"God in Our Minds and in All Things: Tracing Baruch Spinoza and Mordecai Kaplan's Influence on Arthur Green's Theology"

and

"The Hidden Partner: Notions of Covenant in Post-Holocaust Theology"

Jeffrey A. Dreifus

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School of Rabbinic Studies
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Advisor: Rabbi Joseph A. Skloot, PhD

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Contents

"God in Our Minds and in All Things:
Tracing Spinoza and Kaplan's Influence on Arthur Green's Theology"

Rabbi Arthur (Art) Green, PhD, one of the world's leading scholars of Jewish mysticism, has made a career straddling the often-incongruous positions of academic and mystical seeker. At 20 years old, he became aware of his own mystical inclinations while reading Hillel Zeitlin's *In the Garden of Hasidism and Kabbalah*. Green recounts that, "when he spoke of a world in which only God exists, where everything else is but a 'garment' covering the divine light, of raising the sparks of light and serving God everywhere and always, I knew instantly that he was speaking the truth. Not only the truth, in fact, but my truth."[1] Following that realization, over the course of his career, Green has argued that the Jewish mystical sources convey a truth about the unity of God and the world that is not readily apparent from sensory perception or scientific inquiry. Yet, as a scholar trained in a university setting, he has been unwilling to embrace Jewish mysticism alone "as a grand system of truth, one that encompasses all reality and could answer all our questions."[2] To Green, such a system "belongs to the past" because it "gave way to the competing world-view of experimental science nearly three hundred years ago."[3] Green has recognized that "science and its discoveries brought forth the modern world and all its great advances, including many in the social and political realms, as well as within the natural sciences." Unwilling to forgo either the benefits that scientific inquiry has yielded or the fundamental theological truths he sensed in Jewish mystical teachings, Green has sought to synthesize a theology that could accommodate both.

[1] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 12
[2] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 31
[3] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 31

Using a Hasidic framework, Green's theology Judaizes Baruch Spinoza's secular pantheism and tempers it by partially adopting Mordecai Kaplan's notion of a psychological God. He espouses a God that exists in the world yet also transcends it and he frames his theology with traditional Jewish sources. [4] He also rejects some of Spinoza's claims, including his determinism. Kaplan too was a Spinozist who did much to popularize Spinoza among Jews. He envisioned God not as an independent being separate from the universe. However, he rejected Spinoza's broad definition of God as the source and embodiment of all that exists in the universe, instead opting for a more limited God who is simply "the Power that makes for salvation"[5] and the source of man's "inner freedom" that "he needs to fulfill his own nature as a human being."[6] Kaplan's theology is essentially functionalist, meaning that for him, God exists only insofar as the idea of God's existence creates utility for mankind. Green accepts Kaplan's notion that human beings conceive of God as a construct of the human mind, using the psychological term "projection." However, Green asserts that this functionalism does not encompass the entirety of God. God exists both inside the human mind and outside it.

Green expresses his theology in the language and texts of Kabbalah and Hasidism and views his theology as a contemporary articulation of those traditions. The Kabbalistic and Hasidic espousal of a non-dualistic God that can be sensed and influenced by human beings provides a textual basis for Green to synthesize Spinoza's pantheism and Kaplan's functionalist

[4] There is a scholarly debate as to whether Spinoza articulated pantheism, meaning that the entirety of God exists in the world, or pan*en*theism, meaning that God is present in everything in the world, but also transcends the world and exists beyond it. Green considers Spinoza a pantheist and himself a panentheist, explicitly drawing a distinction between himself and Spinoza. He writes, "My theological position is that of a mystical panentheist, one who believes that God is present throughout all of existence, that Being or Y-H-W-H underlies and unifies all that is. At the same time (and this is panentheism as distinct from pantheism), this whole is mysteriously and infinitely greater than the sum of its parts, and cannot be fully known or reduced to its constituent beings….This puts me in the camp…of the Ba'al Shem Tov's pantheism, as distinguished from Spinoza's." (Green, *Radical Judaism*, p. 18 and endnote 4, p. 168)

[5] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism, p. 104*

[6] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism, p. 78*

psychology. This paper will explore and evaluate this synthesis, focusing on questions relating to Green's concepts of dualism, revelation, supernaturalism, determinism, and functionalism.

Spinoza: A Theology of Pantheism

Baruch Spinoza, the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher, articulated a theology that was radically different from conceptions of God found in the Torah and in early to medieval rabbinic literature. Rather than conceiving of God as a separate entity from the rest of creation, a being that transcends space and time and that rewards and punishes human beings based on their actions in the world, Spinoza put forth a theology of pantheism, the idea that God is present in everything that exists. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza attempted to prove his theology systematically using a series of logical propositions and proofs.

Non-dualism - Everything is God

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza wrote that "All things, I insist, are in God, and everything that happens, happens solely by the laws of God's infinite nature and follows from the necessity of his essence."[7] Spinoza contended that God is not separate or distinct from the universe God created (which would mean there is a duality between God and the universe), but that everything in the universe is part of God. If everything that exists is, as Spinoza phrased it, "in God," then his vision of the universe can be called non-dualistic, since there is no dualism between God and God's creation. In this worldview, everything is one. Everything that comprises that oneness is God, or in Spinoza's words, "There exists nothing in the universe but a unique substance."[8] For Spinoza, that one substance is God. He posited, "No substance can be or be conceived besides God."[9]

[7] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1P16, p. 18
[8] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IP11p, p. 11
[9] Spinoza, *Ethics, IP14, p. 14*

This marked a significant departure from the traditional Jewish and Christian views of God, as the Spinoza scholar Steven Nadler notes, writing, "The God of Judaism and Christianity is a transcendent being, ontologically distinct from the world it creates; Spinoza's God…is not transcendent but immanent. God, for Spinoza, is not a supernatural being that stands outside of the world; God is Nature."[10] If God is immanent, meaning God exists within the world as human beings experience it, that raises the question of how God is revealed, meaning how people can come to experience and understand God. According to Spinoza, God is revealed through nature, through the world and the processes and laws that govern it. More simply, God is revealed through nature, and at the same time, God is nature itself.

Revelation: God as Nature

Because God exists in everything in the world, according to Spinoza, God is manifest through the world as it is, or in other words, through nature. Indeed, Nadler cites a 1662 letter from Spinoza to the German theologian Henry Oldenburg in which he wrote, "I do not separate God from nature as everyone known to me has done."[11] In the *Ethics*, Spinoza directly equated God with nature when he uses the phrase, "the infinite power of God *or* nature" (*Deus sive natura*).[12] Nadler clarifies that the translation could literally be interpreted as '"God, that is, Nature', or 'God, or – which is the same thing – Nature.'"[13] Both of these translations reveal that Spinoza saw God and "nature" as one and the same.

Spinoza scholar Matthew Kisner explains that, according to Spinoza, "God is both identical to the natural world and the cause of the natural world. Consequently, God can be

[10] Nadler, p. 113
[11] Nadler, p. 81
[12] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVP4, p. 163, emphasis original
[13] Nadler, p. 81

conceived of in two ways: firstly, as the active principle in nature that ultimately causes all things, and second, as the effects or products of that activity."[14]

Kisner's explanation draws out an important implication of Spinoza's pantheist viewpoint. Not only is God the cause of nature, as had been the traditional theist explanation of the world's creation, God is also, as a being who is entirely present and revealed in nature, the effect and product of creation, which was itself brought about because of the nature of God. This is inherent to a systematic pantheism. When Spinoza argued, "from the necessity of the divine nature infinite things must follow in infinite ways," he means that not only did God create the laws of nature which human beings can observe (e.g. the laws of physics), but that God's essence is reflected in those laws."[15] Nature, according to Spinoza, is a reflection of God.

Spinoza made this point explicitly in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, contending, "the edicts and commands of God, and hence, of providence, are nothing other than the order of nature. That is, when the Bible says that this or that was done by God or by the will of God, it simply means that it was done according to the laws and order of nature."[16]

Nadler summarizes Spinoza's pantheism in this way, "outside of Nature there is nothing, and everything that exists is a part of Nature and is brought into being by and within Nature with a deterministic necessity through Nature's laws. This substantial, unique, unified, active, infinitely powerful, necessary being just is what is meant by 'God.'"[17] In other words, the world as we experience it is in fact God. God is manifest and revealed in the natural world, and in the laws that govern it.

[14] Kisner, Introduction to Spinoza's *Ethics*, p. xxii
[15] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1P16, p. 18
[16] Spinoza, TTP, Chapter 6, 12(3), p. 89
[17] Nadler, p. 114

In the framework of traditional Jewish theism, God is omnipotent and separate from the natural world and therefore God can transcend its laws and intervene in the world through supernatural actions. For Spinoza, whose God is in fact nature itself, God by definition cannot be supernatural. Interestingly, while Spinoza's God differs from the classical Jewish God, Spinoza did not go as far as his twentieth-century disciple Kaplan (discussed in more detail below) who deprived God of any supernatural power. Like the traditional Jewish God, Spinoza's God is still a creator and law-giver, yet Spinoza's God puts forth radically different laws than the *mitzvot* (commandments) outlined in the Torah. Spinoza's God creates the world according to certain rules that arise from God's nature, and all subsequent human events follow the dictates of that system. Therefore, whereas God does not act in ways that contravene the laws of nature as the Bible portrays, human beings are still subject to the laws of nature that emanate from God. In this way, Spinoza's theology reflected both stark differences and subtle similarities with traditional Jewish theism.

Non-Supernaturalism

A key component of Spinoza's theology, one which came to influence both Kaplan and Green, was his rejection of supernaturalism. Because the laws of nature are immutable attributes of God, God cannot act in ways that contravene those laws. Spinoza argued that since "in nature nothing happens which does not follow from its laws,…the term 'miracles 'can be understood only with respect to human beliefs, and that it signifies nothing other than a phenomenon whose natural cause cannot be explained on the pattern of some other familiar thing or at least cannot be so explained by the narrator or reporter of the miracle."[18]

[18] Spinoza, *TTP*, Chapter 6, 5, p. 84

Nadler explains that "for Spinoza, there can be no greater manifestation of God's (Nature's) power than the law-like and necessary course of nature itself. God's providence is not revealed by ad hoc interventions or interruptions of nature's ways. Rather, it appears in the ordinary causal order of things."[19] Spinoza's idea that God does not act in miracles or intervene in the world through extra-natural means marked a stark contrast to earlier Jewish (and Christian) theology, beginning with the Bible and extending through Jewish thinkers in Spinoza's day.

Later theologians, including Kaplan and Green, whose modern understanding of the world led them to reject religious principles that conflict with empirical principles, embraced Spinoza's position. Like Spinoza, they insisted that any notion of God's action must accord with the laws of nature, which themselves can be observed and proven through scientific and mathematical techniques.

Determinism - Human Free Will?

