness" with "calledness", emphasizing Jewish responsibility over divine favoritism. My approach, in line with process thought, further shifts this paradigm: rather than being chosen by an external divine agent, we choose to embrace our identity and ethical mission.

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[315] i.e., the social construction of revelation with focus "on the process of understanding our sensations or experiences as divine disclosure, instead of unquestionably postulating a divine origin." (R. Ruard Ganzevoort, "The Social Construction of Revelation," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1515/IJPT.2006.003.)

A second major issue concerns the notion of a commanding God, which is a central feature of a halakhah-centered Judaism. Spinoza rejects the idea of a supernatural lawgiver, viewing commandments as human constructs rather than divine imperatives. Kaplan, while deeply valuing Jewish tradition, also dismisses the concept of a God who issues binding commands, advocating instead for an evolving Jewish civilization that selectively retains religious practices based on their cultural and ethical relevance. Are there viable alternatives to a commanding God that still allow for meaningful Jewish religious life?

A third challenge concerns the foundation of ethics: Do we need divine revelation to know what is ethical? The dominant view in Jewish thought is that ethics is independent of God, meaning that God is not above moral principles but subject to them. Saadia Gaon, for example, argues that ethical truths can be discovered through human reason, with Torah and revelation serving as a shortcut rather than the sole source of moral knowledge. A process-theological approach affirms that moral knowledge emerges from experience, reason, and relational engagement with the divine.

Finally, the question of scripture remains a major theological and hermeneutical challenge. How can the Bible be read as religiously relevant if (1) it contains morally problematic passages alongside truly ethical insights and (2) we accept the critical biblical scholarship (e.g. the Documentary Hypothesis)? Many modern Jewish thinkers, including Kaplan, argue that we inevitably read scripture through the lens of our values and metaphysical commitments. We do not learn fundamental ethical principles, such as gender equality or human rights, from the Bible but rather bring these ideas to the text and interpret accordingly. This aligns with Kaplan's notion of "revaluation" instead

of "transvaluation", i.e. religious traditions are reassessed based on contemporary moral and philosophical insights. Thus, the practice of "picking and choosing" in scripture might not be a distortion but an intellectually honest, inevitable and necessary process of interpretation.

In the following, I endeavor to articulate a process-theological and Jewish perspective on divine revelation, focusing on the authority of scripture, its interpretation, and the binding nature of halakhah, while also considering the potential for novel interpretations and departures from tradition. My discussion is anchored in the work of Bradley Shavit Artson, whose writings have provided both an initial impulse and a sustained guide for further inquiry.

Although Artson is not the first Jewish thinker to engage with process theology,[316] he stands out as perhaps the only Jewish theologian who fully, intensively, and openly embraces process thought as a comprehensive framework. His two major works, *God of Becoming and Relationship: The Dynamic Nature of Process Thought* (2013), which forms the primary focus of this study, and *Renewing the Process of Creation: A Jewish*

[316] For example: Sandra B. Lubarsky and David Ray Griffin, eds., *Jewish Theology and Process Thought*, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996); Sandra B. Lubarsky, "Post-Holocaust Jewish Theology, Feminism, and Process Philosophy," in *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004); Milton Steinberg, *Anatomy of Faith* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1960); William E. Kaufman, *The Case for God* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1991); William E. Kaufman, *The Evolving God in Jewish Process Theology* (Lewiston: Elwin Mellen Press, 1997), https://archive.org/details/evolvinggodinjew0000kauf; Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981). Arthur Green is close to process theology of Whitehead and Hartshorne, but does not identify himself as such (Ariel E. Mayse, "Arthur Green: An Intellectual Profile," in *Arthur Green: Hasidism for Tomorrow*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes, Library of Contemporary Jewish Philosophers 16 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 34.).

Integration of Science and Spirit (2016), offer a distinctly Jewish articulation of process thought. These works are not mere academic explorations of the history of ideas; they are deeply personal, existentially engaged articulations of a Jewish process-theological vision.

Moreover, Artson's writings hold personal significance in my own engagement with process thought. It was through his work and our ensuing friendship that I was introduced to process theology, prompting me to explore foundational figures such as Charles Hartshorne, as well as John Cobb, David Ray Griffin, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, and Catherine Keller. His ability to translate complex process-theological concepts into a vibrant and accessible Jewish framework has made him an invaluable guide in bringing process thought into contemporary Jewish theological discourse.

Finally, Artson pays particular attention to the topic of revelation, which is also the focus of my dissertation. To my knowledge, no other Jewish thinker associated with process theology has provided a systematic account of revelation based on process metaphysics. For these reasons, his work serves as a natural and compelling starting point for this study.

Artson begins his exploration of Jewish process theology with a striking metaphor:

> "What Process Theology offers is the opportunity to sandblast the philosophical overlay of Hellenistic Greece and medieval Europe off the rich, burnished grain of Bible, Rabbinics, and Kabbalah so that we can savor the actual patterns of the living wood of religion, the *etz hayyim*, and appreciate Judaism for what it was intended to be and truly is."[317]

[317] Bradley Shavit Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship: The Dynamic Nature of Process Theology*, 1. Edition (Jewish Lights, 2016), xiv.

This imagery evokes a radical purification process, suggesting that foreign philosophical influences have obscured Judaism's true nature, much like layers of paint concealing the natural beauty of wood. While such view is common when new perspectives in Jewish theology are proposed, it raises critical questions: Can one truly separate Hellenistic ideas from an "original" Judaism? Are they not interwoven in a historically merged unity, evolving together as part of the process of concrescence? Artson's assertion reminds me of Rabbi Dr. Robert Raphael Geis (1906-1972), who famously declared:

> "If they wanted to force me to separate my Germanness from my Jewishness, I would not survive the operation alive." *(Sollte man mich zwingen wollen, mein Deutschtum von meinem Judentum zu trennen, so würde ich diese Operation nicht lebend überstehen.")*[318]

Would Judaism itself survive such an operation – an attempt to "sandblast away" its Hellenistic influences? Judaism, after all, has never been a static, monolithic tradition but a dynamic, evolving tapestry of influences.

Hartshorne would likely critique the intentionality and essentialism behind such an approach, emphasizing open-ended historical processes over any quest for an "authentic," pre-Hellenistic Judaism.

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[318] Robert Raphael Geis „Von Deutschlands Juden", 1957, possibly originally a quote by Franz Rosenzweig. Cit. in Susanne Schütz, Unterwegs zum Königtum Gottes, *Zeitschrift für Kirche und Judentum*, hrsg. v. Evangelisch-Lutherischen Zentralverein für Begegnung von Christen und Juden, Nr.1, 2001. https://www.jcrelations.net/de/artikelansicht/unterwegs-zum-koenigtum-gottes.pdf

The assumption that Judaism possesses a singular, intended essence, one that must be restored by stripping away external influences, reflects an essentialist quest for purity that disregards the inherent heterogeneity of Jewish thought.[319]

Furthermore, the very assumption that Judaism possesses an "intended" nature and that theological progress requires cleansing foreign influences sits uneasily with Artson's later process-oriented insights, particularly his emphasis on continuous becoming, such as his assertion that "every moment is a moment of creation".[320] If each moment of Judaism's evolution is a creative event, then any attempt to return to a "pure" past contradicts the very processual nature of religious life.

A second important critique of Artson's "sandblasting" metaphor comes from Catherine Keller,[321] who gently highlights the oversimplification of blaming Greek philosophy for problematic theological ideas such as divine omnipotence or *creatio ex nihilo*. She challenges the notion that Greek influence is inherently incompatible with Jewish process theology. Keller specifically questions the assumption that Greek thought necessarily introduced the notion of an all-controlling deity: "In fact, Whitehead, in *Adventures of Ideas*, lifts up Plato's insistence on persuasive power against the barbarism of brute force – noting inconsistencies in Plato that could also, however, cut the other way."[322] Moreover, Keller cautions against the impulse to discard entire

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[319] See critique of essence in Judaism from a process-theological perspective: Lori Krafte-Jacobs, "The 'Essence' of Judaism: A Process-Relational Critique", in Lubarsky and Griffin, *Jewish Theology and Process Thought*, 75–87.
[320] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 24.
[321] Catherine Keller, "Shades of Theology: A Response to Rabbi Artson," *Conservartive Judaism* 62, no. 1–2 (Fall-Winter 2010): 45–54.
[322] Keller, 52. Ref. to Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 148, 160ff.

intellectual traditions in the pursuit of theological reform. She challenges a well-known feminist truism from the 1970s, which states that "You cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools."[323] In contrast, she argues that certain intellectual tools inherited from Greek thought can, in fact, be useful in theological reconstruction: "Indeed, some of those tools are just what is needed, if you are not going to blow the house to smithereens, but instead want to recycle its better materials."[324]

Regarding both general and special revelation, Artson asserts that we intuitively recognize the divine lure because we prehend it – using Whitehead's term for immediate, internal awareness.[325] [326] "Lure" can be defined as God's non-coercive influence on free agents – human and non-human alike – gently guiding them toward the best available options for action. For Artson, there is no external revelation, as divine guidance is inherent within each moment of experience. He writes:

> "We know what the initial aim is. We know it intuitively because we prehend it. We do not have to be told; we are each connected to all and to the creative-responsive love that God offers. So we intuit the lure from the inside."[327]

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[323] Keller refers to Audre Lorde's statement: "For the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support." in Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House (Comments at 'The Personal and the Political Panel,' Second Sex Conference, New York, September 29, 1979)," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 112.

[324] Keller, "Shades of Theology: A Response to Rabbi Artson," 46.

[325] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 18.

[326] Here and in the rest of the book Artson's primary reference is Whitehead, whose God is not personal. Marmur notes that in Michael Marmur, "Resonances and Dissonances: On Reading Artson," *Conservative Judaism* 62, no. 1–2 (Fall-Winter 2010): 105–15. I would like to remind: Hartshorne was not a disciple of Whitehead, he departed from Whitehead in a number of points, especially in the concept and existence of God, for Hartshorne God is a person.

[327] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 18.

This radically inclusive view of divine persuasion suggests that all experiences, traditions, and contexts can be potential vehicles for revelation. Artson states, that the question is not whether God communicates,[328] but rather: what qualifies as revelation? "...not everything that happens is revelatory. Only those events that optimize love, justice, compassion, relationship (in other words, events that embody God's lure) offer a revelatory possibility."[329] Here, Artson links revelation to specific ethical values, namely love, justice, compassion, and relationship. Another value might be beauty. Whitehead recognizes aesthetic experience as central to religious insight – whether through nature, music, poetry, or the harmony of the cosmos.[330]

Schulweis[331] and other critics challenge this view by asking how we can discern whether our actions or intentions stem from divine luring and whether we can ever fully comprehend God's intent. While Artson's perspective will become clearer when he elaborates on the Oral Torah, it is instructive first to examine the optimistic aspect of his claim: that we intuitively know ethical values.

Several contemporary philosophers argue that ethical values can be known intuitively, with key proponents including Robert Audi, Jonathan Dancy, and Michael Huemer. [332] I will focus on Huemer's perspective.[333]

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[328] Artson, 41.
[329] Artson, 43.
[330] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 141–44.
[331] Harold M. Schulweis, "The Pull of the Divine Lure," *Conservartive Judaism* 62, no. 1–2 (Fall-Winter 2010): 55–57.
[332] Philip Stratton-Lake, "Intuitionism in Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, n.d., https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/intuitionism-ethics/.
[333] Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

The core principle of intuitionism is moral realism, i.e. the belief that objective values exist and that some moral statements are universally true, independent of individual perspectives.[334] A clear example is the statement, "Torturing babies is wrong." This is not an indeterminate or false claim; it is objectively true. Its truth does not stem from societal consensus or personal assertion but holds independently of any external validation.

According to Huemer, intuition is a distinct mental state in which something seems to be the case as a result of intellectual (as opposed to sensory or mnemonic) reflection, regardless of whether one believes it. He defines intuition as "an initial, intellectual appearance … a state of its seeming to one that *p* that is not dependent on inference from other beliefs and that results from thinking about *p*, as opposed to perceiving, remembering, or introspecting."[335] When the content of such an intuition is an evaluative proposition, it is termed an ethical intuition. This seeming or appearance differs from belief, because it is possible to either believe or disbelieve what seems to one to be the case. Appearances typically cause beliefs. Huemer emphasizes that the independence of intuition from prior moral belief is crucial, for if intuition merely echoed existing beliefs, it would be unable to adjudicate between competing moral theories.[336]

Huemer further contends that ethical intuitions play a fundamental role in moral knowledge and reasoning. They provide a non-inferential foundation, allowing us to

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[334] Alternatives are that values are entirely socially constructed (relativism), or that they depend on the attitudes of the individual (subjectivism); either that evaluative statements in principle are neither true nor false (noncognitivism) or all (positive) evaluative statements are false, because in reality, nothing has any evaluative properties (nihilism).
[335] Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 102.
[336] Huemer, 104.

perceive moral truths directly, and serve as the starting point for moral deliberation. He refers to the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, which asserts that it is reasonable to assume things are as they appear, justifying our trust in ethical intuitions unless compelling reasons to doubt them arise. These intuitions help us recognize basic moral truths, such as the wrongness of suffering or the idea that no one should be blamed for actions they did not commit. Huemer acknowledges that intuitions are not infallible and can vary in reliability. He outlines several factors that can affect the credibility of intuitions like strength, widespread agreement, simplicity, lack of bias, and coherence with other intuitions.