Spinoza's understanding of causation in the universe led him to conclude that human beings do not have free will. As part of this argument, Spinoza wrote, "Nothing in nature is contingent but everything is determined to exist and to operate in a specific way by the necessity of the divine nature."[20] Accordingly, since all existence is determined by God's nature, human beings do not have the power to act in a way that is not due to God's nature. In other words, human beings do not have the ability to act according to their own will, and instead can act only according to their nature, which itself reflects and is a result of God's nature. Because of this, Spinoza concluded that "all things have been predetermined by God, not however by his freedom of will *or* at his absolute pleasure, but by God's absolute nature *or* infinite power."[21] And

[19] Nadler, p. 112
[20] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IP29, p. 28
[21] Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 35

accordingly, if all things are predetermined by God, then "no one chooses any way of life for himself, nor brings anything about, except via the particular summons of God."[22] The implication of this is that while human beings do not have free will, God does. Human action is simply a result of God's nature, which conceivably God can control. Nadler writes, "it will follow from Spinoza's conception of freedom, however, that ultimately only God is an absolutely free cause, because all other things – including human beings – are determined by causes outside themselves."[23]

Spinoza's understanding of free will radically contradicts the human experience: We appear to have control over every action that we undertake. I appear to be able to choose whether I want coffee or tea for breakfast, or whether or not I want to spend my money dining at restaurants or donating it charity. However, Spinoza contended that this sensation of free will is an illusion and that in fact we only make decisions based on our nature and the environment in which we are a part, both of which come about solely due to God's nature and the nature of the universe that God created.

This rejection of free will is one of the reasons Jews have found Spinoza so problematic. If human beings do not have free will, then they cannot be held responsible for their actions. If I murder or steal, it is not my fault, since I cannot be considered the ultimate cause of my actions. My actions are instead simply a necessary consequence of the world order that God created. Rabbinic Judaism, on the other hand, has insisted on personal responsibility and accountability. The Spinoza scholar Daniel Schwartz notes that for many post-Spinozan Jewish thinkers, "Free will…[is]…the crux of Judaism and the key issue dividing it from Spinozism."[24] For traditional

[22] Spinoza, *TTP*, 3:3, p. 45
[23] Nadler, *Spinoza's 'Ethics', p. 111*
[24] Schwartz, p. 168

Jews, Spinoza's determinism was a justification for misbehavior, morally reprehensible and just too far afield from the Jewish God who "gave free will to choose between good and evil."[25]

Equally radical, Spinoza rejected free will not only for people, but also for God. Even though "God alone is a free cause" and "God acts by the laws of his own nature uncompelled by anyone," God does not have free will in the sense that God can choose how to be or how to act.[26] The fact that "God does not operate from freedom of will"[27] is because, according to Spinoza, "neither intellect nor will belong to God's nature."[28] Even though God's actions cannot be determined by something external to God, neither can God choose to act in a certain way. This is because God too is constrained by God's own nature. He provided the following rationale:

> If things could have been of a different nature or determined to operate in another way so that the order of nature was different, then the nature of God also could be other than it now is, and accordingly (*by P11*) that too would have to exist, and consequently there could be two or more Gods. But (*by P14c1*) this is absurd. Therefore things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order.[29]

Since God's nature is eternal and unchanging, God could only ever have created the world in the way that God did, and the world as it does exist is a reflection of God's nature. God could not have chosen to be otherwise. Therefore, "all things have been predetermined by God, not however by his freedom of will or at his absolute pleasure by God's absolute nature."[30]

[25] Schwartz, p. 185, quoting Asa Heschel
[26] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IP17c2 and IP17, p. 19
[27] Spinoza, *Ethics*, P 32c1, p. 30
[28] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IP17s, p. 19
[29] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IP33, p. 31
[30] Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ia, p. 45

Kaplan - Reclaiming Spinoza for the Modern Jew

Mordecai Kaplan, in his biographer Mel Scult's words, the "founding father of the Reconstructionist movement,"[31] was clearly a disciple of Spinoza. Though he did not incorporate all of Spinoza's views into his own theology, he embraced much of Spinoza's theology. Indeed, Scult, writes that, "we can sum up much of Kaplan's philosophy by calling it a Spinozist approach to God and religion."[32] Kaplan himself said that Spinoza "achieved the highest conception of God,"[33] which Scult explains is a reference to Spinoza's concept of God "that centered on the naturalistic rather than on the supernatural super 'self 'of traditional religion."[34] This idea, that God is manifest through the natural processes that exist in the world, as opposed to through supernatural actions that transcend the world, is key to both Spinoza and Kaplan's theologies.

Anti-Supernaturalism

The aspect of Spinoza's theology that is seemingly most important to Kaplan is Spinoza's notion of a non-supernatural God. As discussed above, Spinoza, by definition, rejected a God who acts outside of nature's laws and the natural order of things. If, according to Spinoza, God is nature and the laws governing nature, then God cannot act contrary to Godself or those laws. That forestalls the possibility of miracles or other suspensions of the natural order.

Likewise, Kaplan argued that an accurate conception of God cannot conflict with observable principles of nature which can be proved through scientific inquiry. Therefore, for Kaplan, a supernatural God is impossible since such a God would negate the immutable laws of nature. In what is clearly a re-articulation of Spinoza, Kaplan wrote, "We cannot, for example,

[31] Scult, p. 7
[32] Scult, p. 22
[33] Kaplan's diaries, qtd. in Scult, p. 32
[34] Scult, p. 21

believe that God performs miracles, and at the same time believe in the uniformities of natural law demanded by scientific theory."[35]

Instead of belief in a supernatural God, Kaplan argued for a belief in "transnaturalism," which "beholds God in the fulfillment of human nature and not in the suspension of the natural order. Its function is not to help man overcome the hazards of nature, but to enable him to bring under control his inhumanity to his fellow-man."[36]

Like Spinoza, Kaplan rejected God's supernatural qualities, yet in arguing for transnaturalism, Kaplan presented a much narrower view of God. Kaplan didn't necessarily view God as present in all of creation. Instead, God was simply a force within human beings that drives us towards and enables certain kinds of moral behavior. Kaplan posited, "God is the Power in the cosmos that gives human life the direction that enables the human being to reflect the image of God,"[37] or more simply, God is the "Power that makes for salvation."[38] While somewhat circular, in that Kaplan wrote that God is what enables human beings to reflect God, what Kaplan posited was that God gives human beings the power to act morally and to strive to reflect the best of human nature. Kaplan indeed believed that the task of religion, and the belief in God associated with it, is to drive us to act morally. Kaplan expressed, "It is the task of humanist religion to make us aware of the transcendent powers which spell God and which, in their influence upon our lives, impel us to become fully human."[39]

Kaplan did not state definitively whether God is a psychological projection or instead an engrained element in the human mind, such the drive to keep living or libido. In fact, he

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[35] Kaplan, "The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion," *Understanding Jewish Theology*, ed. By Jacob Nesuner, p. 196
[36] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 10
[37] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism, p. 112*
[38] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 104
[39] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 102

articulated both ideas.[40] Yet, it does not appear that the distinction is germane. Both have the same functional conclusion, that the purpose of God for human beings is to drive us toward moral action.

Like for Spinoza, Kaplan's God is not a transcendent, external actor, nor is Kaplan's God a being possessing supernatural powers. Instead, Kaplan's view of God as the "Power that makes for salvation," as a force which acts upon the psychological makeup of each person, allowed Kaplan to maintain belief in something called "God," without conflicts with a scientific understanding of the world. In so doing, Kaplan's took Spinoza's immanentism and upped the ante, at least for human beings. Nothing can be more immanent than a God that exists in the human mind, or in Kaplan's own words, "the self-conscious will to salvation is the immanent aspect of that cosmic reality for which no term can be more appropriate than 'God.'"[41] It is important to note that unlike for Spinoza or for Green, for Kaplan God exists only in the human mind and not in other natural phenomena (e.g. dogs, rocks, or trees). For Spinoza and Green, but not for Kaplan, God inheres in everything.

<u>On Determinism: Kaplan Rejects Spinoza</u>

However, Kaplan's psychological view of God inherently conflicts with one of Spinoza's conclusions about God's power. Whereas Spinoza contended that everything in the world is predetermined by God's nature and therefore could necessarily never be otherwise, Kaplan's definition of God as the moral force in the human mind necessitated an anti-deterministic position. For Kaplan, God is precisely what gives human beings free will; whereas for Spinoza, God is what makes free will impossible.

[40] See Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism,* p. 101 for discussion of God as an inner drive and pp. 102 and 112 for notions of God as a projection of the human mind
[41] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 27

Kaplan wrote, “Whatever else human beings may have sought to express by the term ‘God, ’it has always had the connotation of man’s responsibility for what he does and his **freedom to choose** between right and wrong, good and evil” [emphasis added].[42] God, who operates within the human psyche as “the Power that makes for salvation” is a God which allows human beings to choose to act in a way that makes them both more Godly and more human. According to Kaplan, God does not force people to act in any particular way, yet God is what gives human beings the power and strength to act morally, if they choose to do so. He argued, “Man owes to God the freedom he needs in order to fulfill his own nature as a human being. As Redeemer, God redeems not only the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor, but also the inner man from a bondage which is more crushing than that which any outward tyranny can impose. That inner freedom is the soul of whatever freedom man aspires to.”[43]

For Kaplan, God is the “inner freedom” which gives human beings free will, a prospect impossible for Spinoza.[44] As a modern, Kaplan readily accepted Spinoza’s non-supernatural theology. However, rejecting free will was untenable for Kaplan, since that would have conflicted with what was for Kaplan the core purpose of religion, to “impel us to become fully human.” [45] Kaplan’s commitment to free will was foundational because without it, human beings could be not responsible for their actions.

[42] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 27
[43] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 78
[44] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p.78
[45] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 102

Functionalism

Kaplan posed the rhetorical question, "What in the present condition of man renders belief in God indispensable?"[46] By simply posing the question, Kaplan conveyed his belief that whether or not a God exists, belief in God serves a functional or utilitarian end for human beings. According to Kaplan the utility of belief in God is that it motivates:

> (1) the utilizing of material progress for peace and the enhancement of life instead of war and destruction; (2) greater concentration upon the human sciences and arts for the purpose of eliminating poverty, ignorance, and disease, and creating conditions favorable to human individuality and growth; (3) the limitation of the sovereignty of the nations and the translation of their economic interdependence into a workable program for free exchange of goods and services on a world scale; (4) the inculcation in the individual of a sense of responsibility for doing his personal share toward making the world the better and happier for his having lived in it.[47]

According to Kaplan, God gives human beings their sense of freedom and responsibility to act in a moral way: "The encounter between man and God is man's sense of freedom and responsibility."[48] According to Kaplan, the idea of God exists so that "man can utilize his freedom and responsibility intelligently, righteously, and creatively."[49] In this way, Kaplan provided a functional reason for faith: belief in God produces utility for human beings.