Many intuitionists, including Huemer, maintain that specific, concrete judgments should take precedence over broad, theoretical claims. Human cognition typically develops by first apprehending concrete, particular instances before moving to more abstract, general concepts.[337] In fact, the justification for any general theory often rests on the foundation of well-supported beliefs about specific cases. For example, to justify a general account of justice, one must first understand what constitutes a just or unjust action in individual instances. Concrete judgments tend to be more reliable and better justified than their abstract counterparts, and if a general theory comes into conflict with a particular judgment one is inclined to accept, it is almost always the theory that is at fault.

Huemer illustrates this point with a practical example: Suppose you initially adhere to the theory that no person should ever violate another's rights, including property

[337] On relation between experimental-intuitive and cognitive process see Epstein, "Demystifying Intuition."

rights. Then consider a scenario in which a person trespasses on another's property to transport someone to the hospital during a medical emergency. Although this trespass violates property rights, it seems intuitively acceptable given the circumstances. In such cases, you are better off revising your theory to acknowledge that rights violations can sometimes be permissible rather than rigidly insisting that all violations are inherently wrong.

Furthermore, when tackling a specific issue, it is advisable to base the conclusions on the most concrete, plausible premises available, rather than taking unnecessary detours through overly abstract theorizing.

His argument for the possibility of moral correction and progress unfolds as follows. Human beings have the capacity for rational ethical intuitions derived from intellectual reflection, and since some individuals are more rational than others, there will periodically be those who discern flaws in the prevailing values of their society.

Although these individuals do not perceive the complete moral truth, remaining influenced by various biases and often reluctant to deviate drastically from societal norms, they nonetheless approach the moral truth more closely than the average person. Their relatively clearer insight enables them to initiate social reform, as evidenced by historical movements like abolition, women's suffrage, and civil rights. These moral reformers, by nudging society incrementally toward justice, establish new cultural norms that more accurately reflect moral truth. Over time, as these improved norms take hold, a

new generation of reformers emerges, once again identifying areas for further progress and continually steering society closer to the moral ideal.[338]

Most objections to ethical intuitionism, according to Huemer, stem from misunderstandings.[339] A common critique is the claim that false intuitions undermine the theory. However, no philosopher has ever argued that all intuitions are true, just as no one claims that all sensory perceptions, memories, or inferences are always accurate. Intuitionism simply holds that it is rational to trust our intuitions unless we have specific reasons to doubt them, just as we assume our senses and memories are reliable unless proven otherwise.

Another frequent objection is the existence of conflicting intuitions, often based on the mistaken belief that intuitionism asserts all intuitions are true. If that were the case, contradictions would indeed be a problem. Some critics also argue that intuitionists fail to provide a method for resolving all ethical disagreements, yet no metaethical theory has ever done so, nor does this invalidate intuitionism specifically. Lastly, concerns about biases influencing ethical intuitions do not refute the theory, as intuitionism does not claim all intuitions, or ethical beliefs, are infallible. Instead, recognizing bias simply means we should withhold assent from suspect intuitions, rather than dismissing intuitionism as a whole.

Huemer's ideas, though developed in a non-theistic framework, can be meaningfully applied to a process-theological understanding of intuitive prehension of the divine lure.

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[338] Michael Huemer, "An Ethical Intuitionist Case for Libertarianism," *Libertarianism.Org* (blog), 2017, https://www.libertarianism.org/publications/essays/ethical-intuitionist-case-libertarianism.
[339] Huemer.

This aligns with Artson's assertion: "We know what the initial aim is. We know it intuitively because we prehend it." Just as Huemer posits that ethical intuitions provide direct, non-inferential access to moral truths, process thought can conceptualize these intuitions as the prehension of the divine lure – an immediate, though fallible, awareness of divine persuasion toward the good.

In this framework, prehending the divine lure serves as a foundational starting point for developing religious belief and ethical commitments, much like ethical intuition provides the initial cognitive appearance upon which moral reasoning is built. However, as Huemer acknowledges that some intuitions can be false due to cognitive biases, the same caution applies to theological discourse: not all prehensions of the divine lure accurately reflect divine intention. Human limitations, cultural conditioning, and emotional distortions can obscure or misinterpret the lure, making discernment and critical reflection essential. Thus, while prehension is a necessary condition for theological insight, it is not sufficient on its own; it must be tested, refined, and integrated into a broader, reasoned understanding of divine reality.

Artson emphasizes that revelation is fundamentally relationship-based, emerging from the dynamic interplay between God's lure and human responsiveness.[340] Given the central role of the Oral Torah, it would be reasonable to assume that Artson does not limit the relational character of revelation to divine-human interaction alone, but also sees it as emerging through cooperation within humanity. Religious discourse is not merely personal intuition but occurs within a messy and often contentious space of communal negotiation. According to Whitehead, the origin of rational religion is

[340] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 43.

illuminated by the contrast of singularity and universality, solitariness and solidarity.[341] "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness"[342] and "Religion is world-loyalty".[343] Therefore, religious experience is both the experience of "solitariness" and of "loyalty" to the world.[344] Consequently, religious intuition has two aspects. First, it is directly experienced, singular and therefore cannot be conceptualized completely. Second, its rationality, since it must be communicated to others, it must be generalized to be accessible for others.[345]

To illustrate the distinction between universal and special revelation, Artson turns to Exodus 33:18-20. In this passage Moses asks God to let him see God's Presence.[346] For Artson it is crucial to note that Moses' request is not about definitions or rules, but direct experience of God. God responds, "I will make all my goodness (כָּל־טוּבִי) pass before you (עַל־פָּנָי), and I will proclaim before you (לְפָנָי) the name (שֵׁם) the Holy One,[347] and the grace (חַנֹּתִי) that I grant and the compassion (רִחַמְתִּי) that I show. But you cannot see my face (פָּנָי), for humans may not see me (לֹא־יִרְאַנִי) and live."[348]

Artson interprets this passage the following way. Moses asks for a universal revelation (*gilui ha-Shekhinah*), i.e. nonverbal manifestations of divine goodness that are

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[341] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 58.
[342] Whitehead, 16.
[343] Whitehead, 59.
[344] Whitehead, 86.
[345] Faber, "On the Unique Origin of Revelation, Religious Intuition, and Theology," 196–97.
[346] וַיֹּאמֶר הַרְאֵנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבֹדֶךָ׃ – Moses asks God to manifest *"kavod"*.
[347] Artson interprets "YHWH" as "One" or "Holy One". "We can only breath God's Name." (Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, xvii.) "God as the organizing force of an eternally existing reality" (Artson, 22.).
[348] וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אַעֲבִיר כָּל־טוּבִי עַל־פָּנֶיךָ וְקָרָאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְחַנֹּתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אָחֹן וְרִחַמְתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם: וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאֹת אֶת־פָּנָי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאַנִי הָאָדָם וָחָי׃

accessible to all. God agrees to show both dynamic and protective sides of God identified as goodness, grace and compassion. It is still nonverbal and intuitive. Moses cannot prehend God's ontology, the nature of God's being ("face"): "None of us have access to a kind of being that is not also becoming. Being on its own is a (mere) logical abstraction. It is only being in relationship to others – that is to say, becoming – that can be apprehended, that can enter into relationship."[349] He concludes half way that God, like anybody else, cannot be "known abstractly, through some distilled definition."[350]

In the shift from universal to special revelation, Exodus 34:6 becomes pivotal: when God proclaims the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, this marks the moment where universal divine reality is distilled into a culturally specific form:

> "In that instant, the exchange takes the contours of particular words, in the context of a specific language – Hebrew. No longer universal, this encounter is distilled into a form directed specifically to Israel: a specific name nested in a particular relationship."[351]

Note, Artson's reading is selective, he does not quote the entire passage including 34:7, thus omitting its more theologically and ethically problematic elements (though that is a common practice within the Jewish tradition).[352]

Artson further supports his argument with references to Maimonides, who held that God's presence is not revealed in essence but in action ("God's ways"), and

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[349] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 44.
[350] Artson, 44.
[351] Artson, 45.
[352] נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה פֹּקֵד ו עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־ **שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים:**

to Hasdai Crescas, who described revelation as: "Both a spiritual and cognitive overflow from God to humans."[353]

Artson argues that God's ontology (being) is unknowable, but divine action (becoming) is perceptible. Compared to Hartshorne, the distinction between the two poles of a dipolar God is not that strict in the context of its knowability. Hartshorne believes that God's absolute aspects (necessary existence, perfect knowledge, perfect love, steadfast benevolence) are knowable to some extent ("negligibly small"[354]). He argues that these essential attributes of God can be understood through logical reasoning and metaphysical analysis: what we can know with a higher certainty is precisely the abstract, logical structure of divine existence, but not the unfolding details of divine action at any given moment.

Hartshorne emphasizes that God's relative or contingent aspects are indeed knowable and crucial to understanding divine nature. God's contingent aspects are knowable through observation of the world and religious experience. Hartshorne is nevertheless cautious not to claim that this knowledge is full or infallible. Religious experience is not exhaustively describable, but not the description of God that is being experienced. In other words, humans can have some, although negligibly small, knowledge of God.[355] But this experience also needs solid philosophical framework to be shared and interpreted:

> "We should, in serving God, not forget how much murder and torture have been committed and are now being committed by those employing the word "God" (or

[353] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 46.
[354] Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 35.
[355] Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 152–53.

> "Allah", or "Isvara," or "Brahma"). By their deeds, not their assertions of denials of theistic belief, we must primarily judge our human fellows."[356]

Elsewhere Hartshorne laments that "every religious tradition is shot through with human – all too human – error."[357]

I think what he means is that the claim that God is totally other, unknowable and indescribable leads to putting theology outside the framework of rational discourse with all risks of failure and oppression. If God is totally other, unknowable and indescribable in all respects, it is very difficult if not impossible to engage critically with a religious tradition. Instead, we need some general points of reference, that are rational and cohesive, to evaluate theological claims and safeguard humans from the misuse of religious language to justify violence or ignorance.

Hartshorne, in his reflection on Buber,[358] acknowledges the profound impact of Buber's philosophy of dialogue, particularly its emphasis on direct and reciprocal relationships between individuals and the divine. However, he raises concerns about the lack of a systematic metaphysical framework underpinning Buber's ideas. A key point of his critique is Buber's sharp dichotomy between "I-Thou" and "I-It" relationships, which Hartshorne argues requires a more nuanced understanding.

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[356] Viney and Shields, 248. Ref. to Charles Hartshorne, „Response to Zycnski," Process Studies 40/1 (Spring/Summer 2011), 149.
[357] Viney and Shields, 248. Ref. to Charles Hartshorne, „The Ethics of Contributionism" in *Responsibilities to Future Generations: Environmental Ethics*, ed. Ernest Patridge (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1981), 106.
[358] Charles Hartshorne, "Martin Buber's Metaphysics," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967), 49–68.

Hartshorne specifically challenges Buber's assertion that God can only be Thou and never an It, as this implies that there can be no rational analysis or systematic knowledge of the divine.[359] While Hartshorne concedes that there is a sense in which God cannot simply be an object of thought but must be personally addressed, he argues that even in addressing God, one inevitably speaks about God, attributing certain characteristics to the divine. He suggests that God, while being personally related to each individual, must also possess an abstract essence, which allows for rational discourse and conceptual understanding.

Without such an essence, Hartshorne contends, God would not be comprehensible to rational beings at all. He insists that reason requires the distinction between abstract and concrete, laws and cases, necessities and contingencies, and that at the highest level, this distinction applies to God as well. He clarifies that while God's essence is not God, it remains a necessary conceptual component. Only the essence of God, not God, can be considered an "It" and this highest "It" allows for rational engagement without reducing the divine to a mere abstraction.

Hartshorne extends this argument by emphasizing that even human individuals are infinitely more than mere conceptual essences.[360] Conceptual knowledge, he argues, deals with universals, not actual lived realities. If one were to identify God solely with the absolute, independent, or formless,[361] the result would not be a vision of divine

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[359] Hartshorne, 53.
[360] Hartshorne, 61.
[361] Hartshorne refers to "The idea of God... is only... the most lofty of the images by which man imagines the imageless God." (Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God*. 84) "[God] shines through all forms and is Himself formless" (ibid. 62). "Unlimited being becomes, as absolute person, my partner." (ibid. 61).

fullness but rather of emptiness – a mere abstraction that lacks the richness of divine life. He warns that if God is reduced to such an abstraction, God becomes "the emptiest of ideas, or rather, He is the very idea of emptiness itself."[362] [363]

Artson's interpretation of God's "face" in Exodus 33:20 raises a crucial question: What precisely does "face" signify? In biblical and rabbinic thought, the term *panim* often functions as a metaphor for direct encounter, presence, and relational engagement.[364] Might the "face" of God be not an ontological reality in itself but rather a phenomenological construct, i.e. a projection arising from the human experience of divine encounter?

This idea gains further support from cognitive science and anthropology. Humans possess an inherent tendency to recognize faces, even in non-human contexts, a trait linked to our fundamentally social nature. "Our perception is most highly attuned to that which is most important and stimulating for us: other human bodies."[365] Faces are central to social relationships, and face-to-face encounters are never passive experiences; rather, they are deeply stimulating and relationally charged.[366]

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[362] Hartshorne, "Martin Buber's Metaphysics," 58.
[363] Similar critique of Existentialism in Kepnes, "Revelation as Torah: From an Existential to a Postliberal Judaism"; Kaufman, *The Evolving God in Jewish Process Theology*, 175.
[364] Max Kadushin, *Rabbinic Mind*, 2nd ed. (Blaisdell, 1965), 233. Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *God: An Anatomy* (London: Picador, 2021), 309–24.
[365] Stavrakopoulou, *God: An Anatomy*, 311. Ref. to Daniel Black, "What is a Face?", in *Body & Society* 17(4), 2011, 1-25. See also Steward Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford Universita Press, 1993).
[366] Stavrakopoulou, 311.