According to this reasoning, belief in God leads human beings to act morally, which in and of itself is a desirable outcome for humankind. But, Kaplan also argued that this functional conception of God is no less real than other drives within human nature. Like the "life-drive" and the "sex-drive," which "produce and sustain" humanity, so too is the God-drive "no less integral a part of the cosmic structure of reality…whereby each species perpetuates itself."[50]

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[46] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 101
[47] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 101
[48] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 27
[49] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 27
[50] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 101

Kaplan's functionalism gave him a reason to retain theism, weak as it is, in his modern formulation of religion—even if he did not believe in a supernatural God. This claim also has implications for his understanding of Jewish practice. He called for "reconstructing" Judaism into "a society for the advancement of religious realism in Jewish life" so that Judaism could once again "play an important role in the spiritual life of mankind." [51] In order for that to happen, "the entire system of ceremonial observances" should be adjusted "to the spiritual needs of our day" so that they no longer "hamper the Jew in pursuit of his practical affairs" and so that they cultivate Godliness.[52] Jewish ceremonial observance was important only insofar as it reminded us of our "practical affairs," namely our ethical obligation to other people.

Art Green - A Synthesis of Spinoza and Kaplan

Using texts from Judaism's mystical traditions, Kabbalah and Hasidism, Art Green articulates a Jewish theology that is consistent with elements of both Spinoza's panentheism and Kaplan's functionalism, and yet is grounded in indigenously Jewish sources and ideas. The Jewish mystical texts generally support a non-dualistic view of God, and he uses them to both bolster and limit a description of God who is at once non-dual and functional, aloof and yet accessed and influenced by human beings.

Green - Pantheism and Non-dualism

Perhaps the clearest link between Spinoza's theology and Green's is Green's non-dualism, meaning that that God is in all that there is, or that there is nothing other than God. In his book, *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow*, Green writes, "God is Being itself. All of Being. Everything contains God. There is not a place, not a moment, not a thing, certainly not a person

[51] Kaplan, "The Reconstruction of Judaism," pp. 196, 182
[52] Kaplan, "The Reconstruction of Judaism," p. 195

that is not filled to overflowing with the Divine Presence."[53] As one of many source texts for his thinking, Green cites the *Sefat Emet*, the late nineteenth-century Hasidic Rebbe Judah Leib Alter of Ger, who wrote,"everything that exists in the world, spiritual and physical, is God Himself."[54] The Sefat Emet conveyed this idea in a letter to his children and grandchildren on the meaning of the Shema prayer, which Jews traditionally proclaim thrice daily. Green excerpts this letter:

> The proclamation of oneness that we declare each day in saying "Hear O Israel," and so forth, needs to be understood as it truly is. That which is entirely clear to me…based on the holy writings of great kabbalists, I am obligated to reveal to you…the meaning of "Y-H-W-H is One" is not that He is the only God, negating other gods (though this too is true!), but the meaning is deeper than that: there is no being other than Him. [This is true] even though it seems otherwise to most people…everything that exists in the world, spiritual and physical, is God Himself…Because of this, every person can attach himself [to God] wherever he is, through the holiness that exists within every single thing, even corporeal things…This is the foundation of all the mystical formulations in the world.[55]

Green cites this Hasidic text as an expression of his own "realization that God is everywhere, indeed that nothing but God exists."[56] This certainly parallels Spinoza's own articulation of a God whose presence comprises all things, as when he wrote, "There exists nothing in the universe but a unique substance"[57] and that "no substance can be or be conceived besides God."[58]

Though Green's non-dualism certainly resembles Spinoza's, Green chooses to express it through the language of Jewish mysticism rather than Spinoza's language of mathematical proofs. Spinoza's Latin works were meant to be read by Christian humanists and even so ran afoul with his co-religionists, leading to his excommunication. Yet, by framing his non-dualism in Jewish sources, Green articulates a theology that channels Spinoza yet is unambiguously

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[53] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 18
[54] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 40
[55] Green, Ehyeh, p. 39, quoting *Otsar Ma'amarim u-Mikhtavim* (Jerusalem: Makhon Ga haley Esh, 1986), p. 75f.
[56] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 39
[57] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IP11p, p. 11
[58] Spinoza, *Ethics, IP14, p. 14*

Jewish. In the early twentieth century, Kaplan also tried to naturalize Spinoza within Jewish theology—and even went so far as to seek to, retroactively, lift the *herem* (excommunication) the *Ma'amad* of Amsterdam imposed upon him. Nearly a century later, Green goes further by making Spinoza and Kaplan's radicalism seem indigenous to Judaism through his use of Hasidic sources.

Sensation vs. Reason

Green's mysticism provides a language and framework for understanding non-dualism that goes beyond Spinoza's. Spinoza's non-dualism was premised on logic and reason. Instead, in mystical texts, Green finds an explanation not for what he logically deduces to be true, but for what he senses to be true. He writes that Kabbalah is "addressed to a level of the mind beyond the rational."[59] Green seeks truth through a mixture of reasoning and sensing or feeling. He writes, "the 'journey' to God is thus nothing other than a return to our deepest self. The task is to seek out that innermost reality, to find it, and to reshape the rest of our lives around that return."[60]

Even though, as Green notes, human beings perceive the world as separate from God (a dualistic reality), Green senses that he is connected in oneness to all other things. Even though Spinoza also articulated a worldview in which everything emanates from God and is part of God, for Green, his mathematical proofs were insufficiently compelling. Kabbalistic language and imagery, for Green, are more easily understood and democratizing. One need not understand Spinoza's complicated logic, one need only experience the Oneness, which, apparently, any person can do. Green writes, "Creation is not a distant one-time event, nor is it a formal theological doctrine to which one must give adherence. Creation may be experienced each day,

[59] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 27
[60] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 116

indeed in every moment."[61] It takes a mystic such as Green using the mystical insights of Kabbalah to take Spinoza's logical ideas and inspire his readers to sense they too are a part of the Oneness.

God Created the World Out of God's Self

Implicit in the argument that everything is God is the idea that God created the world out of God's self, and not out of some external substance. Spinoza articulated this when he contended, "No substance can be produced or created by something else. Furthermore…we showed that no substance can be or be conceived besides God; and we concluded from this that extended substance is one of the infinite attributes of God."[62]

Green channels Spinoza's idea, but explains it through a kabbalistic framework. He writes:

> The third pillar of the kabbalists' view of Creation is their insistence that God creates out of God's own self. The flow of energy by which Creation happens comes directly from God. When the mystics encountered the old theological formula claiming that God creates the world yesh me-ayin, "out of nothing," they agreed, saying that God is the No-thing out of which Creation comes! Here the idea of Creation has essentially been reread as one of emanation. God is the inner source or fountain out of which all existence flows. God is eternal and hence preceded Creation and caused it to happen. But the more important part of the teaching is that God is always present, within and behind the world as we know it, sending forth the renewing surge of energy from within the deepest recesses of God's own self.[63]

Spinoza's pantheism explained a world in which every person is made from God; but this rather aseptic God cannot feel human connection and the Godliness within each human being is more scientific fact than spiritual insight. By using Kabbalah instead of Spinoza as his frame, Green conveys to his readers that the notion that they were made from God is not simply an ontological explanation of the universe but a path to spiritual connection. This is clear when he

[61] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 44
[62] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IP15s, p. 15
[63] Green, *Ehyeh*, p 45

argues, "Each human being has a divine soul, a part of God, a spark of light, or (if you are not ready for such metaphysical language) a deep longing for Oneness buried within us."[64]

God as an Ideal - Aristotelian First Cause vs. Platonic Form

Spinoza's God resembles Aristotle's First Cause, which preceded creation. For Spinoza, "God is the efficient cause of all things that can fall under an infinite intellect…God is cause through himself and not by accident…God is absolutely the first cause."[65] Like Maimonides, who also followed Aristotle, for Spinoza God was an "unmoved mover," not affected by the actions of the creatures God created.[66] For Spinoza, the world does not deviate from the ideal (God), since God and the world are One.

Green also argues that God is the First Cause, writing "God is eternal and hence preceded Creation and caused it to happen."[67] At the same time, Green articulates a neo-Platonic theology in which God created the world out of an ideal form (namely that of intelligence), yet the world itself varies from the ideal. He cites a rabbinic rendering of this idea in which Torah is the blueprint that God consults when creating the world.[68] Green writes, "Torah is not just the message of Sinai, but the eternal Word of God. It was there from the great beginning: Torah existed before the world was created. In fact, says the opening midrash (rabbinic commentary) on the Book of Genesis: God looked into Torah and created the world."[69]

According to Green's explanation of this kabbalistic teaching, *hokhmah* is that blueprint, what existed before the world, and is akin to Spinoza's idea of God's perfect knowledge. He explains:

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[64] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 13
[65] Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1P16c1-3, p. 18
[66] Pines, Introduction to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*
[67] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 45
[68] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "NeoPlatonism"
[69] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 47

> *Hokhmah* is the beginning of God's way, the primal point of all existence….*Hokhmah* exists deep within the mind of Being, the first concretization of the will that makes for existence…The notion of primordial Torah could then mean that the intent to bring about existence, including all its many forms and even a humanity that would quest for understanding, was all there from the beginning.[70]

He continues, "*Hokhmah* is also the primordial teaching, the inner mind of God, the Torah that exists prior to the birth of words and letters. As Being exists first in this ultimately concentrated form, so too does truth or wisdom."[71] This echoes both Spinoza and Plato's notions that truth, and by extension God, predates Creation. However, Green grounds this idea in kabbalistic teaching, expressing not only this Platonic idea, but also legitimating the task of the spiritual seeker: to 'quest for understanding.' This quest is both essential in the long chain of Jewish tradition and is also a reflection of God's eternal plan. <u>God as Nature / Evolution as God's Revelation</u>

As discussed above, Spinoza held that God is revealed through the nature of the universe, or in Nadler's words, "God is the invisible but active dimension of Nature, its essences and laws."[72] Green embraces this idea but reframes it subtly by characterizing evolution instead of nature as the vehicle of God's revelation. In Green's view, the nature of God can be seen through the way in which the world has evolved over time. He writes:

> We would understand the entire course of evolution, from the simplest life forms millions of years ago, to the great complexity of the human brain (still now only barely understood), and proceeding onward into the unknown future, to be a meaningful process. There is a One that is ever revealing itself to us within and behind the great diversity of life. That One is Being itself, the constant in the endlessly changing evolutionary parade. Viewed from our end of the process, the search that leads to discovery of that One is our human quest for meaning. But turned around, seen from the perspective of the constantly evolving life energy, evolution can be seen as an ongoing process of revelation or self-manifestation.[73]

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[70] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 48-49
[71] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 63
[72] Nadler, p. 82
[73] Green, *Radical Judaism*, p. 20

Green takes Spinoza's idea that God is manifest in the laws of nature one step further, adding in the more contemporary principle of evolution by natural selection, the process by which species change over time due to adaptive characteristics that arise over generations of reproduction from a combination of genetic variations and exogenous environmental factors. This concept, first articulated by Charles Darwin in the nineteenth century, would have been unknown to Spinoza. Yet, the idea that God is manifest through evolution is really quite Spinozan, since it combines Spinoza's view that God is manifest through nature's laws with Spinoza's idea that God's nature is unchanging. Even though the world seemingly changes all the time, the one constant in that change, in fact the one constant propelling that change, is evolution. For Green, channeling Spinoza, that process of evolution is God. For example, Darwin observed finches that were once part of the same species, but that, in response to different environmental factors that selected for specialized physical attributes, had over many generations diverged into separate species, enabling each to thrive in its own specialized environment. In Spinozan terms, God created the environmental factors that led to the necessity of adaptation and the genetic mechanisms for adaptation, enabling the finches to change over time. Yet, according to Green, God did not only create those possibilities, but God comprised them. Counterintuitively, the changes brought about by evolution by natural selection are in fact a manifestation of God's immutable and unchanging nature that is brought into being and is reflected over the course of time. The constancy of change in the biological universe is emblematic of the constancy of God.