Given this, it is unsurprising that Moses longs to see the face of God, echoing a broader biblical tradition that expresses the human desire to gaze the divine face.[367] Yet, this desire is fraught with tension: while Exodus 33:20 declares, "You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live," biblical narratives complicate this assertion. Jacob, after wrestling with a divine being, names the place Peniel (Face of God), proclaiming, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life was preserved" (Gen 32:31). Similarly, Moses speaks with God *panim el panim* (Ex 33:11), and Numbers 12:8 further affirms that Moses experiences God not through riddles but by gazing upon the *temunah* (form, JPS: likeness) of YHWH. His prolonged encounter with the divine transfigures his own face, leaving it radiant (Ex 34:29–35).

The concept of seeing God's face extends beyond individual encounters to the collective religious experience of pilgrimage. Deuteronomy 16:16-17 instructs the males, "You shall not see the face of YHWH empty-handed" *(et pney YHWH)*, a phrase typically translated as "appear before the Lord" (JPS, NRSV). However, biblical scholarship widely agrees that the original Hebrew sense may convey the act of actually seeing the divine face.[368] Some rabbinic interpretations, such as those cited by Kadushin, imply that temple pilgrims experienced *gilluy shekhinah*, a revelation of the Divine Presence. The biblical scrolls contain only consonantal text, allowing for multiple non-Masoretic readings. These variant readings, derived from the consonantal text, were sometimes employed in rabbinic exegesis, including halakhic interpretation. For example, as seen in the Mekilta of Rabbi Simeon's interpretation of Exodus 23:17,

[367] e.g., Ps 17:15, 24:3–6, 27:8, 42:2, 100:2, 105:4; 1 Chron 16:11; 2 Chron 7:14; Hos 5:15.
[368] Stavrakopoulou, *God: An Anatomy*, 482.

where the verb יֵרָאֶה *yeraeh* (“shall be seen”) is read as יִרְאֶה *yir’eh* (“shall see”), leading to the exclusion of the blind from pilgrimage on the premise that they cannot visually behold the divine.[369] [370]

From a theological perspective, such narratives serve both profound and pragmatic human purposes. Theologically, they function as safeguards against the reductive objectification of the divine, reinforcing the biblical assertion that God is incorporeal. Yet, the persistence of these traditions, despite their apparent tension with theological abstraction, reveals the human tendency to cognitive dissonance. Warnings against “seeing” God also reinforced the authority of religious elites, particularly priests and figures like Moses, who mediated access to the divine. The power to regulate divine visibility is not unique to antiquity. “Like many powerful forms of visual culture today, be it religious relics, films, or pornography, permission to see or not to see is often in the gift of those socially sanctioned to curate, mediate, regulate, or propagate images.”[371] The ancient priests and scribes were no different.

Artson’s use of Exodus 33 to support his argument illustrates the challenges and speculative nature of such an approach. The ambiguity and multilayered meanings of biblical and rabbinic texts make them unsuitable as definitive proof for any particular theological claim; one can often find scriptural or rabbinic support for a wide range of positions. At best, these sources can serve as illustrations rather than conclusive evidence.

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[369] Kadushin, *Rabbinic Mind*, 240–41.

[370] יראה. פרט לסומא שאין יכול לראות:

[371] Stavrakopoulou, *God: An Anatomy*, 318.

Artson asserts that the rabbinic concept of Oral Torah, as a dynamic, ever-evolving process refining the meaning of the Written Torah, is "strongly rooted in the metaphysics that Process articulates".[372] However, this claim lacks substantial historical grounding. While Artson presents examples that align with a process-theological framework, these instances appear selective rather than indicative of a comprehensive rabbinic metaphysical system. The classical rabbis did not explicitly formulate a metaphysics akin to process thought, nor would they have been inclined to do so. Their interpretive methods were primarily legal, hermeneutical, and exegetical rather than ontological or cosmological.

Although rabbinic discourse frequently engages themes of change, adaptation, and reinterpretation, this does not necessarily imply an underlying commitment to process metaphysics. At most, one might argue that rabbinic thought anticipates certain aspects of process philosophy.

That said, the fact that rabbinic thought does not explicitly articulate a process metaphysics does not mean that process theology is incompatible with Jewish theology. The classical rabbis were not Kantians or Hegelians, yet Jewish theologians have fruitfully engaged with these philosophical systems: Herman Cohen integrating Kantian ethics into his Jewish philosophy, and Samuel Hirsch conversing with Hegelian thought to shape his theological vision. Likewise, process thought can serve as a constructive philosophical framework for contemporary Jewish theology.[373] A key strength of

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[372] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 50.

[373] See also Kaufman: "... conceptual frameworks are inescapable; willy-nilly, the background of whatever we say is based on a world hypothesis or philosophical presupposition even though it may be tacit rather than explicit. By utilizing insights of process theology we are not encasing Judaism in an alien system. Rather we are using

process theology is in its promotion of unity. With the help of the dipolar theism, it is able to unify the abstract God of philosophers and the relational God of religion.[374]

For an engagement with traditional sources to be meaningful, it is crucial to adopt a systematic and coherent approach. Without a structured interpretive framework, the use of biblical and rabbinic texts risks becoming selective and arbitrary, allowing almost any theological position to find textual support. As Steinberg, another Jewish thinker associated with process theology, wisely observes, "a theology without a metaphysic is really not a theology at all but an account of the psychological and ethical consequence of affirming one."[375] Modern, demystified, history-conscious theology requires not just an accumulation of sources but a guiding philosophical structure that provides coherence to religious belief and practice.

Moreover, Steinberg's insights highlight the necessity of maintaining a critical balance between faith and reason. He argues that "reason is always required to control the excess of faith" and that "faith ought not be reposed in Scripture, but only in God. Scripture is simply the means by which God discloses Himself to man. It is not the sufficient disclosure. Faith must always arch over Scripture to the object of faith".[376]

Artson emphasizes that revelation is fundamentally relationship-based,[377] emerging not only through the relationship between God and humanity but also through cooperative engagement within humanity itself. While the intuitive prehension of divine

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process theology as heuristic device to further Jewish philosophical and theological inquiry. (...) There is no such a thing as a totally unproblematic theology." (Kaufman, *The Evolving God in Jewish Process Theology*, 170, 173.)

[374] Kaufman, 172.

[375] Steinberg, *Anatomy of Faith*, 181–82.

[376] Steinberg, 264.

[377] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 43.

lure (akin to Huemer's concept of intellectual intuition) can provide initial insights and inform our worldview, unless there is no doubt about their validity. In case of doubt, these impressions must be rigorously cross-verified against both traditional sources and contemporary academic scholarship to ensure their validity. In this process of verification, contemporary scholarship should take priority. As Kaplan famously says, "The past has a vote, but not a veto".

Artson seeks to balance Jewish particularism with universalism, reinterpreting chosenness in a way that aligns with process theology's emphasis on relationality and mutual becoming. Rather than viewing election as a one-sided divine decree, he frames it as an ongoing, reciprocal partnership between God and Israel: "We do not know whether the Holy Blessing One chose Jacob or whether Jacob chose the Holy Blessing One."[378] In his reading, chosenness is not fixed but a continuous act of human commitment, Jews are chosen to live Torah, but they also actively choose this role.

Artson further expands the concept of chosenness, rejecting Jewish exceptionalism:

> "Jews choose/are chosen to live Torah in the world, both to build communities of justice and inclusion and to model that it is possible to embody such a life. But other peoples choose/are chosen too, in ways that match their particularity and distinctiveness."[379]

In this framework, Israel is not inherently superior to other nations but tasked with a particular mission. At the same time, Artson retains the traditional idea that Judaism plays a distinctive role as a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). However, this reinterpretation of chosenness faces an inherent tension between ideals and textual

[378] Sifrei Devarim, Piska 312 cit. in Artson, 105.
[379] Artson, 105.

tradition. While process theology allows for an evolving understanding of election,[380] many classical Jewish sources emphasize Jewish election, sometimes in ways that reinforce a hierarchical view of Jews in relation to others (e.g., the notion that being commanded is superior to voluntarily following halakha). This issue becomes particularly pressing in the context of rising Jewish supremacy and radical nationalism, where the idea of chosenness risks degenerating into chauvinism. Here, I align more with Kaplan, who argues that the concept of Jewish chosenness is irredeemable, it inherently implies privilege rather than responsibility and should therefore be abandoned altogether. Instead, he aligns with the vocational understanding of chosenness, grounded in ethical responsibility rather than divine favoritism.

Artson, in his discussion of Exodus 33, distinguishes between two forms of revelation: general revelation *(giluy ha-Shekhinah)*, a non-verbal divine manifestation, and special revelation *(matan Torah)*, which is expressed in a particular language – Hebrew. This distinction raises an important question regarding the nature of revelation and its communicability.

As I have previously discussed in the chapter on the definition of revelation, many argue that the supposed contrast between the revelation of propositions and divine self-revelation is misguided. God cannot reveal Godself without simultaneously making certain propositions about God knowable. Just as revealing an object to someone not only discloses the object itself but also conveys implicit information about it, divine self-

[380] Clark M. Williamson, "Reversing the Reversal: Covenant and Election," in Lubarsky and Griffin, *Jewish Theology and Process Thought*, 163–84.

revelation must include an epistemic dimension – making something known or knowable. Otherwise, it would be difficult to classify such an event as revelation at all.

Since revelation inherently involves this epistemic dimension, it must necessarily include at least some propositional content. Moreover, the notion of having "personal" knowledge of God without possessing any propositional knowledge about God – such as the fundamental proposition that God exists – is difficult to sustain. Therefore, propositions must form part of the content of manifestational revelation *(giluy ha-Shekhinah)*, even if they are not its means.

Importantly, propositions are not necessarily expressed verbally and can be conveyed with the same meaning in different languages (e.g., The sky is blue / Der Himmel ist blau / השמיים כחולים). However, even for general revelation to be shared, to take on a religious meaning within a community, it must ultimately be verbalized. While both general and special revelation might originally be non-verbal in nature, their perception and transmission by human beings necessarily involve some form of verbal articulation.

Fine arts and music, for example, can be understood as forms of revelation.[381] They are not verbal in themselves, yet meaningful engagement with them – both individually and collectively – requires verbalization. To communicate and interpret our experiences of art and music with others, we rely on language. Even on a personal level, the cognitive process of making sense of such experiences often necessitates verbalization. As human beings, we construct meaning, interpret reality, and share our experiences

[381] As Nikolaus Harnoncourt aptly observed, "Art is not merely a pleasant addition; it is the umbilical cord that connects us with the divine." *(„Die Kunst ist eben keine hübsche Zuwage, sie ist die Nabelschnur, die uns mit dem Göttlichen verbindet.").*

through storytelling. Language is the medium through which we make sense of the world and through which revelation – whether general or special – becomes part of our shared religious discourse.

I take a more cautious (or perhaps less optimistic) stance than Artson regarding the human ability to adequately grasp divine lure (revelation). My focus is primarily on the record of revelation, which must be verbal, rather than on the question of whether divine revelation itself is inherently verbal or nonverbal. In this respect, I intentionally diverge from thinkers like Buber and others who advocate for a non-propositional conception of revelation, such as the idea of divine revelation as a "commanding presence." While such approaches may have theological elegance, they offer little in terms of constructing a shared religious discourse or translating religious experiences into graspable beliefs and practices that can be shared within a religious community.

Perhaps this reflects my perspective as a congregational rabbi, where I am more concerned with the practical consequences of beliefs than with their aesthetic or abstract appeal. My approach is in critical reflection of the insights from Fleischacker, who defends the necessity of verbal revelation. Unlike Fleischacker, my concern is not with the idea of a commanding God, which, according to Fleischacker, requires language to issue authoritative directives. Since I do not subscribe to the concept of a commanding God (in contrast to both Fleischacker and Artson), I am not particularly interested in the ontological link between divine lure and language. However, I do share Fleischacker's view that religion and religious communities require language – a verbalized record of revelation – since language is the medium through which religious experience is communicated, preserved, and made meaningful for a community.

This also leads me to diverge from Artson on the question of whether special revelation *(matan Torah)* is tied to a particular language, such as Hebrew. It is feasible that divine lure neither "speaks" only Hebrew nor any human language at all. Artson states, "God speaks through human words, and our best insights articulate the Divine."[382] While I acknowledge the role of language in articulating divine insight, I remain open to the possibility that revelation, as a process, might transcend linguistic constraints. However, our intuitive prehension of the divine lure is inevitably shaped by the language we use to process and communicate it. In the case of Jewish tradition, this language has historically been Hebrew, but it has also been Aramaic, Greek, German, English, and others – depending on the human recipient and the historical-cultural context of its transmission.

In the following, I will summarize Fleischacker's argument in favor of verbalized revelation, drawing on the linguistic theory of the late Heidegger (which should not be confused with early Heidegger).[383]

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[382] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 47.