Furthermore, by using this conception of "God as evolution," Green subtly and deftly shows why the theology he proposes does not conflict with science. On the contrary, it is harmonious with science, and even uses scientific principles to describe God. By insisting that

his theology be compatible with science, Green aligns himself with Kaplan and makes his theology palatable for the modern Jew who is unwilling to give up faith in science and yet also unwilling to affirm that science answers all of life's mysteries.

Nature: Revealing God or a Mask for God?

Green adopts the Jewish mystical idea that the physical, dualistic world that human beings perceive is but a mask of many layers, cloaking the true reality of God. At first glance, this seems to conflict with Spinoza, who held that God's essence is revealed precisely through the physical reality of the universe. Green writes:

> The world is not an entity separate from God but a cloak that both hides and reveals God's presence. Through that cloak, in all its infinite varieties, we can gain a glimpse of the One within. Knowing and loving the universe, whether through understanding the minute organisms studied by the microbiologist or the vast spaces traversed in the mind of the astronomer, is part of our way to knowing and loving God… All that deepens and enriches our appreciation of God's world is Torah, the roadmap for our journey back to God. It is through the many masks of God that we will come to catch a glimpse of the single "face" that lies behind them all.[74]

Upon further consideration, this position is not so different from Spinoza's. Like Spinoza, Green posits that entities in the physical world, such as minute organisms, do reveal aspects of God. If he essentially agrees with Spinoza, why does he adopt the mystical notion of a cloaked reality? What nuance does the cloak metaphor contribute? Perhaps it helps retain a sense of mystery in his approach to the world. Even though everything in nature may be ultimately explainable, human beings are not yet advanced enough to explain it all. The notion of cloaks helps to express mystery until such time as scientists account for all of the world's secrets. Hence, there is a need for a theology that adequately takes account of mystery while also accepting science.

[74] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 49-50

On the other hand, Green's adoption of the cloak metaphor may also nod towards humility. Even if human beings can know God through nature, as both Green and Spinoza posit, surely human beings cannot know or understand the *entirety of God* in any one moment. Therefore, the notion that each aspect of nature can provide a "glimpse of the single 'face 'that lies behind them all" and yet that the '"face" 'is still occluded is simply a way of expressing the unknowability of God's supreme vastness.

No matter what specifically Green's rationale is for adopting this metaphor, it is clear that Green is not content with simply catching a glimpse of what is beneath the cloak. He insists that the recognition of God in all things should lead us to a certain type of action, and here Kaplan's influence on Green shines through. Green writes:

> I seek in a contemporary Kabbalah a Judaism unafraid to proclaim the holiness of the natural world, one that sees Creation, including both world and human self, as reflecting divinity. I seek a Judaism that looks to nature itself, with its wonder, mystery, and beauty, as a source of religious inspiration. I long for a Judaism that teaches us how to live in harmony with the natural world, one whose most basic teachings will demand of us that we position ourselves at the cutting edge of sensitivity toward relieving the suffering and pain of all God's creatures. God's name is inscribed in all that is.[75]

Kaplan argued that our understanding of God should lead us to moral action. Green too, wants to foster a Judaism in which the recognition that we are all one leads us to treat all other creatures and the natural world as if God exists in each of them. That is why, as cited above, we must not only *know* the Oneness of the universe, but we must also love it. Knowledge of the Oneness leads to love, and love leads to a desire to act ethically and treat others with love. For Spinoza, on the other hand, love was irrelevant, because people had no free will, and therefore had no ability to choose to act on their emotions.

<u>Determinism and Theurgy</u>

[75] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 32

While Kaplan rejected Spinoza's determinism because of his commitment to free will, Green rejects it because of his belief in "theurgy," "the belief that human words and deeds have the power to affect the cosmos and to bring divine blessing into the world."[76] The Kabbalah scholar Daniel Matt cites an early modern Jewish mystical text that illustrates such a theurgical process:

> The world could be created only by virtue of the action of the righteous, the arousal of those below. So God contemplated the good deeds of the righteous—yet to be created—and this act of thinking was enough to actualize the thought. God drew forth light from within himself and delighted himself with holy people, like those who would eventually be. This joy engendered undulation, greater delight. In the bliss of contemplating the righteous, of imagining holy people—in this fluctuation, the power to create was born.[77]

According to this viewpoint, human action impacts and influences God and in turn, how God acts towards human beings.

While the very idea of theurgy seems to conflict with Spinoza's view of God since it asserts that God can be influenced by human beings, that is not necessarily the case. Spinoza argued that God is the only free cause, since nothing other than God can affect God's freedom. However, Spinoza also contended that human beings are part of God. Thus, even if human beings can affect God and cause God to act, that would not constitute something outside of God affecting God. It would constitute a part of God affecting God!

Green qualifies classical Kabbalistic theurgy, and doing so bring him into conflict with Spinoza's theology. Green states that in fact, human action cannot not force God to act. It is not as if human beings simply recite a particular incantation or act in a particular way to compel, as if by magic or force, God to respond with a particular action, as some kabbalists believed. Green writes, "This can never be an automatic power, as it is in magic. It is God's love, the divine

[76] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 102
[77] Matt, p. 98, quoting Naftali Bacharach (seventeenth century), *Emeq ha-Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1648), 1:2, 1d–2d.

desire to bless, that causes blessing to flow...We are not its masters, but its servants. Our knowledge and insight are there to serve God's end, not our own."[78]

Green argues that instead of human power forcing God to respond, it is God's own love and God's own desire to bless, that causes blessings to flow. This implies that God can choose whether or not to respond out of love. Spinoza rejected the divine ability to choose: "Neither intellect nor will belong to God's nature," reflecting the Aristotelian/Maimonidean idea that God is an Unmoved Mover. [79] Since God changing God's mind implies some kind of flaw or imperfection in God, which Spinoza, following Aristotle, assumed was impossible, God cannot choose. Green, however, rejects this position, insisting that theurgy "can never be an automatic power." If God's response to human action is possible yet not automatic, then it must be due to choice. If God can choose to act in a certain way, then God does indeed have free will, and we must conclude that Green's assertion to the contrary applies only to the *Eyn Sof*, and not to the entirety of God's essence. In such a case, God can and does respond to human action, and thus Green differs from Spinzoa.

Unlike Spinoza's system of the universe which can explain everything in mathematical terms, for Green, theurgy cannot be demonstrated. It is not rationally comprehensible or measurable. Instead, the soul senses, hopes, and yearns for it, but it can never be proven. As a mystic, Green cannot give up on theurgy, even if it can never be explained by science or mathematics.

Supernaturalism

Green's notion of theurgy also has implications for his position on the issue of supernaturalism. On this issue, Green once again threads the needle between Spinoza and

[78] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 102
[79] Spinoza, *Ethics*, IP17s, p. 19

Kaplan. Green rejects any kind of supernaturalism, like Kaplan, that is not compatible with a scientific understanding of the world. And he rejects the ability of religion to alone explain every phenomenon, writing, "Kabbalah as a grand system of truth, one that encompasses all reality and could answer all our questions, belongs to the past. In that role it gave way to the competing world-view of experimental science nearly three hundred years ago."[80]

However, Green's position that theurgy is possible seems to contradict his endorsement of science. If human action can influence God, thereby moving and/or motivating God to act, then inherently any such actions that God takes in response to human beings would be outside of the natural order. A God who chooses to intervene to save a dying person upon hearing a human prayer must surely operate outside of scientifically provable natural laws.

This contradiction does not pose a problem for Green's theology, however, since for him, "the mystical mind is in no way opposed to science, but rather seeks to encompass it."[81] Even though Green believes that theology must be compatible with science, he does not believe that modern science is the best tool for answering every question. He writes, "We question whether science is the right way to pursue some of our great and eternal questions about life's purpose. In this context, we seek to reexamine the more profound tools of human self-understanding that were cast aside with the advent of modernity. Kabbalah is one of these, and in this spirit we open ourselves to learning from it."[82] Here, he is essentially saying that religion, and for him Kabbalah specifically, may be better able to explain certain eternal questions than science.

Supernaturalism is Naturalism

[80] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 32
[81] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 50
[82] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 33

As a modern person in the mold of Kaplan, Green refuses to put forth a God-concept that conflicts with science. Yet, as a mystic who cannot shake the awe he feels when contemplating the universe, he never gives up on the miraculous. He writes, "There is indeed something 'supernatural' about existence, something entirely out of the ordinary, beyond any easy expectation. But I understand the 'supernatural' to reside wholly within the 'natural.'"[83] It is a position that echoes Spinoza, who argued that what human beings perceive to be miracles must have some natural explanation. And yet he also places himself in a long chain of Jewish mystical thought, writing, "The presence of the miraculous within the natural has a long history in Jewish theological conversation. Some key prior participants in this conversation are Nahmanides, the MaHaRaL of Prague, and Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev." [84] His position also clearly links him to Kaplan, who rejected supernaturalism altogether.

Green and Kaplan's Functionalism: A Psychological God

Just as Kaplan articulated that God was a force inside of each of us, a force driving us toward moral action, Green too embraces a theology in which God exists inside of each person. However, Green's position on this subject is nuanced, and involves both an embrace and a rejection of the limited, psychological God in Kaplan's theology.

In Kaplan's words, God is the "Power that makes for salvation."[85] According to Kaplan, our task in seeking God is to "identify the particular human experiences which enable us to feel the impact of that process in the environment and ourselves which impels us to grow and

[83] Green, *Radical Judaism*, p. 22
[84] Green, *Radical Judaism*, p. 168
[85] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 104

improve physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually"[86]. To Kaplan, God is the inward force that drives us to grow towards those goals.