[383] Heidegger is an unlikely choice for a Jewish thinker. His post-1929 writings are less intellectually stimulating for anthropology and other academic disciplines, but his biography reveals how deeply human thought depends on ethical and intellectual engagement with others. Under Rickert and Husserl, his thinking remained grounded in reason, but after breaking with Husserl, he lost this corrective. His moral failings during the Nazi era made this absence glaring. Rather than admitting his entanglement in the very herd mentality he condemned, he offered weak justifications and recast himself as a victim. His greatest failure was not his misjudgment but his refusal to acknowledge it. The obscurity of his later thought, especially post-1945, seems to have masked his moral and personal shortcomings. (Gerhard Danzer, *Wer sind wir? Auf der Suche nach der Formel des Menschen: Anthropologie für das 21. Jahrhundert - Mediziner, Philosophen und ihre Theorien, Ideen und Konzepte* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2011), 70–71, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-16993-9.). Hartshorne, who studied under Heidegger and wrote the first English-language review of *Sein und Zeit*, later dismissed him as a "mystic without ethics." (Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 9.). On relation between Hartshorne and Heidegger: Daniel A.

Fleischacker critiques the notion that profound significance must necessarily elude language, arguing that this idea was a dominant theme in "one, very limited and peculiar period of modern thought."[384] He challenges wordless encounter theology, which assumes that divine revelation operates independently of language, asserting that such a view rests on an untenable philosophical conception of language.

Fleischacker draws on Heidegger's later philosophy, which posits that language is not merely a tool for expressing fully formed, pre-existing thoughts, nor simply a means of communication. Instead, Heidegger argues, "Man acts as though he were the master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man."[385] In other words, language is not something we control; rather, it conditions our very ability to think, categorize, and make sense of the world. Heidegger further claims, "Language alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time."[386] Without language, there is no disclosure of reality, no distinction between what is and what is not.

Fleischacker interprets this as an argument that we do not fully control the meanings of our words. Meaning is not merely constructed by the speaker; it emerges from a network of historical, social, and existential forces. He concludes that language is an expression and vehicle of everything beyond our control, a phenomenon Heidegger

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Dombrowski, "Hartshorne on Heidegger," *Process Studies* 25 (January 1, 1996): 19–33, https://doi.org/10.2307/44797501.

[384] Fleischacker, "A Defence of Verbal Revelation," 428.

[385] "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 144. (Original: *Bauen Wohnen Denken,* 1954).

[386] "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 71. (Original: *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, 1935/36.)

terms "thrownness" *(Geworfenheit)*. Our intentions, our ability to describe the world, and even our efforts to shape reality are all linguistically mediated – we pattern our practices only when we can put them into words. Language, therefore, is not only a means of navigation but also something we shape even as it shapes us.[387]

Fleischacker extends this linguistic framework to the divine-human relationship, arguing that there is no better site for encountering God than in language itself.[388] He notes that God is both within us and beyond us – we exercise rational mastery over the world as beings created in God's image, yet at the same time, the world precedes and shapes us, limiting our control. This paradox is reflected in language: God appears both in our speech and beyond it, yet it is only through language that we are capable of recognizing God's presence beyond speech. If God shapes nature and history, then God must also shape language; if God can be present in trees, then God can also be present in words – and thus, "God can speak".[389]

But what does it mean to say that "God shapes nature and history"? If God, as process theology argues, allows things to make themselves, then divine participation in shaping nature and history is subtle, operating "behind the scenes" in ways that do not override the freedom of creation. I am reminded of Teilhard de Chardin's assertion that "God does not make; He makes things make themselves."[390] If this is the case, then

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[387] I see this dynamic at work in Heidegger himself: he coined neologisms and even altered standard German spelling (e.g., *Seyn* instead of *Sein*).
[388] Fleischacker, "A Defence of Verbal Revelation," 442.
[389] Fleischacker, 444.
[390] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Note on the Modes of Divine Action in the Universe," in *Christianity and Evolution* (San Diego: A Harvest Book - Harcourt, 1969), 28. And: "Considered objectively, material facts have in them something of the divine. In relation, however, to our knowledge, this divine element of them is no more than a potency." (Teilhard de Chardin, 29.)

God's role in shaping human language would be even less direct, raising questions about whether divine agency can be meaningfully attributed to linguistic development.

Fleischacker, however, maintains that God is present in language – but to recognize this presence, one must relinquish the illusion of control. Rather than assuming that we fully determine meaning, we must humble ourselves before language, allowing it to guide us. But I wonder: Why should we take a passive stance toward language? If language is a human construct, then isn't the attempt to "step back" from it an illusion – or worse, a form of false modesty?

Fleischacker argues that within a religious tradition, humility entails recognizing that we do not independently determine which parts of language carry authority. Instead, tradition itself selects and canonizes certain texts, granting them a privileged status. For Jews, encountering God means encountering the Torah. If one cannot experience God in the Torah, Fleischacker argues, there is no reason to expect such an encounter anywhere else. However, he acknowledges that the question of what exactly God might mean through the Torah's language remains open.[391]

But if we relinquish control over meaning, how does meaning arise? If we simply "step back" and allow the text to "guide" us, does this process happen effortlessly? At what point do we start interpreting actively? This is especially critical when confronting ethically problematic passages in the Torah – those that have historically been used to justify oppression of women, LGBT+ individuals, and marginalized communities. Does

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[391] Fleischacker, "A Defence of Verbal Revelation," 444–46.

this kind of "modesty" toward the text risk reinforcing centuries of exclusionary interpretations?

Fleischacker assures that taking the Torah's words as divine rather than merely human does not mean submitting to static, rigid interpretations. On the contrary, it is precisely this sanctification of the text that enables an ongoing, dynamic process of reinterpretation. By treating the Torah with reverence and allowing tradition to guide interpretation, one does not merely read into the text what is convenient or comfortable. Rather, interpretation becomes a continuous, responsive engagement with the moral demands of the present. The authority of sacred texts does not lie in their immutability but in their ability to speak anew to each generation. Ultimately, for God to "speak" through the Torah, we must be willing to listen – and this listening requires both reverence and critical engagement.

It remains unclear why Fleischacker insists on verbalization as a necessary condition for sustaining the idea of a commanding God. While he appears to draw on Heidegger's philosophy of language to support this claim, Heidegger's framework does not provide decisive evidence for the necessity of linguistic mediation in divine commands. Moreover, insights from contemporary research on normative cognition challenge the assumption that norms must be explicitly verbalized in order to be understood, followed, or enforced.

Current discussions in cognitive science suggest that normative cognition[392] operates in both implicit and explicit ways. On the one hand, there is considerable evidence that

[392] Daniel Kelly, Evan Westra, and Stephen Setman, "The Psychology of Normative Cognition," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri

norms shape social motivations and reasoning in an intuitive and automatic manner, often outside of conscious awareness.[393] On the other hand, human beings clearly possess the ability to explicitly represent, reason about, teach, and challenge norms when necessary.[394] Norms are often framed as rules, but this does not necessarily mean that they are always represented in a linguistic or sentence-like format. If normative rules exclusively exist as sentences in natural languages such as English or Hebrew, this would imply that language must have evolved before normative cognition and that non-linguistic creatures, such as infants and nonhuman animals, lack the capacity for norms altogether.[395]

Several researchers have proposed alternative models of norm representation that do not require linguistic encoding.[396] Westra and Andrews[397] take a pluralistic approach, suggesting that some norms may not be stored in individual minds at all, but rather emerge as collective patterns of social interaction. They argue that while some instances of norm-following behavior may involve explicit, sentential representations of rules, other cases may be guided by non-linguistic, model-based representations, or by entirely implicit social dynamics.

Nodelman, n.d., https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2025/entries/psychology-normative-cognition/.

[393] David A. Kalkstein et al., "Social Norms Govern What Behaviors Come to Mind—And What Do Not," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 124, no. 6 (June 2023): 1203–29, https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000412.

[394] Cecilia Heyes, "Rethinking Norm Psychology," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 19, no. 1 (January 2024): 12–38, https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221112075.

[395] Heyes.

[396] Kelly, Westra, and Setman, "The Psychology of Normative Cognition."

[397] Evan Westra and Kristin Andrews, "A Pluralistic Framework for The Psychology of Norms," *Biology & Philosophy* 37, no. 5 (October 2022): 40, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10539-022-09871-0.

Given this broad spectrum of possibilities, language, while useful, is not the sole mechanism for encoding, transmitting, or enforcing norms. If normative cognition does not necessarily depend on explicit linguistic formulation, then the idea of a commanding God does not require linguistic articulation either. God could communicate norms in a nonlinguistic manner, or even through entirely non-verbal forms of divine lure. It is humans who, in attempting to process, transmit, and systematize this lure, translate divine guidance into words. This does not diminish the role of language in religious life, but it does suggest that verbalization is a human function, not necessarily a divine one.[398]

Artson's approach to Torah as both fully divine and fully human frames revelation as a dynamic, relational process, rather than a fixed and infallible decree. This perspective insists that even the most challenging biblical passages must be engaged, not dismissed, through interpretation that reveals God's love, justice, and compassion.[399] [400] However, it remains unclear how this works in practice – how, for instance, the authority of a given interpretation is established.

Artson explicitly rejects textual finality, emphasizing that no single book can fully contain divine revelation.[401] This understanding of revelation might challenge traditional textual hierarchies. If revelation is continuous and unfolding, what justifies the privileged status of the Pentateuch over later interpretations and texts? If God reveals

[398] On religion as a linguistic framework see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 33, Ch 2.
[399] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 47.
[400] „The Bible may be an arresting and poetic work of fiction, but it is not the sort of book you should give your children to form their morals."
[401] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 55.

Godself through the ongoing discernment of human beings, should contemporary insights carry equal weight to ancient scripture?

It is time to turn to Whitehead's theory of language and process hermeneutic. Accordingly, language, at its core, is a system of symbols, nothing more than a set of sounds or marks on paper. Yet, as the most elaborate symbolic system available to human beings, it is the primary medium for recalling and communicating propositions.[402] However, language is not a perfect tool. Whitehead notes that "every proposition refers to a universe exhibiting some general systematic metaphysical character" and emphasized the impossibility of extracting a proposition from its systemic context within the actual world."[403] Similarly, Janzen observed that "we experience more than we know, and we know more than we think; and we think more than we can say; language therefore lags behind the intuitions of immediate experience."[404] Consequently, language can only approximate meaning, and its function is inherently incomplete and fragmentary.

In process thought, language is understood as analogical, indeterminate, imprecise, and value-laden.[405] Since reality is not composed of discrete objects but is rather a fluid network of interrelated processes, words cannot be understood univocally. Language is necessarily abstract, an imprecise and indeterminate representation of reality.

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[402] David J. Lull, "What Is 'Process Hermeneutic'?," *Process Studies* 13 (1983): 191.
[403] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 11.
[404] Gerald J. Janzen, „The Old Testament in 'Process' Perspective: Proposal for a Way Forward in Biblical Theology", 492, cit. in Ronald L. Farmer, *Beyond the Impasse: The Promise of A Process Hermeneutic*, Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics 13 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 94.
[405] Farmer, 95.

Furthermore, no sentence merely enunciates a proposition, rather its tone, context, and authority influence the way it is received.

From a process hermeneutic perspective, a text is never a fixed, self-contained entity but rather: (1) A partial and inexact expression of the author's original vision of propositions. (2) A source of propositions that readers will interpret in ways not necessarily intended by the author. (3) An evolving medium through which each reader's interpretation will differ from another's.[406]

If meaning is dynamic, new interpretations of a text should be expected rather than rejected a priori. This, however, raises the question: How do we validate an interpretation? Process hermeneutics proposes three criteria: historic routes,[407] God's work of creative transformation,[408] and the interpretive community.[409]

Since every act of interpretation builds on past interpretations, no text is encountered in isolation. The historic route of a text includes its context, evolution, and reception over time. That does not mean that the interpreter has "no immediate access to the lures elicited by reading of the text itself," but it does mean that the kind of lures the interpreter feels "have seen socially conditioned by prior feelings of the text's lures".[410] Importantly, process hermeneutics rejects the idea of an unchanging "essence" of religion, religious traditions evolve rather than merely repeat the past. Novelty is a defining characteristic of life.

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[406] Farmer, 103.
[407] Similar to "effective history" *(Wirkungsgeschichte)* in terms of Gadamer.
[408] Similar to "fusion of horizons" *(Horizontverschmelzung)* in terms of Gadamer.
[409] Farmer, *Beyond the Impasse*, 110.
[410] Farmer, 111.

Since God operates through creative transformation *(tamid ma'aseh bereshit)*, process interpretation seeks to understand how texts contribute to this transformation. Rather than choosing between conflicting interpretations, the process interpreter aims to create a "harmonious contrast", a more inclusive perspective that accounts for multiple propositions and leads to growth. Pluralism, in this sense, is not a problem but an opportunity, moreover human freedom requires alternatives. However, not every transformation is creative. To be truly creative, transformation must remain open to diverse sources of meaning while also maintaining continuity with prior insights.[411]

Artson's claim that "ethics takes precedence in the Torah"[412] and that "the very values that have emerged from the Bible sensitize us to hear those tales and practices with heightened awareness"[413] suggests that modern moral consciousness is an organic outgrowth of biblical tradition.[414] Yet, one could argue that many of our most cherished ethical principles – human dignity, democracy, religious pluralism, gender equality, and LGBQ+ rights – are often in tension with, rather than derived from, biblical texts. If we are to take process thought seriously, interpretation must remain open to sources beyond the narrow boundaries of Jewish tradition. The lure of God must be recognized not only

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[411] Lull, "What Is 'Process Hermeneutic'?"
[412] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 52.
[413] Artson, 49.
[414] I agree with Dawkins: „The Bible may be an arresting and poetic work of fiction, but it is not the sort of book you should give your children to form their morals." (Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 280.) Artson is aware of the complexity: "Read literally, the Bible can be a terrible book: a bullying patriarchal God who justifies slavery, rape, the marginalization of women and people with special needs." (Bradley Shavit Artson, *Why The Bible Is a Terrible Book (and Worth Reading on a Regular Basis)*, Sermon, n.d., https://www.openhorizons.org/why-the-bible-is-a-terrible-book-and-worth-reading-on-a-regular-basis.html.)

in Torah and rabbinic thought but also in the Enlightenment, secular humanism, and even atheism, realms that have significantly shaped contemporary moral awareness.

If revelation is continuous and evolving, why should we privilege the Torah and rabbinic tradition? Process theology can stand independently of biblical or rabbinic reference, and Judaism itself could theoretically exist without scripture.[415] However, if one's theology is to remain Jewish, it must maintain some continuity with the tradition. Jewish texts serve as a repository of Jewish lived experience; they allow Jews to live from the past, in the present, toward the future.[416] This recalls Steinberg's Shavuot sermon, in which he describes the Israelites carrying two arks in the wilderness – one containing the bones of Joseph (the past) and the other containing the *Shekhinah* (the living, evolving divine presence). Judaism, he argues, is not only about preserving the past but also about moving toward the future.[417]

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[415] For discussion on the primacy of the Oral Torah over the Written Torah see Sommer, *Revelation and Authority*, 151–70. On didactic, not prescriptive function of the Torah see Gary Knoppers and Bernard Levinson, "How, Where, When, and Why Did the Pentateuch Became the Torah?," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, ed. Gary Knoppers and Bernard Levinson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 1–19. On the loss and recovery of scripture: Eva Mroczek, "'Without Torah and Scripture': Biblical Absence and the History of Revelation," *Hebrew Studies* 61, no. 1 (2020): 97–122, https://doi.org/10.1353/hbr.2020.0015.

[416] Torah is not a perfect word of God but "the basic context out of which Jewish thinking and religious experience flow." (Kepnes, "Revelation as Torah: From an Existential to a Postliberal Judaism," 206.)

[417] "In Judaism – the past is not enough especially the limited past. We need both the past and the future." "All those years that the Israelites were in the wilderness, those two chests, one of the dead [Joseph] and the other of the Shechinah proceeded side by side... (Sota 13b)" Eternal symbol of Judaism – two arks. The past personal collective. But also the ark of the living God of the future." (Milton Steinberg, „Time and Religion" in Milton Steinberg, *From the Sermons of Rabbi Milton Steinberg: High Holydays and Major Festivals*, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum (New York: Bloch, 1954), 196.).

If interpretation is shaped by historical context, it is equally influenced by the community to which the interpreter belongs. Whether religious, linguistic, ethnic, political, or academic, the interpreter's community helps shape what is seen in the text. Furthermore, an interpretation finds its confirmation in resonance within the interpretive community. Whitehead observed that "the creative process is rhythmic: it swings from the publicity of many things to the individual privacy; and it swings back from the private individual to the publicity of the objectified individual."[418] Thus, a valid interpretation is one that contributes to the creative transformation of the interpreter's community.

Process hermeneutics acknowledges that language is incomplete, imprecise, and evolving. Meaning is not static but emerges through historical continuity, divine lure, and interpretation within a community. This dynamic view of text and tradition fits well into Artson's framework.

Finally, I come to the question of commandment and its source in divine revelation. Artson reinterprets *mitzvot* not as external divine commands, but as expressions of inner moral and spiritual imperatives. Rather than viewing *mitzvot* as obligations imposed by a commanding God, he frames their authority as emerging from within, rooted in empathy, love, and belonging.[419] This raises a fundamental question: If *mitzvot* are self-generated responses rather than divine mandates, can (Conservative) Judaism still be considered a commandment-based tradition?

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[418] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 151.
[419] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 91.

Schulweis notes that Artson rejects the idea of obligation rooted in divine coercion – the traditional Sinaitic model – in favor of obligation as an act of communal acceptance. Commenting on Artson's reference to the story of Esther and Mordechai, Schulweis explains that for Artson, Jews are not obligated by divine threat, but by the historical decision of their ancestors to accept and transmit the covenant.[420] Consequently he raises a question: Are contemporary Jews bound by the commitments of their ancestors, or are they free to reshape the obligations they have inherited? I think Artson has already answered this: every Jew chooses to follow the covenant or not.[421]

Artson describes halakhah as "an invitation" to transcend self-interest and orient life toward service and integration, offering a "palette of practice" from which individuals construct a meaningful Jewish life.[422] This language suggests autonomy, allowing for personal engagement and adaptation in shaping religious expression – an approach that aligns more closely with Reform Judaism than with Conservative/Masorti frameworks.[423]

Yet, Artson does not advocate for complete individualism. He insists that *mitzvot* must function within the evolving system of halakhah, rather than as isolated ethical choices.[424] His position does not reject binding halakhah, nor does it endorse absolute autonomy. Instead, he presents a middle path – one that views halakhah as structured yet

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[420] Schulweis, "The Pull of the Divine Lure," 55–57.
[421] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 105.
[422] Artson, 95.
[423] Michael Graetz, "The Impossibility of Talking about God," *Conservartive Judaism* 62, no. 1–2 (Fall-Winter 2010): 116–21. Rivon Krygier, "The Force of Bradley Artson's 'Process Theology' and Its Limitations," *Conservative Judaism* 62, no. 1–2 (Fall-Winter 2010): 67–87.
[424] Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 95–96.

flexible, requiring self-imposed commitment but always subject to reinterpretation and evolution.

This chapter has explored the possibility of a Jewish process-theological engagement with revelation, particularly through the lens of Charles Hartshorne's thought. Hartshorne's model of a relational, non-coercive God fits well within the framework of liberal[425] Jewish theology, providing both a systematic metaphysical foundation and a practical orientation that emphasizes experience, communal discourse, and ethical transformation. His dipolar concept of God – one who is responsive and relational rather than omnipotently commanding – offers a compelling way to conceptualize divine-human interaction, allowing for both divine lure and human agency in shaping religious life.

In contrast to traditional models of revelation that posit an infallible and static transmission of divine truth, Hartshorne's process framework suggests that revelation is inherently dynamic, continually unfolding within history and mediated through human experience, language, and tradition. However, this approach raises critical epistemological questions: If revelation is always interpreted through human cognition, how do we discern authentic divine guidance from human projection? If no single text or tradition fully contains divine truth, what criteria determine the authority of Jewish teachings? These challenges point to the need for a coherent, systematic approach to interpretation, rather than an arbitrary or selective reading of sources.

[425] Hartshorne defines "liberal" as one who knows that he or she is not God. (Hartshorne, *Creativity in American Philosophy*, 9.)

One potential response to this epistemological challenge is the role of ethical intuition in revelation. Huemer's theory of ethical intuitionism suggests that moral truths are apprehended directly through intellectual intuition. The intuition can be followed unless there are doubts about its validity, it is the initial step in ethical reasoning. If moral awareness is an innate cognitive faculty, then divine revelation could be understood as aligning with and expanding upon our intuitive moral knowledge rather than imposing externally derived commandments. This aligns with Artson's claim that mitzvot are not arbitrary divine decrees but expressions of inner moral and spiritual imperatives. However, this approach raises a tension between moral universality and religious particularity: if truths are accessible through human intuition, what is the distinct role of Jewish sources in shaping ethical and religious life?

One consequence of this process-oriented approach is a rethinking of Jewish chosenness. Artson seeks to reframe election not as a fixed divine decree but as an evolving, reciprocal commitment between God and Israel. However, as discussed, this reinterpretation faces tension between Jewish theological ideals, textual tradition and political reality. Traditional sources often emphasize Jewish chosenness, sometimes in ways that reinforce hierarchical views of Israel's role among the nations. In a time of rising Jewish nationalism and supremacy, the concept of chosenness must be handled with care, lest it devolve into chauvinism rather than a commitment to ethical responsibility. Here, I align with Kaplan's critique, which argues that the notion of divine election is fundamentally flawed and should be abandoned. As with any theological reform, there are inevitable trade-offs – something is gained, and something is lost. I acknowledge that abandoning the doctrine of election may mean forfeiting a

powerful source of consolation and symbolic compensation, particularly for a minority community seeking meaning in the face of suffering and historical persecution. However, from a process-theological perspective on theodicy and after the Shoah such a belief appears ungrounded. While the psychological function of chosenness may have been sustaining, I wonder whether it is a healthy way of coping with the difficult reality.

A further implication of process thought is the necessity of re-evaluating the language of revelation itself. Process hermeneutics, rooted in Whitehead's process philosophy, challenges the idea that texts convey fixed, timeless truths. Instead, meaning emerges through dynamic interpretation, where readers interact with the text in an evolving historical and communal context. According to process hermeneutics, texts are: partial and inexact expressions of an author's original insights; open-ended, evoking new interpretations and meanings beyond the author's intent; and interpreted differently by each reader, influenced by context, history, and tradition.

If revelation is not static but participatory, new interpretations of religious texts are not deviations but necessary developments. This, however, raises the question of interpretive validity: how do we distinguish between creative transformation and distortion? Process hermeneutics offers three criteria for legitimate interpretation:

1. Historic continuity: interpretation must engage with tradition rather than ignore it.

2. Creative transformation: new interpretations must enrich and expand in line of approximation of the values.

3. Communal discourse: meaning is established not individually, but within the community of interpretation.

Thus, process thought does not advocate pure relativism – it grounds textual reinterpretation in historical, ethical, and communal continuity, rather than in personal subjectivity alone.

To sum up, revelation is the dynamic and relational process through which divine reality becomes accessible to human consciousness. It is not a fixed transmission of doctrinal propositions, but an ongoing, co-creative interaction between divine lure and human perception – shaped by intuition, imagination, reason, and moral insight. Revelation may manifest in nature, history, scripture, or inner experience, and always requires interpretation. In this view, revelation is not a supernatural interruption but an immanent unfolding, inviting individuals and communities into deeper awareness, ethical responsiveness, and spiritual growth.

If revelation is an open-ended process, does the term "revelation" itself remain useful? Traditional Jewish and theological discourse often relies on the term "revelation", yet this term carries connotations of static, infallible truth (that waits to be revealed), which contradict the fluid, evolving, constructed nature of process theology. Rather than investing intellectual energy in redefining revelation, I propose a shift toward "God-awareness" – a more flexible, experience-based framework that acknowledges divine lure without implying authoritative finality. Significantly, the Hebrew Bible lacks an abstract equivalent for "revelation", reinforcing the idea that divine-human interaction has always been framed in specific, context-dependent terms (e.g., *matan Torah* rather than a general category of "revelation").[426] This shift also has

[426] Cf. Kadushin: "... the term 'revelation,' which has become hallowed in certain Jewish quarters, is not rabbinic, if that term is intended as a designation for the giving of the Ten Commandments on Sinai. The rabbinic term is Mattan Torah (the giving of Torah)

practical implications for interfaith and interconvictional dialogue, moving beyond sectarian claims of exclusive divine knowledge toward a shared pursuit of wisdom, justice, and truth.

Finally, Hartshorne's model of God supports a pluralistic view of knowledge and ethics. If God-awareness is not confined to a single tradition, then moral and theological insights must be drawn from multiple sources including science, philosophy, and even secular humanism. This perspective aligns with Deleuze's argument that philosophy is not about discovering universal truths but about constructing frameworks that help communities navigate an unpredictable and unknowable reality. Applied to theology, this means that religious systems do not uncover divine truths but rather generate meaning in response to historical and existential challenges.

The next chapter will explore the practical implications of a Jewish process theology of revelation.

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and it is not confined to the occasion at Sinai. If by revelation is meant revelation of Shekinah, Gilluy Shekinah, that too cannot be limited to Sinai, for according to the Rabbis there were many other occasions when the Shekinah was revealed. Both Mattan Torah and Gilluy Shekinah are concepts, generalizations, and hence neither is limited to a single concretization or instance." (Kadushin, *Rabbinic Mind*, 57–58.)

7. Applications

"The test of an authentic theology", Heschel pointedly observes, "is the degree to which it reflects and enhances the power of prayer, the way of worship."[427] In this chapter I will give some examples of how process theology can reshape Jewish liturgy and ritual practice by emphasizing dynamic relationality, human agency, and ongoing divine-human partnership.

Interpretation of Psalm 19

Psalm 19 holds a significant place in Jewish liturgy, highlighting the dual revelation of God through nature and Torah. A key verse, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before you, Eternal One, my rock and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:15), is recited at the conclusion of the Amidah. The psalm is also traditionally included in the Pesukei Dezimra[428] section of the morning service on Shabbat and festivals.[429]

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[427] Abraham J. Heschel, "On Prayer," *Conservative Judaism* 25, no. 1 (1970): 1–12.

[428] "Verses of Song," alternatively, David Wolfe-Blank: "Praise Cuts." "Zimrah also means cutting and pruning, the type of work one might do to reduce overgrowths of thorns and brambles. The Pesukei D'Zimrah are verses which cut through the thorns and dilemmas of life which burden us, narcotizing the soul, killing our sense of Divinity and muffling our perception of wonder. Singing the Hallelyah prayers is not the futile attempted seduction of a primitive god; praise is a courageous cutting away from a cynical reality. Praise is not the whistling in the dark of our existential angst; it is a piercing of the silence. Praise cuts through, reaching across space and time to awaken a sleeping giant - the Divine reality in ourselves and within the silence of the universe." (David Wolfe-Blank, "Meta Siddur. A Jewish Soul-Development Workbook (Version 5.0)" (n.d.), 99.3.)