Green also posits, like Kaplan, that human beings *encounter* God by looking inward. He writes, "We make the journey inward toward Oneness, to a deeper level of being, and return from it through the same ten stages, to the external, or outer reality, of daily living. So too does God emerge out of the inner, hidden depths to manifest in the unique surface form of each and every creature."[87] Yet unlike Kaplan, Green's God exists far beyond the confines of the human mind. He directly criticizes Kaplan's limited conception of God when he writes:

> "A God who has no place in the process of ''how we got here ''is a God who begins in the human mind, a mere idea of God, a post-Kantian construct created to guarantee morality, to assure us of the potential for human goodness, or for some other noble purpose. But that is not God. The One of which I speak here indeed goes back to origins and stands prior to them, though perhaps not in a clearly temporal sense. A God who underlies all being, who is and dwells within (rather than ''who controls ''or ''oversees'') the evolutionary process is the One about which—or about ''Whom''—we tell the great sacred tale, the story of existence."[88]

So while Green insists that the pathway to God remains an inward one, he rejects Kaplan's notion that God is *only* something inside of our heads, or in other words, only a human construct that functions to guide us towards morality. Green's God is larger in scope, but still a projection of the human mind.

Kaplan also wrote, "God is the Power in the cosmos that gives human life the direction that enables the human being to reflect the image of God," and at the same time that God "impel[s] us to become fully human."[89] If God is what gives human beings the power to be both more Godly and more human, as Kaplan contended, then the image of God that human beings

[86] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 110
[87] Green, *Ehyeh, p. 59*
[88] Green, *Radical Judaism*, p. 17
[89] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, pp. 112, 102

can reflect is really the most *human* human being. Human beings project onto God what we believe to be the moral ideal.

Green concedes, in partial agreement with Kaplan, that our conception of God is necessarily a projection of our own mind. In other words, he says that how we conceive of God is impacted by the way our own minds and consciousness are structured. Green writes, "To us post-moderns, it may seem clear that what we are describing here is projection: "God" is structured this way because this image of God is the creation of human beings, and, in fact, the creation of Jews, and this is the way we have conceived our God."[90] To Green, God is necessarily a function of the neurological structure of our own minds. But God is more than just that. Green continues:

> "God demands of us that we create the projection of God that we can worship! The God who is the source of that demand must therefore be a God beyond all images. The Endless One or source of all, present within us as within all that is, manifests itself to us in a way that calls upon us to create religions, worshipful forms in which we can acknowledge that One…In short, we may accept from modernity the psychological and historical insights that view religion as projection."[91]

For Green, God is more than a projection of the human psyche. God exists beyond that projection, and explains that the human mind, the source of that projection, is itself a reflection of the architecture of God's being. This is an expression of Green's Platonism. The human projection of God is the form, but the reality of God is the ideal. Green writes:

> "The mirror of projection goes both ways. We may project a God-image that reflects us, but God may also project a human image that reflects God. We may have projected a God who reflects our own cultural and historical setting, but we did so because we felt within us the stirring of a deeper reality in which we ourselves are mere projections. The **human brain conceives of a Cosmic Mind** of which the brain itself is a tiny copy. Or does the Cosmic Mind, the "mainframe" of intellect in the universe, replicate itself in some minuscule way in that mini-wonder called the human brain? Who can determine where this hall of mirrors begins? It seems hardly likely that it begins with us alone. "The

[90] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 71
[91] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 73

> eye with which I see God and the eye with which God sees me are the same eye," says the great Christian mystic Meister Eckhardt. The mirror turns both ways."[92]

Green transforms Kaplan's idea of God as projection into another mode of conceiving of Spinoza's non-dual God. If human beings are God and vice-versa, then both God and human beings naturally reflect one another. Yet while the way we conceive of God may be projection, God Godself exists beyond such a projection. According to Green's logic, the reason that human beings conceive of God as projection of the human mind is due to the fact that God made human beings *B'tzelem Elohim*, in God's own image. As images of God, we human beings project God to be what God made us to be.

Where Does Green Stand on Functionalism?

Green seems to explicitly reject Kaplan's functionalism when he argues against "a mere idea of God, a post-Kantian construct created to guarantee morality, to assure us of the potential for human goodness."[93] Yet at the same time, in writing about the purpose of Judaism, he seems to argue for a functional framework. He writes, "the Hasidic masters understood that the true value of kabbalistic teaching was in the spiritual-psychological realm. While they by no means denied or even questioned the truth claims of Kabbalah as a metaphysic, their interest was always in the ways in which kabbalistic concepts could be used to explain the human mind, both spiritually and emotionally."[94] In other words, "The purpose of using kabbalistic insights on the psychological plane is to point toward a transcendental psychology, **an understanding of human personality as emerging out of a deep well of preconscious reality. That well draws on sources that are truly infinite, rooted in a mysterious inner self that ties us to all others and to the single Self of the universe.**"[95] Thus, the function of Judaism should be to enable us

[92] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 73-74
[93] Green, *Radical Judaism*, p. 17
[94] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 113
[95] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 115, emphasis added

to more fully understand our human nature and to connect to a part of the human psyche that links us to all others, or in other words, to God. We can therefore conclude that like Kaplan, for Green, religion serves a key function, helping explain human psychology and enabling human beings to connect more deeply to each other and to the "mystery of 'Oneness.'"[96]

Interestingly the functional purpose of religion as Green articulates it is actually a synthesis of both Kaplan and Spinoza's theologies. The "deep well of preconscious reality" that, according to Green, shapes the human personality is an articulation of Spinoza's pantheist God. This is especially clear when Green describes the inner self as part of a "truly infinite" source "that ties us all to others, and to the single Self of the universe." However, like Kaplan, Green conceives of a "mysterious inner self" which leads us to act more humanely. That is strikingly similar to Kaplan's position that religion should "impel us to become fully human." [97] For Green, unlike Kaplan, the function of Judaism depends on Spinoza's theology being true. For his functionalism to be logically consistent, God must exist in all things, not just the human mind.

[96] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 58
[97] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 102

Conclusion

By combining elements of Spinoza and Kaplan's theologies with Jewish mystical texts, Art Green articulates a Judaism that is resonant for the contemporary Jew who senses a non-dualistic world, and yet seeks a religion firmly grounded in the Jewish tradition. While Green's attempts to thread the needle between Kaplan and Spinoza sometimes yield some logical inconsistencies, those inconsistencies are revealing. They highlight Green's priorities – that he is committed to working within a Jewish framework, which necessitates firm boundaries and must include notions of theism and free will. Even so, those inconsistencies are relatively insignificant compared to the quality of his synthesis. Summarizing his task, Green reminisces:

> Over the decades I have come to see myself as a builder of bridges between the scholarly ivory tower, with its great skills in deciphering difficult, obscure sources, and the community of seekers who want to know if there is any value or wisdom in those sources that might still speak to people who live in a very different age from those in which the texts were written.[98]

An intellectual disciple of Kaplan, Green himself has successfully "re-constructed" a Jewish mysticism, with its native pantheist elements, that is compatible with a modern understanding of psychology and science.

[98] Green, *Ehyeh*, p. 11

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“Conceptions of Covenant in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought”

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, [1] Jewish theologians began to consider how unfathomable destruction presented significant challenges to both classical and modern Jewish conceptions of God. For the former, the near-total destruction of God’s chosen people called into question, at best, God’s power and at worst, God’s existence. That the Nazi regime could arise from a country that as late as the early 20th century, “enshrined humanity’s highest ideals” “seemed to refute the modernist premise that human beings tended toward progress and would bring about their own ethical perfection.”[2]

Some post-Holocaust theologians, most notably Richard Rubenstein, rejected the existence of God altogether. He contended that “the Holocaust had made it impossible for a responsible person any longer to believe in the God of the Covenant, the One he said Judaism considered ‘the ultimate, omnipotent actor in history.’”[3] The traditional framework of the Jewish Covenant states that if the Jewish people follow God’s commandments then God will bless and protect the Jewish people. To accept such a God and this understanding of Covenant required believing that the Jews who were murdered deserved God’s punishment and that Hitler was an agent of the Divine will. Faced with such a calculus, Rubenstein chose to reject the existence of

[1] Many contemporary Jewish groups and scholars prefer the Hebrew term Shoah, to the term Holocaust, which derives from a Greek word meaning a sacrifice completely consumed by fire. As a term to describe the Nazi genocide, Holocaust is problematic because it implies a willingness to be sacrificed on the part of the victims and a God desiring such sacrifice from God’s own people. The term Shoah, which means devastation, destruction, or catastrophe, is preferable because it does not carry such theological implications. Furthermore, because Shoah is a Hebrew term, it is particular to the Jewish people and not universal to any genocide, unlike the term Holocaust. In this paper, I use the term Holocaust because it is more universally recognizable and because the theologians discussed herein employ it in their own analysis and reflections on this subject. For more information on this issue, refer to “The Slaughter of Six Million Jews: A Holocaust or a Shoah?” by Zev Garber (https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-slaughter-of-six-million-jews-a-holocaust-or-a-shoah)

[2] Borowitz, p. 230, citing Hermann Cohen’s description of Germany in WWI. Borowitz further notes that “Jews reared on these [modernist] models of human improvability simply could not believe that a people as educated and cultured as the Germans could countenance and carry out the Holocaust.” (Borowitz, p. 161) Michael Meyer adds that, Cohen “argued that German humanism and Jewish universal messianism were fundamentally alike, each aiming at the same ultimate goal.” (Meyer, p. 35)

[3] Borowitz, p. 34

God rather than believe in a God who would enable and condone such brutality. However, many post-Holocaust theologians take another approach. Accepting that the horror of the Holocaust indicates God's inability or unwillingness to act in history, these theologians argue, leading them to reexamine the question of whether God is intervenes or is present in the lives of people at all, and if so, how.

Rejecting the rejectors, as it were, Leo Baeck, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Eugene Borowitz, and Melissa Raphael each insisted that God is still present for and in relationship with human beings. Unlike Rubenstein, they did not reject God outright, but instead rejected the traditional formulations of God's power and God's activity in history. This paper will explore these thinkers' articulations of how God interacts with and reveals God's self to human beings, and in turn, how the Jewish people should or must respond to such a God. Each of these thinkers stressed their belief that God engages in the daily lives of individuals, yet in ways starkly different from how God is portrayed in the Bible and Talmud. For some God becomes manifest in moments of human relationship and/or moral action. For others, God is hidden but is present in the mystery of existence. What unites these theologians is that they insisted that the Holocaust did not deny but affirmed both God and the Jewish people's role in the Covenant. At the same time, in light of the Holocaust and the post-Enlightenment insistence of individual autonomy, they posit conceptions of Covenant that balance theism with human power.

This paper is organized around four questions: 1) Where was God in the Holocaust? 2) Why is Covenant relevant or needed? 3) What is God's role in the Covenant? and 4) What is the Jew's role in the Covenant? Each section analyses these four theologians' answers to these questions as well as their relation to one another. The paper concludes with my own reflection on these questions.

Where was God in the Holocaust?