[429] Some Reform prayer books relocated Psalm 19 from the *Pesukei Dezimra* section to the Torah reading section, reinforcing its role as a psalm of revelation. For example, in

Sommer explores this interplay between nature[430] and revelation, challenging the common scholarly view that the psalm consists of two separate compositions: one focusing on nature (verses 2-7) and the other on Torah (verses 8-14). Instead, he argues that Psalm 19 presents a unified vision, where both the natural world and divine instruction complement each other.

Below is the full text of Psalm 19 (excluding the technical introductory verse 1), presented with an English translation based on Sommer's translation and analysis, with some modifications.

[2] The heavens declare God's splendor	[2]הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֵל
the sky proclaims God's handiwork.	וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מַגִּיד הָרָקִיעַ׃
[3] One day utters a word to the next,	[3]יוֹם לְיוֹם יַבִּיעַ אֹמֶר
one night conveys knowledge to another.	וְלַיְלָה לְלַיְלָה יְחַוֶּה־דָּעַת׃
[4] There is no speech, there are no words	[4]אֵין־אֹמֶר וְאֵין דְּבָרִים
whose sound is not heard.	בְּלִי נִשְׁמָע קוֹלָם׃
[5] Their sound goes through all the world,	[5]בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ יָצָא קַוָּם
their words, to the end of the earth.	וּבִקְצֵה תֵּבֵל מִלֵּיהֶם
In the skies God set a tent for the sun,	לַשֶּׁמֶשׁ שָׂם־אֹהֶל בָּהֶם׃

Mishkan T'filah verses 8-10 are mentioned as one of the passages that may be read before returning the scroll to the ark (Judith Frishman, ed., *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur: Weekdays, Shabbat, Festivals, and Other Occasions of Public Worship* (New York: CCAR Press, 2007), 375.). In the British Reform Siddur the same passage is part of the "Torah Service II" at its beginning when the scroll is taken from the ark (Jonathan Magonet, ed., *Seder Hatefillot: Forms of Prayer*, 8th Revised edition (London: Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, 2008), 258.). The British Liberal Siddur "Lev Chadash" (1995) and the Israeli siddur "Tefilat Ha-Adam" (2021) keep Psalm 19 in full as part of the *Psukei Dezimra* section.

[430] Sommer notes that although "nature" is not a biblical term "the confluence of terms and themes found in the first stanza fits 'nature' well. (Benjamin D. Sommer, "Nature, Revelation, and Grace in Psalm 19: Towards a Theological Reading of Scripture," *The Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 3 (July 2015): 379.). He also refers to Geller: "If one limits the range of the term 'nature' 'the way things work, the ordering of things by God in a manner that human observation,' then the semantic range of 'nature' is covered, in a very general term derek , 'way, manner of acting'" (Stephen A. Geller, "Wisdom, Nature and Piety in Some Biblical Psalms", in *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen* [ed. Tzvi Abusch; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns 2002] 101-21, 101.

[6] which is like a groom	[6]וְהוּא כְּחָתָן יֹצֵא מֵחֻפָּתוֹ
who comes out of his chamber,	יָשִׂישׂ כְּגִבּוֹר לָרוּץ אֹרַח:
like a hero, eager to run the course.	[7]מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם מוֹצָאוֹ
[7] It rises at one end of the sky,	וּתְקוּפָתוֹ עַל־קְצוֹתָם
and its circuit goes to the other;	וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מֵחַמָּתוֹ:
nothing is hidden from its warmth.	[8]תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נָפֶשׁ
[8] GOD's teaching is whole,	עֵדוּת יְהוָה נֶאֱמָנָה מַחְכִּימַת פֶּתִי:
renewing life;	[9]פִּקּוּדֵי יְהוָה יְשָׁרִים מְשַׂמְּחֵי־לֵב
GOD's witness is trustworthy,	מִצְוַת יְהוָה בָּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינָיִם:
making the simpleminded wise;	[10]יִרְאַת יְהוָה טְהוֹרָה עוֹמֶדֶת לָעַד
[9] GOD's orders are fair,	מִשְׁפְּטֵי־יְהוָה אֱמֶת צָדְקוּ יַחְדָּו:
gladdening one's mind;	[11]הַנֶּחֱמָדִים מִזָּהָב וּמִפַּז רָב
GOD's instruction is bright,	וּמְתוּקִים מִדְּבַשׁ וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים:
bringing light to the eyes;	[12]גַּם־עַבְדְּךָ נִזְהָר בָּהֶם
[10] GOD's wisdom[431] is pure,	בְּשָׁמְרָם עֵקֶב רָב:
enduring forever;	[13]שְׁגִיאוֹת מִי־יָבִין מִנִּסְתָּרוֹת נַקֵּנִי:
GOD's judgments are true,	[14]גַּם מִזֵּדִים חֲשֹׂךְ עַבְדֶּךָ
righteous altogether,	אַל־יִמְשְׁלוּ־בִי אָז אֵיתָם
[11] More desirable than gold,	וְנִקֵּיתִי מִפֶּשַׁע רָב:
than quantities of platinum;[432]	[15]יִהְיוּ־לְרָצוֹן אִמְרֵי־פִי וְהֶגְיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ
sweeter than honey,	יְהוָה צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי:
than drippings from the comb.	
[12] Your servant, too, is enlightened by them;	
in obeying them there is great bounty.	
[13] Who can be aware of errors?	
Cleanse me of the hidden	
[14] From the arrogant, too,	
guard your servant;	
Let them not rule over me;	
then shall I approach perfection	
and be cleansed of terrible sins.	
[15] May speech of my mouth	
and thoughts of my mind	

[431] Lit. „awe". Sommer notes that "awe" stands out from the other five terms. While all the others are top-down: referring to a command, teaching, ruling, or judgment <u>from</u> God, awe <u>before</u> God moves in the opposite direction, from humanity toward God. Carasik explains this distinction by referencing biblical wisdom literature, where "the awe of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 110:10; Prov. 1:7, 9:10). From this, he concludes that "awe" in verse 8 stands for "wisdom." (Sommer, 380.).

[432] Lit. "fine gold."

find acceptance before you,
GOD, my rock and redeemer.

Sommer demonstrates thematic and linguistic links between the two sections (verses 2-7 and 8-14), arguing they work together to present a cohesive message. The psalm presents two ways of knowing God: through observing nature (so-called general revelation, or natural theology) and through the study and obedience of Torah (so-called special revelation or revealed theology). Sommer argues that these are not contradictory but complementary: nature hints at God's power, while Torah provides a more direct and personal knowledge of God's will.

He engages with the interpretation by Barr,[433] who argues that biblical texts, such as Psalm 19, suggest that nature reveals God's presence but are often overshadowed by later theological traditions emphasizing revelation. Barr sees the relationship between the two parts of Psalm 19 as complementary: God reveals Godself in two distinct yet complementary ways. First through the patterns of natural order and then through special communication, exemplified by law. Barr further interprets the reference to *"torah"* in verse 8, acknowledging that while it can be identified with Moses' Torah, it may also be understood more broadly as divine "instruction" that is accessible and available beyond the specific textual Torah. This interpretation aligns *"torah"* with parental guidance, particularly a mother's instruction (Prov. 1:8, 6:20), or with Wisdom's direct teaching. If read this way, the two parts of the psalm form a cohesive unity, portraying a universal

[433] James Barr, ed., *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology: The Gifford Lectures for 1991, Delivered in the University of Edinburgh*, The Gifford Lectures for 1991 (Oxford New York: Clarendon Press, 2010), 87–88. Ref. in Sommer, "Nature, Revelation, and Grace in Psalm 19: Towards a Theological Reading of Scripture," 395.

communication: the heavens offering praise to God and God providing instruction to humanity.

Levenson offers a similar reading.[434] According to him, what nature communicates about God in its continuous, wordless monologue is of the same order as the verbal revelation of the Torah. Just as the heavenly bodies follow consistent patterns, shaping the world they govern, the commandments establish order within human society. The psalmist does not draw an analogy to Torah from human institutions or history, but rather from the fixed regularities of nature – specifically, the precise and unwavering laws of astronomy.

Sommer builds on Barr's and Levenson's insights but challenges strict natural theology readings. He points out that in the first part of the psalm, God is referred to as *El*, a general noun rather than a personal name, more of a title than an intimate designation. In contrast, the second part addresses God as YHWH, God's personal name, a name uniquely used by Israel,[435] signifying a closer, covenantal relationship. *El* conveys reverence but also distance, whereas YHWH implies intimacy and direct connection. Observing nature allows one to learn about God, but keeping the terms of God's covenant enables one to truly know God. Sommer argues that the first part of the psalm presents God in a universal sense, while the second emphasizes a particular

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[434] Jon D. Levenson, "The Theologies of Commandment in Biblical Israel," *Harvard Theological Review* 73, no. 1–2 (April 1980): 29, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816000002005. Ref. in Sommer, "Nature, Revelation, and Grace in Psalm 19: Towards a Theological Reading of Scripture," 395.

[435] Sommer is aware of the use of YHWH outside of Israel, but he states, "these cases are at best rare and hardly overrun the claim I make above." (Sommer, "Nature, Revelation, and Grace in Psalm 19: Towards a Theological Reading of Scripture," 397.)

relationship with Him. Thus, Psalm 19 suggests that nature offers partial knowledge of God, but Torah completes this understanding.

This complementary relationship can be enriched by considering Charles Hartshorne's panentheism, which posits that God is not separate from the world but is the very place of the world, experiencing all feelings within it. From this perspective, Psalm 19 need not be read as a stark juxtaposition between two distinct forms of divine revelation – one through nature and another through supernatural law – but rather as a unified expression of God's presence and activity in the world.

In this reading, both nature and Torah (in the widest sense, not as Pentateuch) are natural manifestations of the divine, a view that aligns with James Barr's argument in favor of natural theology. Yet Hartshorne's framework offers an additional nuance: God's activity is not imposed externally, as a sovereign issuing decrees from beyond, but emerges from within the system itself. Revelation, then, is not merely about commandment but about divine "lure", God's gentle persuasion rather than authoritarian imposition. The Torah, in this sense, is not an arbitrary set of instructions imposed from outside, but an expression of wisdom and rules organically arising within the relational fabric of the world. Just as humans observe nature declares God's glory by its very being, the human discourse produces Torah to embody God's call to deeper understanding and attunement to the world reality.

It may be helpful to consider Torah in its broadest sense in two distinct but interconnected senses: the ideal Torah, which serves as a synonym for the divine lure, and the humanly perceived Torah, which represents our evolving understanding of that divine lure. This distinction parallels the philosophical differentiation between an

objective reality and our perception of it. While the Torah (lure) of God is indeed whole, pure, deeply relational, and perfectly responsive, the Torah as understood by humanity remains an approximation of the divine Torah – an ongoing, dynamic, yet inevitably limited effort to discern and respond to God's call.

The living Torah, understood as human response to the divine lure, shall not be static or absolute; rather it is an evolving interpretation shaped by historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts. This process is, in a sense, agnostic – not in the sense of doubt about God's existence, but in the recognition of human epistemological humility. We do not possess direct, unmediated access to divine wisdom; instead, we continually strive to grasp it through study, reflection, and lived experience. In this light, the Psalm's plea, *"From the arrogant, too, guard your servant,"* serves as a reminder of the dangers of intellectual or spiritual arrogance. The verse warns against the presumption that one has fully grasped divine truth. Instead, it calls for an approach marked by humility, recognizing that our understanding is always partial, provisional, and in need of refinement.

This humility does not weaken faith but strengthens it, for it fosters a posture of openness to learning, to dialogue, and to the evolving wisdom of tradition. Just as scientific inquiry accepts that knowledge is constantly refined through new discoveries, so too does Torah study – if it is to be worthy of this designation – embrace the necessity of continuous engagement and reinterpretation. The divine lure calls us forward, not toward static dogmatism, but toward an ever-deepening relationship with the unfolding meaning of life.

Yet, this ongoing process does not render human engagement with Torah meaningless or arbitrary. On the contrary, the very act of struggling with and refining our understanding is itself a sacred endeavor. Torah, as it is humanly perceived, shall remain an active, relational dialogue within the human community, which itself is embraced within the Divine. In a way it is an internal dialogue within the Divine.

In conclusion, Psalm 19 offers a meditation on the dual dimensions of divine revelation: the testimony of the heavens and the humanly articulated instruction of Torah. Far from being a fragmented composition, the psalm presents an integrated vision in which the natural world "utters a word" (v.3) and its message is accessible to all (v.4). Within this openness the divine Torah emerges – an "instruction," that "renews life" and "brings light to the eyes" (vv.8-9). In this light, human interpretations of Torah are living responses to utterances (v.4). In a world where "one day utters a word to the next, one night conveys knowledge to another" (v.3), the message is not fixed, but contingent, and thus its human articulation always partial, always provisional. Read through the lens of process theology and Hartshorne's panentheism, this psalm does not suggest a hierarchical divide between natural and special revelation, but relates to a continuous, relational dynamic between God, world, and humanity. Revelation, in this reading, emerges as a persuasive, evolving lure toward wisdom, justice, and relational harmony.

Reimagining Melekh as a Metaphor of Inner Sovereignty

The metaphor of *melekh*, applied to God as king, sovereign, and ruler, has shaped religious thought, but it also presents significant conceptual challenges in modern theological reflection. Given the shifting cultural perceptions of authority, power, and governance, it is essential to reconsider how this metaphor functions today and whether it remains a viable expression of divine reality.