Baeck

Leo Baeck, Germany's leading rabbi prior to and during the Holocaust, was imprisoned in Theresienstadt and survived. Even so, writing after his escape, Baeck makes little to no direct mention of the Nazis' atrocities. His theological position must be inferred from his writings. Baeck argued that God is always present with human beings, and yet God does not act in the world on God's own. God is only made manifest in the world through human action that is decided upon by the free will of individual people. Therefore, for Baeck, God was present in the Holocaust and yet is not responsible for its horrors. For Baeck, that responsibility lay at the hands of the Nazis and their enablers, who chose not to act in Godly ways.

Baeck argued that though it may appear otherwise, humankind "is never forsaken and never lost, nowhere alone, nowhere condemned forever. He is never surrendered or wholly abandoned to anyone. Rather he is always supported by the One, the unfathomable." [4] Baeck expressed this sentiment through the classical rabbinic image of *Shekhinta ba'galuta,* the notion that the indwelling feminine aspect of God (the *Shekhinah*) followed Israel into exile and remained with Her through Her pain and devastation. Baeck scholar Michael Meyer writes, "Thus had She done for their ancestors in the past. Thus, by implication, might She do, as well, in the present. For, as Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai taught: 'Wherever the righteous go, the *Shekhinah* goes with them.'" Summarizing Baeck's argument, Meyer concludes, "However isolated they might be, even in Nazi Germany, the Jews were not alone."[5]

While Baeck may have argued that God was present with the Jewish people in their suffering, he clearly drew a distinction between God's presence and God's actions. Baeck

[4] Baeck, *This People Israel,* p. 14
[5] Meyer, pp. 121-122

contended that God's actions in the world were expressed as moral commandments. Baeck wrote that "the law comes from God, but with each and every hour it becomes the task of man."[6] If people do not carry out those commandments, God cannot act in the world. Therefore, the Nazis represented not God's failure, but a failure of human beings. Before Hitler rose to power, Baeck wrote:

> Injustice and sin exist in every nation; they come and they go and the people lives on. But if the nation as such, as a whole, joins in the guilt through silence, through indulgence, through looking on, then that misdeed destroys the foundation upon which a nation exists; it collapses under it. Nations have perished only when they first remained silent, when people ceased to resist sin and to speak out for justice.[7]

Nazi Germany ultimately came to reflect such a dearth of moral action. Baeck later wrote regarding the Nazi era:

> Voices… praised crime and jeered at righteousness. States disregarded their duties of faithfulness towards their citizens. House of prayer, in which faith, righteousness, and justice had been proclaimed, were burned to the ground; congregations, in which reverence for God, humanity, philanthropy, and a feeling for the total society had been nurtured, were dismembered; hundreds of thousands, children of this people, human lives containing a soul, were destroyed. And those that committed this knew what they committed.[8]

This was an indictment of people, not of God.

A logical extension of Baeck's theology was that if the Holocaust resulted from a failure of individual human beings and not from God, then individual human beings also have the power to create a better world. Baeck argued that different, more ethical action from human beings was the only way to achieve a different result. It was humanity's task to save humanity, not God's. There was no *deus ex machina*. He hoped that such a lesson could be learned from the

[6] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 20
[7] Quoted in Meyer, p. 79, from Letter reproduced in *Freiburger Rundbrief 6* (1999): 174.
[8] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 386

Holocaust, that it would mark a new epoch in which human beings would choose to act morally and humanely. He wrote:

> The victors [of World War II] undertook the task of expiating the profaned peace through a labor of pure peace. In a sense, they wanted to reconsecrate humanity. The United Nations was to be the foundation for that task, so that a sanctuary of hope might be built. Will this come to be? Is this the commencement of a humane epoch…? Those who come later will hear the answer.[9]

With a stunning ability to retain hope in humankind in general and Germans in particular, Baeck also wrote:

> What is it that remains after the passage of time? Justice and spirit are immortal, even on earth…A people will reawaken to a new life — the power granted to it - only after it becomes self-aware and returns, only when it will find its way again to the ethical ideal, the way of culture. A new epoch in its history begins.[10]

Perhaps it was Baeck's belief that God remained present in the Holocaust that led him to retain such hope for the future. Scholars Gabriel Padawer and Bernard Mehlman write that for Baeck, "redemption, renewal, and rebirth are possible - even for the German people. But such a change can come only through the rededication of individual members of the population, one by one, to the principles of justice and ethics." [11] How could this be possible? Through Covenant.

Heschel

For Abraham Joshua Heschel, who escaped Nazi persecution in the United States through the intervention of the Hebrew Union College, the horror of the Holocaust did not necessarily mean that God was absent. He expressed that God could be found in both the glory of awe and in the desolation of misery: "There are those who sense the ultimate question in moments of wonder, in moments of joy; there are those who sense the ultimate question in moments of

[9] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 386
[10] Baeck, "The Meaning of History," Translated by Gabriel Padawer and Bernard Mehlman, pp. 11,18
[11] Baeck, "The Meaning of History," Translator's Introduction. Translated by Gabriel Padawer and Bernard Mehlman, p. 6

horror, in moments of despair. It is both the grandeur and the misery of living that makes man sensitive to the ultimate question. Indeed, his misery is as great as his grandeur."[12]

Heschel rejected the Aristotelean/Maimonidean conception of a God unfeeling and unmoved by suffering, arguing that the influence of Hellenism distorted Judaism's conception of God's pathos. The Heschel scholar Shai Held explains that:

> Heschel deems the God of Aristotle, Philo, and Maimonides to be so transcendent and self-contained as to be altogether heartless and aloof. In a world of genocide and atomic devastation, a world in which human beings are heedless and uncaring, what good is such a God? In a world in which man is impervious to the suffering of his fellow, what could be more otiose than a God who is an Unmoved Mover?…But the God of the prophets is entirely different, profoundly affected by the cries of the oppressed and downtrodden. The God of Israel is a God of Pathos and concern.[13]

For Heschel's pathos-filled God, the Holocaust was a tragic event that God could not stop, but from which God was not absent. God was present insofar as God remained concerned for and afflicted by the suffering of God's people. Held traces Heschel's thinking back to Heschel's analysis of the biblical prophets:

> God is pained not only by Israel's waywardness, but also by its sufferings. Speaking of the theology of the prophet Jeremiah, Heschel writes that "Israel's distress was more than a human tragedy. With Israel's distress came the affliction of God, His displacement, His homelessness in the land, in the world."[14] Speaking of Second Isaiah, Heschel points out that "Israel's suffering is God's grief," and that, in the prophet's own words, "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9). Thus G**od seems to suffer not only from disappointment with Israel, but also out of emotional solidarity with it.**[15]

The implication of a God capable of pathos is that like human beings, God is vulnerable. Held writes, "At the very heart of prophetic theology, then, is the paradoxical insistence that the

[12] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 367
[13] Held, p. 232
[14] Heschel, *Prophets*, II, 4, quoted in Held, p. 145
[15] Held, p. 145, emphasis added

Creator of heaven and earth is also a profoundly vulnerable Being. The cost of real relationship, it seems, is emotional vulnerability, even for an all-powerful God."[16]

Heschel argued that due to God's vulnerability, in certain moments in history God hides God's self, a phenomenon known in the Torah and in rabbinic literature as *hester panim*, "the hiding of God's face." Heschel demurred as to the precise mechanics of this hiding, as to whether it was by choice or because of some other aspect of God's nature. Yet, if God cared so much for the suffering of God's own people, why would God remain hidden to them? Held explained that God's hiddenness begins with human beings turning away from God:"Human beings first turn away from God, and He, in turn, turns away from them. Divine hiding results from prior acts of human defiance." Or in Heschel's own words, "The will of God is to be here, manifest and near, but when God's will is thwarted, He leaves the world as if against His own will."[17]

Though God went into hiding because of human actions, God did not want to remain hidden forever. On the contrary, God wanted to be "'A hiding God,' Heschel emphasizes, 'not a hidden God. He is waiting to be disclosed, to be admitted into our lives.'"[18] Held writes, "God hides Himself and curtails His power in the hopes of being discovered and responded to. These actions are thus paradoxical gestures of relational vulnerability, the very antithesis of Abandonment."[19] If the Holocaust lacked God, it was, according to Heschel, because human beings did not let God in.

For Heschel, the failure of human beings to stop the Holocaust was a symptom of their inability to recognize and bring God into the world. Heschel wrote, "Modern man may be

[16] Held, pp. 144-145
[17] Held, p. 181
[18] Held, p. 182, quoting Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, p. 154
[19] Held, p. 182

characterized as a being who is callous to catastrophes. A victim of enforced brutalization, his sensibility is being increasingly reduced; his sense of horror is on the wane. The distinction between right and wrong is becoming blurred. All that is left to us is our being horrified at the loss of our sense of horror."[20] In other words, God was not silent, but was silenced by the human indifference to evil.

Like Baeck, Heschel put the responsibility for the Holocaust on humankind but unlike Baeck, Heschel did not believe that human beings had the power to redeem the world on their own account. He wrote:

> Judaism would reject the Kantian axiom, 'I ought, therefore I can;' it would claim, instead, 'Thou art commanded, therefore thou canst.' Judaism, as we have said, claims that man has the resources to fulfill what God commands, at least to some degree. On the other hand, we are continually warned lest we rely on man's own power and the belief that man, by his power alone, is capable of redeeming the world. Good deeds alone will not redeem history; it is the obedience to God that will make us worthy of being redeemed by God. If Judaism had relied exclusively on the human resources for the good, on man's ability to fulfill what God demands, on man's power to achieve redemption, why did it insist upon the promise of messianic redemption? Indeed, messianism implies that any course of living, even the supreme human efforts, must fail in redeeming the world. It implies that history for all its relevance is not sufficient to itself.[21]

Heschel posited that though human beings would necessarily fail to redeem the world if they tried to do so on their own, with God as a partner, humankind could redeem the world: "If the nature of man were all we had, then surely the outlook would be dim. But we also have the aid of God, the commandment, the mitsvah."[22] Acting in accordance with God's commandments kept God in the world.

<u>Borowitz</u>

[20] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 369
[21] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 378-379
[22] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 374

For Borowitz, an American-born scholar whose youth coincided with the Nazi's atrocities but whose education occurred their shadow, the Holocaust illustrated the failure of what he characterized as the "modernist" notion that that people can perfect the world without God's help. He contended that the Holocaust was a prime example of how the neo-Kantian modernist worldview advocated by Hermann Cohen and his student Baeck was doomed to fail. He wrote:

> "[In modernity], we stopped relying on our traditional God to save us and instead put our faith in humanity's power to create justice. We now expected that education, cultural creativity, economic expansion, and political action-not observance of the Torah-would bring us to a Messianic age. Ethics became our surrogate for *mitzvot.*…Those who still talked of God largely meant an idea that unified their ever-expanding humanistic worldview."[23]

For Borowitz, the Holocaust marked the end of our ability to believe that modernization can be our messiah:

> Once Jews could confront the Holocaust in its own satanic fullness and see it as the terrifying symbol of humankind's demonic energies, they identified Western culture as an ethical fraud. With modernist messianism discredited, we modern Jews, like many others in our civilization, have had to rethink our most fundamental beliefs, particularly with regard to the age-old Jewish concern: How, really, must we live? If we insist, against most of what we see and hear around us, that there are things that must not ever be done by anyone, that there are standards of quality that every life must manifest to be truly human-to be a mentsh-then we must seek their ground elsewhere than in our secular culture. The slow but steady growth of this consciousness has been the basis of the surprising emergence of an explicitly religious concern in postmodern Jewishness; against the predictions of the pundits God again claims our attention.[24]

Therefore, to the question, 'where was God in the Holocaust?' Borowitz answered: God was not there because human beings shut God out. Like Heschel, for Borowitz, the Holocaust represented a failure of human beings to acknowledge that God plays a part in redeeming the world. However, Borowitz did not altogether reject the power of human action. While still asserting the

[23] Borowitz, p. 4
[24] Borowitz, p. 5

power of human free will, Borowitz concluded that after the Holocaust, human beings had to adopt a worldview that necessitated a more limited role for humanity and a larger role for God.

Raphael

In her book *The Female Face* of God in Auschwitz, Melissa Raphael provides the most explicit and emphatic affirmation of God's presence in the Holocaust. While she insists that God was present, she also provides the clearest and perhaps most expansive definition of what God was not. She asserts that the reason why Rubenstein and others struggled to reconcile God's existence with the horrors of the Holocaust was that their conception of God is flawed. She contends that it was the patriarchal model of God — necessarily omniscient and omnipotent — that cannot be reconciled with the vicissitudes of history. She writes:

> Holocaust theologians' problem is that their God is omniscient and omnipotent and his power and control over the world are therefore absolutely valorized. But since such suffering did continue then the God who would not have allowed it to continue does not exist. Or to put it another way, the God who did allow it does exist, which returns us to the original problem."[25]

The problem is not that God did not exist in the Holocaust. It was that the patriarchal God did not exist. Raphael explains, "Although Holocaust theology has at least partially indicted God on account of his holocaustal absence [or] silence…it has not questioned its own basic *model* of God, only certain failures of its attributes. It is my contention that it was a patriarchal model of God, not God-in-God's-self, that failed Israel during the Holocaust.[26]

Instead of the patriarchal model of an omniscient and omnipotent God, Raphael argues instead for a more limited God, one whose immanent presence is felt and made manifest through relational acts:

> Judaism teaches that its ultimate purpose is to elicit the presence of God and that we are never nearer to God than when we respond in love and sympathy to the need of

[25] Raphael, p. 36
[26] Raphael, p. 5

> others….When a woman in Auschwitz saw the face of the other and went out to meet her she can also be said to have gone out to meet God. Auschwitz was a mirror onto the suffering face of God; God was seen and authoritative in the face of the suffering other.[27]

For Raphael, God was locked out of the world by the evil acts of the Nazis which God abhorred but was welcomed back into the world by female prisoners in the concentration camps whose relational acts of love and humanity revealed and restored God's image in the women they helped. Here, Raphael channels Heschel, who wrote, "God is in search of man, in search of a home in the soul and deeds of man. God is not at home in our world. Our task is to hallow time, to enable Him to enter our moments, to be at home in our time, in what we do with time."[28] For Raphael, the means by which people allow God to enter the world is through acts of relationship. Acts of *hesed*, including being present to and staying with the suffering of others, were "a way of seeing and recreating a woman's full humanity."[29] In so doing, "*hesed* presented God by holding up the image of God in the restored image of the human."[30]

On the other hand, while Heschel argued that God hid God's face during the Holocaust, preventing the Jewish people from seeing God's presence, Raphael argued that "The face of *Shekhinah* was hidden only in so far as the Jewish faces that imaged her were defaced by their profanation; burned and dispersed as ash…Yet in women's care for the other—emblematized in the wiping of filth from a face – God's face was revealed as present and visible to the eye of spiritual perception in the facing image."[31]

One advantage of Raphael's theology compared to the others is how hers accounts for theodicy. Instead of excusing an omniscient or omnipotent God for failing to intervene in the

[27] Raphael, pp. 100, 105
[28] Heschel, "On Prayer," p. 73
[29] Raphael, p. 100
[30] Raphael, p. 100
[31] Raphael, p. 55

Holocaust, as Baeck and Borowitz do, Raphael argues that the power to intervene as such is not within God's nature. By relinquishing the notion that God could have intervened, she no longer has to explain why God would tolerate such evil. Her God can remain entirely good, or "omnibenevolent." She writes, "It is Jewish feminist theological revision of the immanent God as *Shekhinah* (the traditionally female image of the indwelling presence of God) which helps us to trace God's redemptive presence in Auschwitz in ways which do not entail divine or theological complicity with evil."[32] She continues, "Where God is among us as an assembly of suffering bodies, God's power, there, is limited by the conditions of embodied finitude and, God being wholly good, is manifest in the exercise of the beneficent power of *hesed* or human love and kindness within that assembly."[33]

Therefore, more forcefully than any of the other theologians covered in this paper, Raphael makes the case that God remained present in the Holocaust. She argues, "God's presence in the camps was hidden only in that it was not ordinarily perceptible. In a religious feminist context the phrase *hester panim* could connote not so much the hiding of the face as its disguise, and one which brought God deep into the broken heart of Auschwitz. She remained among us, perhaps unknown and unknowable, but not hidden."[34] Even in Auschwitz, God did not remain unknowable. The prisoners indeed knew Her and felt Her presence, as Raphael writes, "God, in Auschwitz, was knowable in the moment of being seen in the face of the seen other; was produced in and as the inter/face between persons; the face between faces."[35]

Why is Covenant Relevant or Needed?

[32] Raphael, p. 5
[33] Raphael, p. 39
[34] Raphael, p. 54
[35] Raphael, p. 88

These theologians' contention that God remained present in the Holocaust raises the question of how Jews can and should continue to relate to God in its aftermath. Each argues that the Jewish people's Covenant with God remains in effect even amid the horrors of the Holocaust, but proposes that in its aftermath, the Jewish conception of that Covenant must be revised.

Baeck

Leo Baeck insisted that in the aftermath of the Holocaust, maintaining the awareness of Covenant between the Jewish people and God was essential for the Jewish people's future. Covenant would be Israel's path to rebirth and the means through which would derive its right to existence. For Baeck, experiencing Infinity is the highest hope of man, and being part of the Covenant is what allows people to experience Infinity. He wrote, "The spiritual foundation of the one, the religious hope, is the deep assurance, this deepest knowledge, in which the finite comes to experience something of the power of infinity, this certainty that the goal endures in which all fulfills itself and that, where the goal is firmly established, there is the one way that leads to it." The "one way" of which Baeck writes is Covenant. In Baeck's words, "This people can only be a people in relationship to God. It can only find itself when it seeks God; when it is distant from God, it becomes estranged from itself. It can only have strength in its life when it 'enters into Covenant with God; nearness to God is the foundation and the condition of existence here." [36] Without Covenant, the Jewish people have no way to be close to God, and no way to continue to exist as a people. Baeck wrote, "There cannot be a time, no matter how bright, that is certainty; and there cannot be a time, no matter how dark, that can shake the certainty. Instead, question after question may approach, and the attempt can constantly be renewed to open the doorway to

[36] Baeck, *This People Israel, p. 390*

the answer. Amidst all hopes and all disappointments, the hope endures."[37] It is only by continuing to engage with questions such as "what does God demand from individual Jews and from the collective Jewish people" in every generation that allows Jews to continue to be in relationship with God, which is what ultimately provides a never-ending hope for the Jewish people.

For Baeck, recommitment to Covenant in the aftermath of catastrophe was what allowed the Jewish people to endure. Meyer explains, "What set Jewish history apart was that the Jewish people had gone through not one but several such periods, or, as Baeck prefers to call them, epochs. Whereas other peoples had not been able to recover from eventual decay, the Jewish people experienced repeated rebirth….Of Jewish history, Baeck contends that it is a history of epochs, that is to say, it is a history of rebirths."[38] However, for Baeck, the Covenant between God and Israel had implications for humankind and the world. He contended that it was only through God's Covenant with the Jewish people that the rest of humanity would learn to act morally, and thereby redeem the world:

> The covenant has been established so that, through it, creation might continue; it has been commanded that, through it, man might endure within creation. Because the covenant exists, the power of creation and the power of revelation remain in the world and with man. The one covenant endures, the one law of the One God. Nature and morality thus share *one* origin, *one* root; they emerge out of the One. Together they are the covenant, the law of the One God[39]

For Baeck, thus, the particularism of the Jewish people's Covenant, in other words, was a precondition for universal redemption. Meyer notes that, "In religious terms, Baeck's understanding of history, viewed theologically, approaches what is called in German a Heilsgeschichte—in this case, a Jewishly understood partnership of God and humanity aimed at

[37] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 389
[38] Meyer, p. 204
[39] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 20, emphasis original

a collective salvation."[40] For Baeck, the Jewish people play a role in the redemption of the world that the other nations cannot achieve on their own.

Heschel

As for Baeck, Heschel's rationale for Jewish Covenant has both universal and particularistic elements. Baeck believed that it is only through the Jewish Covenant that all humankind could be redeemed. Heschel also emphasized the power of individual Jews to influence the broader world, joining the collective Jewish people and God in Covenant:

> Israel is the tree, we are the leaves. It is the clinging to the stem that keeps us alive. There has perhaps never been more need of Judaism than in our time, a time in which many cherished hopes of humanity lie crushed…The future of all men depends upon their realizing that the sense of holiness is as vital as health. By following the Jewish way of life we maintain that sense and preserve the light for mankind's future visions.[41]

However, whereas Baeck stated that the Jewish people would accomplish this by showing the other nations how to act morally, Heschel argued that *Am Yisrael* would show the rest of the world how to recognize God through the wonder and faith:

> It is our destiny to live for what is more than ourselves. Our very existence is an unparalleled symbol of such aspiration. By being what we are, namely Jews, we mean more to mankind than by any particular service we may render. We have faith in God and faith in Israel…Israel exists not in order to be, but in order to cherish the vision of God. Our faith may be strained but our destiny is anchored to the ultimate. Who can establish the outcome of our history? Out of the wonder we came and into the wonder we shall return.[42]

For Heschel, Jews can teach other nations a universal method for connecting to God by showing them how to cultivate a sense of awe and wonder as they experience the world. Such wonder

[40] Meyer, pp. 70-71
[41] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 424
[42] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 425

leads to the recognition of God, which all nations can and should strive to do by following Israel's example.

In addition to this universalism, like Baeck, Heschel understood that the Jewish people need Covenant in order to continue as a people, establishing their place in eternity. Heschel wrote, "It is not utility that we seek in religion but eternity. The criterion of religion is not in its being in agreement with our common sense but in its being compatible with our sense of the ineffable. The purpose of religion is not to satisfy the needs we feel but to create in us the need of serving ends, of which we otherwise remain oblivious."[43] Continued Jewish existence requires faith in both God and the Jewish people, both of which are affirmed in Covenant.