Religious language is embedded in historical and cultural contexts. The notion of God as king once resonated deeply within societies governed by monarchs claiming absolute power. Reference to divine kingship conveyed strength, justice, and supreme authority, surpassing the claims of the earthy rules. The divine king was envisioned as able to triumph over oppressive regimes. This strengthened hope. However, in contemporary democratic societies, where authority is decentralized and absolute monarchy is largely obsolete, this metaphor may appear increasingly alien or even problematic. A conception of God as an absolute sovereign risks being aligned with theological frameworks that justify suffering and submission to status quo, reinforcing problematic power structures that prioritize dominance and submission over relationality and mutuality.

Hartshorne offers an alternative approach by envisioning the cosmos as a "metaphysical monarchy" in which God is the presiding head, yet not omnipotent in a coercive sense. In contrast, human society is seen as a "metaphysical democracy," where

each individual possesses intrinsic agency and creative potential.[436] This perspective mitigates the authoritarian connotations of the *melekh* metaphor while preserving a sense of divine guidance.

While Jill Hammer does not explicitly engage with Hartshorne, her reinterpretation of the Hebrew root *m-l-kh*, traditionally translated as "to rule," resonates with his emphasis on divine relationality. Instead of reinforcing hierarchical rule, she aligns it with the kabbalistic notion of *malkhut*, the divine immanence, the presence of God within the world.[437] In her translation work, the verb *malakh* (reigns) is often rendered as "is," shifting the focus from dominion to existence. She further suggests translating *melekh* as "guide," presenting a gentler, more relational understanding of divine rulership.[438] "Guide" is also my preference in the translation of the blessing formulas.

Expanding on this theme, David Wolfe-Blank suggests that rather than rejecting the *melekh* metaphor outright, one might explore its deeper potential. Instead of an external, dominating ruler, *melekh* can be understood as an internal organizing force – an illuminator, mediator, and harmonizer within the psyche. Drawing on psychological and spiritual frameworks of the Jewish Renewal, he describes *melekh* as an awareness center, a guiding force capable of integrating disparate elements of the self. In this view,

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[436] Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Process Philosophy and Political Liberalism: Rawls, Whitehead, Hartshorne* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 39.
[437] On *sefirah* of *malkhut* as the manifestation of God (*shekhinah*) in the world, see Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 176–77.
[438] Larry Schwartz, ed., *The Romemu Siddur: Shabbat Evening Prayers to Elevate Spirit*, trans. Jill Hammer (New York: Romemu, n.d.), iv.

invoking *melekh* in prayer and meditation is a practice of aligning with one's inner center, transforming internal discord into coherence.[439]

This reinterpretation aligns with Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's concept of paradigm shift from a vertical model of divine-human relationship (characterized by submission to a distant, hierarchical sovereign) to a horizontal one (marked by intimacy, mutuality, and inward attunement).[440] Here, God is not above but within, and the traditional language of kingship is reappropriated as a symbolic framework for spiritual integration and relational presence rather than subordination.

This psychological and mystical reading of *melekh* resonates with Hartshorne's theory of human identity, which challenges static notions of the self.[441] Hartshorne sees personal identity not as a fixed essence but as an ongoing process, where each moment of experience builds upon the past, forming a continuous yet evolving self. In a panentheistic framework, where God and the human self are deeply interconnected, *melekh* is not an external force imposing order but an evolving relational presence within the flux of lived experience.

Inspired by *The Conference of the Birds*[442] and similar Hasidic ideas, Wolfe-Blank approaches the *melekh* metaphor as a journey toward encountering divine kingship.

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[439] Wolfe-Blank, "Meta Siddur. A Jewish Soul-Development Workbook (Version 5.0)," 48.6-53.
[440] More on this theme in Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift: From the Jewish Renewal Teachings of Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi*, ed. Ellen Singer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).
[441] Charles Hartshorne, "Personal Identity from A to Z," *Process Studies* 2, no. 3 (1972): 209–15.
[442] Hartshorne might also have found inspiration in this parable, given his well-documented fascination with birds. He believed that birds possess a primitive aesthetic sense, stating, "Bird song is a fine symbol of what I believe is the meaning of all nature, the development of varied forms of free and beautiful experience." ("Freedom.

Rather than viewing *melekh* as an external authority Wolfe-Blank aligns this conception of sovereignty with the Sufi Persian allegory of the Simorgh, which reframes the idea of sovereignty as a process of self-discovery. In *The Conference of the Birds* by the Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar (1145–1221) the birds of the world gather in search of their king. Guided by the wise hoopoe bird,[443] they embark on a perilous journey to find the Simorgh, the King of Birds, who is said to reside atop a distant mountain. The journey is filled with immense challenges, and only a fraction of the original travelers completes the quest.

Before reaching their destination, the hoopoe warns the birds that the Simorgh's majesty is beyond comprehension. To gaze directly upon the king would be overwhelming, even fatal. Thus, mirrors have been placed around the palace walls, allowing seekers to glimpse the king's presence indirectly, shielding them from being consumed by its brilliance. When the thirty surviving birds finally arrive at the palace of the Simorgh, they expect to meet their king. Instead, they only find a mirror. To their astonishment, in the Simorgh's radiant reflection, they see themselves.

The realization is profound: they <u>are</u> the Simorgh. The Persian name Simorgh itself is a word play, meaning thirty *(si)* birds *(morgh)*. What they sought all along was within

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Individuality, and Beauty in Nature," 10 cit. in Viney and Shields, *The Mind of Charles Hartshorne*, 48.). His book on bird song was well received by ornithologists: Charles Hartshorne, *Born to Sing: An Interpretation and World Survey of Bird Song* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

[443] Hoopoe is associated with wisdom and trust both in Koran, in bHul63a, and in Midrash, see Jillian Stinchcomb, "The Queen of Sheba in the Qur'ān and Late Antique Midrash," in *The Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen et al. (De Gruyter, 2021), 85–96, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110675498-005.

them. Their arduous journey, filled with suffering and perseverance, has stripped away illusions and revealed their deepest unity with the divine.

> There in the Simorgh's radiant face they saw
> Themselves the Simorgh of the world— with awe
> They gazed, and dared at last to comprehend
> They were the Simorgh and the journey's end.[444]

As they gaze upon their reflections, they are struggling to reconcile the difference – or lack thereof – between themselves, thirty birds, and the king. The journey has led them not to an external king but to the realization that kingship is within them. The *melekh* they sought is not a distant ruler but their deepest, truest self. They are the king. They are God in hiding, ultimately made one with the divine presence they had long pursued.[445]

This poetic vision of divine kingship reimagines *melekh* not as a static figure of authority but as a process of self-discovery, transcendence, and ultimate unity. Rather than a ruler exerting power over subjects, *melekh* becomes a symbol of guidance, integration, and the awakening of the divine within the human. Thus, offering a language that can resonate with both theists and nontheists alike.

While reading about the Simorgh, often depicted as a peacock, I was reminded of the motif of the golden peacock, *di goldene pave*, in Yiddish poetry. Like the Simorgh, which reflects the inner world of those who encounter it, the golden peacock in Yiddish

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[444] Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 219, lines 4234-4235.
[445] Belden C. Lane, *The Great Conversation: Nature and the Care of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 62.

poetry symbolizes longing, nostalgia, and spiritual or cultural displacement, mirroring the inner landscapes of poets and their communities.

In Itsik Manger's 1948 poem *Dos lid fun der goldener pave* (*The Song of the Golden Peacock*),[446] the peacock travels in search of *di nekhtike teg* (*the days of yore*), only to encounter a mourning widow in the West, suggesting an unattainable yearning for a lost world. Written in the aftermath of the Shoah, the poem's imagery of irretrievable loss takes on a profound historical dimension.[447] In contrast, Leyb Halpern's *Di zun vet aruntergeyn* (*The Sun Will Be Setting*),[448] envisions the peacock as a guide who "will come / and take us to the place we long for," evoking a messianic figure capable of bridging past and present, loss and redemption.[449] This redemptive interpretation is further developed in Simcha Simchovitch's 1989 poem *Di goldene pave* (*The Golden Peacock*), where the bird no longer symbolizes exile but cultural renewal. The long-awaited peacock returns, bringing a "new tune, a song" and reviving the poet's sense of purpose.

This shift – from exile and mourning to cultural revival – reflects a transformation in the collective Jewish consciousness, particularly as Yiddish literature undergoes a process of reclamation and reinvention after the Shoah. Across these works, *di goldene pave* functions as a mirror, reflecting not just historical displacement but also the changing self-understanding of Jewish cultural identity. Like the Simorgh in *The*

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[446] Itsik Manger, "Dos Lid Fun Der Goldener Pave," *Jewish Folksongs* (blog), https://www.jewishfolksongs.com/en/goldene-pave-manger.
[447] Batya Fonda, "The Golden Peacock," *Jewish Folksongs* (blog), https://www.jewishfolksongs.com/en/golden-peacock.
[448] Leyb Halpern, "Di Zun Vet Aruntergeyn," *Jewish Folksongs* (blog), https://www.jewishfolksongs.com/en/di-zun-vet-aruntergeyn.
[449] Fonda, "The Golden Peacock."

Conference of the Birds, the peacock's meaning is fluid, shaped by the longings of those who invoke it.

I have shown a possible application of the *melekh* metaphor through a broader perspective in religious and literary thought, away from hierarchical and authoritarian conceptions of kingship and toward a model of inner sovereignty, self-discovery, and spiritual integration. Whether through Hartshorne's process thought, Hammer's mystical reinterpretation, or Wolfe-Blank's psychological reading, *melekh* emerges not as an external ruler but as an organizing principle within the self, a harmonizer of inner conflicts, and a guide toward coherence and spiritual depth.

The allegorical journey of the birds in *The Conference of the Birds* parallels this transformation, demonstrating how the search for divine kingship ultimately leads to self-recognition. The Simorgh is not an external sovereign but a reflection of the seekers themselves. Similarly, *di goldene pave* in Yiddish poetry serves as a mirror for cultural and spiritual longing, reflecting different historical and personal dimensions of Jewish experience.

Taken together, these perspectives underscore the interpretive fluidity of the *melekh* metaphor. Just as the Simorgh is ultimately revealed within the seeker, and the golden peacock reflects the inner world of the poet, *melekh* emerges as a symbol of deep spiritual awakening. By embracing the *melekh* as an internal guide rather than an external authority, we open ourselves to a theology of relationality, one that affirms the sacred within the self and within the world, where sovereignty is not imposed from above but realized from within.

A Meditation for Inner Peace amid Distant Sorrows

This meditation articulates a vision of God as dynamically engaged in the ongoing process of reality, emphasizing divine immanence within human experience rather than separation from it. A central tenet of this vision is the role of humans as co-creators with God, actively shaping reality through their choices. Rather than anticipating divine intervention, the meditation underscores personal responsibility: cultivating peace, extending compassion, and fostering sanctuaries of care. This reflects Hartshorne's conception of a God who does not unilaterally control history but instead depends on human partnership in the unfolding transformation of the world. No action exists in isolation; even the smallest expressions of love and justice contribute to the greater whole. In this light, the prayer does not petition a sovereign deity for miraculous intervention but rather acknowledges the interdependence of divine and human action. It shifts the focus from passive supplication to an active recognition of the partnership between God and humanity in the work of healing a broken world.

> Eternal One, Source of Life and Becoming,
> in a world filled with pain,
> where blood stains what should be sacred,
> I come to you not as a warrior,
> but as someone seeking solace in the face of sorrow I cannot mend.
>
> God who dwells in the still, small voice,
> I feel the weight of distant suffering,
> yet my hands feel too small, my strength too limited,
> to change the vastness of what is broken.
> Help me find peace within my circle of care,
> knowing that even the smallest acts of love
> reflect the divine spark you placed in each of us.
>
> Divine Presence, who rests among us,

you know the fragility of the human heart.
You see how I ache for justice, yet turn inward
to nurture my family, to build a haven of kindness
in a world that so often feels beyond repair.
May this sanctuary I create in my home
merit your blessing,
that it may radiate compassion outward,
even if my reach does not extend far.

Compassionate One, who feels with us,
teach me that even in my stillness, I can honor the suffering.
Through prayer, through memory,
through a quiet refusal
to let hatred or despair take root in my heart.

God, Eternal Partner in the work of creation,
remind me that I am enough.
Even if I cannot save the world,
I can offer tenderness to those near me.
Even if I cannot end the cries of the innocent,
I can teach my children the ways of peace.
Even if I cannot bear the weight of all suffering,
I can carry the light of hope within my soul.

May my care for those close to me
be a blessing in a world that feels so broken,
and may the peace I create in my own heart
honor the holiness of all life.

A Hanukkah Prayer for Insertion into the Amidah (Al ha-Nisim)

This Hanukkah insertion for the Amidah emphasizes God's immanence, relational presence, and the unfolding nature of both divine creativity and human action. It presents Hanukkah as a celebration of historical and ongoing miracles, manifested in

acts of courage, justice, and hope. Additionally, it alludes to the dynamic nature of Hanukkah's historiography and its theological implications.

> We thank you, Eternal One, who is present in all things,
> for the wonders and miracles of our ancestors,
> and for the miracles that continue to unfold in our world today.
>
> In your dynamic presence, history is never static,
> but a process of renewal and growth.
> You dwell in the courage of those who resist oppression,
> in the creativity of those who light the way in darkness,
> and in the hope that grows even in the face of despair.
>
> In the days of the Maccabees, you were with our people,
> guiding their hands and strengthening their hearts.
> Not through might, nor through power,
> but through the spirit of justice and perseverance,
> the light of your presence was revealed.
>
> Today, as we kindle the Hanukkah lights,
> we remember that your guidance flows through all the *uni-verse*,
> and that every act of justice and every moment of kindness
> adds to the light of the world.
>
> May we learn to recognize the miracles of the present moment,
> and to play our part in the ongoing creation.
> Let the light of Hanukkah inspire us to seek justice,
> to act with compassion, and to bring unity into the world.

El Male Rakhamim

This version of אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים departs from the traditional formulation in several significant ways. While the traditional prayer portrays God as a sovereign and transcendent being who grants rest to the departed soul, this reinterpretation aligns with

a view of God as deeply immanent, relational, and dynamically engaged in the unfolding of life. Rather than petitioning God to provide peace and rest for the deceased, it emphasizes the idea that all life continues within God – not in an afterlife characterized by new experiences, but as part of the divine memory. This perspective suggests that God holds within the divine self both joy and sorrow, actively experiencing and embracing every moment. Whereas the traditional prayer centers on the soul's rest in the "bond of life" (צְרוֹר הַחַיִּים), this version shifts the emphasis from rest to continuity, affirming that human actions, love, and memory persist eternally within God's experience rather than in a separate realm. The closing lines do not invoke resurrection or divine mercy but instead offer comfort in the ongoing existence of all life within God, reinforcing the notion that nothing is ever truly lost. Ultimately, this reinterpretation transforms the prayer from a plea for mercy into an affirmation of divine interconnectedness and eternal participation in the divine reality.

God, full of compassion,	אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים,
you encompass the unfolding of life,	אַתָּה סוֹבֵב אֶת הִתְפַּתְּחוּת הַחַיִּים;
both the joy and the sorrow	גַּם אֶת הַשִּׂמְחָה ,וְגַם אֶת הָעֶצֶב
of every moment.	שֶׁל כָּל רֶגַע וָרֶגַע.
In your memory,	בְּזוֹכְרְךָ,
all that has been continues to live,	כָּל מַה שֶּׁהָיָה מַמְשִׁי– לִחְיוֹת,
and nothing that was part of this world	וְאֵין דָּבָר שֶׁהָיָה בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה,
is ever truly lost.	שֶׁנֶּאֱבָד לְעוֹלָם.
[Name], daughter of [Name],	פְּלוֹנִית בַּת פְּלוֹנִי וּפְלוֹנִית,
has completed her journey in this world.	הִשְׁלִימָה אֶת מַסָּעָהּ בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה.
Her deeds, her love, and her memory	מַעֲשֶׂיהָ, אַהֲבָתָהּ וּזְכָרָהּ,
have found an eternal place,	מָצְאוּ מָקוֹם נִצְחִי,
never to be erased, within your eternity.	שֶׁאֵינוֹ יִמָּחֶה בְּנִצְחִיּוּתְךָ.
May the light of her life	יְהִי אוֹר חַיֶּיהָ מַמְשִׁי– לְהָאִיר בָּעוֹלָם,
continue to shine in the world,	דֶּרֶךְ– הַסִּימָנִים שֶׁהִשְׁאִירָה בְּלִבּוֹת אֲחֵרִים,
through the traces she left	וּבָאֲמֶת הַיְפִי שֶׁהֵבִיאָה לָעוֹלָם.

in the hearts of others,
and in the beauty and truth
she brought into existence.

כִּי בְּטוּבְךָ וּבְחָכְמָתְךָ הָאֵין־סוֹפִית,
כָּל חַיִּים הוֹפְכִים לָנֶצַח,
חֵלֶק מִן הַשָּׁלֵם הַגָּדוֹל.

For in your boundless goodness
and wisdom,
all life becomes forever
a part of the greater whole.

מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים,
יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁנִּמְצָא נֶחָמָה בִּידִיעָה זוֹ:
שֶׁאֵין חַיִּים שֶׁנֶּעֱלָמִים לָעַד,
אֶלָּא מַמְשִׁיכִים לִהְיוֹת צְרוּרִים
בִּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים,
בְּתוֹכְךָ,
תָּמִיד.

Source of Life,
may we find comfort in this insight:
that no life is ever truly lost,
but continues to be bound up
in the bond of life within you,
always.

A Prayer for Healing

This prayer integrates the biblical plea of "אֵל נָא רְפָא נָא לָהּ" (Num. 12:13) but shifts its focus from a request for God's sole intervention to an affirmation of divine-human partnership in the work of healing. It acknowledges that even when physical healing is unattainable, God's healing presence endures, guiding both the ill and their community toward deeper connection, meaning, and peace.

> אֵל נָא רְפָא נָא לָהּ
> God, Source of Healing,
>
> We are before you seeking healing and wholeness for [Name/those who are ill].
> You are present in suffering, not as a distant observer,
> but as One who feels with us,
> One whose love flows through every moment of pain and every spark of hope.
> We know that even when a cure is beyond reach, your healing presence remains,
> bringing comfort, connection, and meaning in the face of uncertainty.
> May [Name/they] know the depth of your companionship,
> the embrace of your love, and the gentle touch of your healing.

May [Name/they] sense that their life is held within your care,
woven into the unfolding wholeness of creation, never separate from you.
May we, as friends and community, mirror your compassion.
May our presence be a balm, our words a source of comfort,
our hands and hearts open in acts of kindness and love.

Meditation on the War in Ukraine

God, in your perfect knowledge,
you are aware, much more than we are,
about the war in Ukraine,
the birthplace of so many of our ancestors,
a place where the Jewish people has seen both light and darkness.

We do not ask you to singlehandedly change the course of history,
for you do not coerce, nor do you dictate human will.
Instead, you move within us, calling us toward justice,
persuading hearts, inspiring courage, and urging peace.

We mourn with you the lives shattered by this war –
civilians caught in the violence,
soldiers defending their people,
young conscripts sent into battle,
blinded by falsehoods and imperial dreams.
We grieve with the families who have lost loved ones,
with those who are wounded, displaced, or violated,
with all whose dignity has been stripped away.

Yet you, Eternal One, are present even in despair.
You dwell with the wounded and the grieving.
You are the quiet strength in those who resist oppression,
the resilience of those who refuse to be broken,
the kindness that endures even in the face of cruelty.

God, who works through human hands and human hearts,
may your voice be heard in those who seek peace.
May the leaders of nations open themselves to your wisdom,
the wisdom that calls not for domination, but for reconciliation.

Help us remember that the future is not fixed,
that we are partners in shaping what will be.
May we draw closer to the vision of your prophet:
"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
nor shall they learn war anymore."(Isaiah 2:4)
Until that day comes, may we stand together –
with you, with each other, with all who long for peace.

A Prayer for the European Union (Europe Shabbat, Day of Europe)

מְקוֹר הַשָּׁלוֹם
God, Source of Peace,
We turn to you with hope and commitment for the European Union,
a union forged from the ruins of war,
built on the dream that nations might rise above division,
that people might join hands instead of lifting swords,
that diversity might become a source of strength, not conflict.

Eternal One, you call us to shape the world with wisdom and justice.
You are found in the quiet courage of dialogue,
in the persistence of those who build bridges instead of barriers,
in the hands that extend in welcome rather than in fear.
We remember the anthem that unites this Union,
the words that echo the prophetic vision of our tradition:
"All people shall be as brothers
Under your protective wing."
(*Alle Menschen werden Brüder*
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt)

May these words be more than a song –
may they be a guiding truth.
May the nations of this Union work not for their own gain alone,
but for the well-being of all people.
May prosperity never come at the expense of justice.
May freedom never be wielded as a weapon of exclusion.
May the dignity of every human being be upheld,
from the shores of the Mediterranean to the forests of the North,

from the great cities to the quiet villages,
from those born within its borders to those seeking refuge in its embrace.

God, who dwells within the connections between people,
may you quiet voice (קוֹל דְּמָמָה דַקָּה)[450] be heard in the halls of leadership,
calling for policies rooted in compassion and responsibility.
May your presence be felt in every home and every street,
where neighbors choose kindness over suspicion,
where communities embrace the sacredness of difference.

May we learn that this Union is not just treaties and trade,
but a covenant of hope, a promise of solidarity.
Its future is not predetermined,
but shaped by the choices we make –
to seek justice, to protect the vulnerable,
to pursue peace, to recognize our shared humanity.

May this European Union fulfill its highest calling –
to be a force for Peace.
To be a sanctuary for human dignity.
To be a witness to the power of "Unity in Diversity".
And may we, its citizens, be partners with you, God,
in bringing this vision to life.

Taken together, these liturgical reflections articulate a theology of immanence, responsibility, and relationality – each prayer and meditation offering a different lens through which to reimagine the divine-human encounter. Across contexts as diverse as Hanukkah, mourning, healing, war, and European unity, a common thread emerges: God is not portrayed as a distant sovereign who intervenes arbitrarily in human affairs, but as a presence dynamically interwoven with the unfolding of life. Whether through the soft murmur of the *still small voice*, the resilience of those who build peace amid conflict, or the memory of lives that continue within the divine, these texts shift the liturgical

[450] 1Kgs 19:12

imagination from a vertical paradigm of supplication to a horizontal paradigm of partnership.

This shift emphasizes divine persuasion over coercion, human agency over passivity, and spiritual intimacy over transcendental detachment. Rather than seeking miracles from above, the prayers call on us to recognize the miracles within: the courage to love, the wisdom to care, and the strength to co-create sanctuaries of compassion. God's presence, in this vision, is revealed not through supernatural disruption but through the sacredness of ordinary acts, the holiness of memory, and the moral clarity of justice and peace.

These liturgical texts invite us to pray not only with our words, but with our lives – to become active participants in the world's healing, and to affirm that even our smallest gestures of kindness are part of the divine unfolding.

This chapter has explored how process theology can enrich reinterpretations of traditional metaphors and transform Jewish liturgical language. Through reflections on Psalm 19, the reimagining of *melekh*, and the various prayers for healing, peace, and remembrance my intention has been to affirm that theology is not only what we believe, but also how we pray, how we speak to and with God, and how we live in relationship with one another and the world.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the concept of divine revelation through the lens of process theology, engaging with key figures in Jewish and philosophical thought, including Maimonides, Spinoza, Mordecai Kaplan, and Charles Hartshorne. Throughout this study, we have examined how theological perspectives on revelation have evolved from premodern to modern frameworks, emphasizing the shift from static, infallible notions of divine communication to more dynamic, participatory understandings.

At the heart of this inquiry lies the recognition that revelation is not merely an event in history but an ongoing interaction between humanity and the divine. Traditional models often assume a fixed, propositional form, wherein divine truth is delivered in an absolute, immutable manner. However, process theology challenges this view by presenting revelation as an ever-evolving, relational process. This perspective aligns with the broader paradigm shift in contemporary theology that moves away from rigid dogmatism toward a more fluid and experiential understanding of divine-human engagement.

A central theme in this study has been the role of intuition in moral and religious value perception. Revelation, understood through a process-theological framework, is not solely an external transmission of knowledge but also an internal, intuitive recognition of divine presence and ethical truth. Human moral consciousness, our sense of justice, compassion, and obligation, function as a medium through which divine persuasion operates. Rather than being imposed upon individuals from an external source, religious and ethical awareness emerges from a deep, intuitive responsiveness to

the world. This suggests that revelation is not separate from human cognition but is intertwined with the faculties of insight, imagination, and moral discernment.

Given this reframing, one must ask: If revelation is an open-ended, evolving process, does the term "revelation" itself remain useful? Traditional Jewish and theological discourse often relies on the term, yet it carries connotations of static, infallible truth, knowledge that waits to be disclosed rather than co-created through human experience. This contradicts the fluid, constructed nature of process theology. Rather than investing intellectual energy in redefining revelation, I propose a shift toward God-awareness, a more flexible, experience-based framework that acknowledges divine lure without implying authoritative finality. Revelation, understood as divine lure, can be treated as an ontological fact; however, from an epistemological perspective, it is more pragmatic to maintain a certain level of agnosticism regarding humanity's ability to adequately receive, internalize, and transmit divine lure. The limitations of human cognition necessitate a cautious approach, acknowledging that any theological claim remains contingent upon interpretation, historical context, and communal engagement.

In this regard, process thought offers a hermeneutical perspective that aligns with systematic theology rather than functioning as a separate hermeneutical method. The goal of engaging with sacred texts, from this perspective, is not necessarily to extract absolute truths but to explore meaning, both as a theological exercise and as a cultural practice that sustains communal ties. Interpretation serves not only an intellectual purpose but also a relational one, allowing individuals and communities to remain connected to their religious heritage while dynamically engaging with contemporary

concerns. This view reinforces the idea that theology is an ongoing process of meaning-making rather than a retrieval of preexisting certainties.

This reorientation has practical implications for interconvictional dialogue. Moving beyond sectarian claims of exclusive divine knowledge, a shift toward God-awareness fosters a shared pursuit of wisdom, justice, and truth. It creates a space where diverse religious and philosophical traditions can engage in meaningful conversations about the nature of the sacred, ethics, and human flourishing without being constrained by doctrinal exclusivity. If revelation is no longer conceived as a rigid transmission of absolute knowledge but rather as an ongoing process of divine-human interaction, then theology must also reflect this openness, recognizing that truth emerges from dialogue, interpretation, and collective moral striving.

In conclusion, this study affirms that revelation, rather than being a static transmission of fixed truths, is an evolving encounter that invites reinterpretation, ethical growth, and theological creativity. By integrating insights from Jewish tradition, philosophy, and process thought, we can move toward a richer, more dynamic understanding of divine engagement, one that honors the past while remaining open to future possibilities. The shift from revelation to God-awareness not only aligns with the fluidity of process theology but also fosters a more inclusive, relational approach to religious thought, one that is rooted in experience, moral intuition, and the shared human quest for meaning.

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