Because Heschel's God is one of profound pathos who yearns to be in relationship with human beings, God's need for Covenant in Heschel's eyes takes on additional meaning. Whereas Baeck's God needs Covenant to achieve God's desired moral outcome for humankind, Heschel thought that Covenantal relationship could make the transcendent aspect of God at home in our world. Not only that, but Heschel posited that this would fulfill God's deepest desire, born of pathos and deep love for the human beings, to be in relationship with humanity, to find a home in the world. Yet whereas Baeck stressed ethical action, for Heschel Jews enacted the Covenant through fulfilling *mitzvot*. He argued:

> To do a mitsvah is to give an answer to His will, to respond to what He expects of us. This is why an act of mitsvah is preceded by a prayer: 'Blessed be Thou …' What is a mitsvah? A prayer in the form of a deed. And to pray is to sense His presence…In stressing the fundamental importance of the mitsvah, Judaism assumes that man is endowed with the ability to fulfill what God demands, at least to some degree…In spite of all imperfection, the worth of good deeds remains in all eternity.[44]

[43] Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* p. 351
[44] Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* pp. 375,378

For Jewish Covenant, the mitzvot—given to the Jewish people alone—were more important than the universal elements of awe and wonder.

Borowitz

Borowitz recognized that Jewish literature had long depicted the Jewish Covenant as a relationship between God and the collective Jewish people. However, Borowitz insisted on a model of the Covenant based on individual choice, not top-down communal coercion. The Covenant, for Borowitz, was a mechanism through which individual Jews chose to enter into their people's historical relationship with God so that as a collective, they might strive to perfect the world. Borowitz wrote:

> This dialectical postmodern evolution has brought much of world Jewry to a paradoxical spiritual situation. We are too realistic about humankind to return to the messianic modernism that once animated us. Instead we sense we derive our deepest understanding of what a person ought to be and humankind ought to become from participating in the Covenant, our people's historic relationship with God. But not exclusively. Emancipation was not altogether a lie. It taught us something true about the dignity of each person and about the democracy and pluralism that make it effective, and this must be carried over into our postmodern Judaism. These affirmations—corporate Covenant and self-determination—can easily come into conflict, yet we propose to live our lives affirming both of them.[45]

In other words, human beings could not comprehend the meaning of their lives or their task in the world on their own. Such insights only become clear when a person enters into relationship with God. Therefore, Covenant was needed in order to redeem the world. At the same time, Borowitz's post-modern lens allowed him to identify both specific benefits and challenges that Covenant posed for contemporary Jewry and that a renewed post-modern Covenant would have to take into account to be tenable.

[45] Borowitz, p. 51

Echoing Baeck and Heschel, that Covenant has defined the Jewish people's relationship to God in every age, Borowitz argued, "The Covenant renders the Jewish self radically historical. Our Jewish relationship with God did not begin with this generation and its working out in Jewish lives has been going on for millennia…Different social circumstances aside, the underlying relationship between God and the people of Israel has remained substantially the same."[46] Further, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, Borowitz contended that Covenant, the means through which Jews had historically related to God in both good and bad times, was as relevant as ever. He traced the Covenant's history:

> For one thing, the same religious moments decisively shape our Covenant sensibility…Exile, return, destruction of the Second Temple, Diaspora, the rise of the rabbis, medieval triumph and trial, which we extend by Holocaust, and Third Commonwealth. We too live by Jewish memory. For another thing, reading our classic texts inevitably points up the constancy of human nature with its swings between folly and saintliness. Jews then behaved very much as Jews do today. Hence, much of they did as their Covenant duty will likely still lay a living claim on us. For the Jewish self, Covenant means Covenant-with-prior-Jewish-generations.[47]

Like Baeck and Heschel, Borowitz insisted that after the Holocaust, Covenant was needed for Jewish continuity. In his telling, Covenant did not just bind the Jewish people to God; it linked them to all the generations who came before. While Baeck and Heschel also stressed Covenant's role as a link to the Jewish past and future, Borowitz emphasized more than others the significance of Jewish 'ethnicity' or lineage, or to use the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig's term, "blood." He contended:

> The multiple ties that ethnicity engenders help the imperiled people endure. Bound to one another and their Covenant memories by land, language, customs, heroes, jokes, foods, gossip, and other aspects of folk life, the Jewish people can defend itself from history's blows clothed in a many-layered ethnic armor. Infusing its folkways with Covenant sensibility, it can powerfully transmit, reinforce, and renew Israel's lasting purpose.[48]

[46] Borowitz, p. 291
[47] Borowitz, p. 291
[48] Borowitz, p. 232

And yet Borowitz tempered the communal ties of ethnicity with an awareness of human autonomy: "In one critical religious respect, however, we stand apart from prior generations: our conviction that we must exercise considerable self-determination."[49] Unlike in the past when God or the corporate Jewish community could compel individual Jews to enter into the Covenant, post-modern (or post-emancipation) Jews would have to enter the Covenant voluntarily. What would drive a person to want to enter into this Covenant of their own volition? According to Borowitz, a transcendent encounter with the Divine would engender a sense of duty to join in the Covenant. Borowitz described these transcendent encounters as moments in which a person becomes so fully present in an interaction with another person that he can see the divine image in which that person was created. In such moments, Borowitz contended, a person not only connects to the other person, but he also connects to God.

Borowitz based his assertion that Covenantal duty derives from a person's experience of Divinity (that arises out of relationship) on his depiction of Israel's original Covenant with God. He described the encounter between God and *Am Yisrael* (the Jewish people) as an example of the direct encounter that human beings can have with one another, as just described. Naturally, given the intensity and directness of the encounter, a sense of Covenantal duty ensued. He explained:

> [The early twentieth-century Jewish philosopher Martin] Buber also believes that, on occasion, groups…participate in I-thou encounters… Whenever such encounters occur, whether they be momentous or fleeting, they generate a sense of obligation in the group…In historic moments a folk can undergo such an experience, giving it a distinctive national character. This happened to the Hebrews in the events we call Exodus and Sinai, during which they became conscious of being as directly involved with God as with one another. The nation that emerged from these encounters bound itself in a relationship with God they called the Covenant-and renewed it in subsequent experiences over the centuries in the land of Israel. In due course, the Hebrews came to understand themselves as the people Covenanted to God.[50]

[49] Borowitz, p. 291
[50] Borowitz, p. 179

A feeling of obligation arises out of encounter only through sensitivity to the emotional and spiritual magnitude of Divine encounter. It is not something that can be reasoned. It must be sensed and experienced. When individuals experience moments of transcendence (and for Borowitz this generally happens through relational encounters), that moment engenders a sense of obligation. Once an individual experiences this feeling of transcendence and then obligation, he will then choose of his own free will to be in Covenant. In Borowitz's words, "We may freely reject the injunctions that arise from our touching up against transcendence but only by not being true to ourselves as people and as Jews."[51]

Raphael

According to Raphael, Covenant is needed in order to redeem God, not only humankind. Like Heschel, Raphael argues that aspects of God can be exiled from the world and that human action is needed to bring God back in. This was especially true during the Holocaust. She writes, "In Auschwitz, God's glory was so diminished as to barely illuminate the begrimed Jewish face. The darkness of Auschwitz was therefore experienced as a sign of the withdrawal of God. At this moment God and Israel were in equal need of redemption from the pit."[52] Like Heschel, Raphael posits that human evil and disregard for other people's suffering can block God's access to the world. However, Raphael writes that caring acts between people can return God to the world: "However momentarily, the spark generated between the seeing and seen face was analogous to a Sabbath candle inviting God's presence – *Shekhinah* – into Auschwitz. Even the most infinitesimal spark of light was enough to illuminate – if only momentarily – the grey face of the other and so refract God into the toppling world."[53]

[51] Borowitz, p. 117
[52] Raphael, p. 61
[53] Raphael, p. 61

According to Raphael, this act of bringing God into the world through caring is Judaism's raison d'être, and what its Covenant enables. She writes, "The idea of covenantal sanctification is indispensable…to a theology of divine holocaustal presence. For the intimation of the holy in human communities is a signal and manifestation of the presence of God in the world: Judaism's very purpose."[54] Raphael suggests that relationship with one another was precisely how Jewish women, in particular, fulfilled their obligations to God under the Covenant in the Holocaust. She writes, "Here, in the peculiarly catastrophic setting of the Holocaust, I want to interpret women's fidelities to relation not as a peripheral fidelity to the covenant but as binding up the covenant between God and Jewry against the forces of its historical dissolution."[55]

However, Raphael asserts, the ability to bring God into the world through Covenantal relationship is not limited to women, but is only embodied by actions traditionally defined as feminine. She writes, "both men and women care in the image of a loving God whose covenant with us institutes relational commitment. In Auschwitz, where the covenant was under extreme duress, to hold and tend the body of Israel in its dereliction was at once a practically and ethically maximal undertaking of the Jewish obligation."[56] Indeed, "The commonalities between God's transcendent personality and immanent human personhood are such that God is present wherever personhood is honoured, for personhood is the locus and episteme of divine will and activity. Relational acts testified to the presence of the human/e in Auschwitz whose purpose was to destroy and consume it."[57]

[54] Raphael, p. 61
[55] Raphael, p. 87
[56] Raphael, p. 87
[57] Raphael, p. 88. Relatedly, Baeck's own actions as a prisoner in Theresienstadt, which included comforting the afflicted and teaching Torah, exemplified Raphael's notion of relational acts. For more information, see Meyer pp. 146-166

Just as for Heschel and Borowitz, Raphael's transcendent God can enter the immanence of the human experience. And like Borowitz, Raphael contends this occurs through relational acts. Yet, in Raphael's telling, the presence of God in human relationships also presents a strong critique of the regnant androcentrism of Jewish theology. If the Holocaust proved patriarchal theologies of omnipotence untenable, it also revealed that previously ignored aspects of God that are key to theism in the post-modern, post-Holocaust age.

Raphael's Covenant allows Jews to redeem God, both in the sense of allowing God to enter the world, but also in that it reveals and honors aspects of God that were previously ignored or not recognize as Divine. She writes, "To be faithful to the actual and particular suffering of all persons during the Holocaust and to the Covenantal presence of God in the midst of that suffering, Jewish theology must reflect on the gendered variety of Jewish experience before or instead of its resolution of a set of formal (theo)logical problems whose framing is itself gendered."[58]

A Voice Calls out in the Desert: God's Role in the Covenant

It perhaps goes without saying that these theologians do not see God as a puppet master, controlling history from above. Some see God as a mystery, concealed from human understanding. Others see God as the source of goodness or morality, while others see God in the small details of life, such as in human relationship or moments of awe. All see God as integral to the Jewish people's and humanity's continued existence even if for some, God presence is more distant.

Baeck

Though Baeck was a rationalist, meaning that he argued the universe and God could be comprehended by the human mind, he also argued that there are aspects of God that were

[58] Raphael, p. 109

unknowable. God resides in what Baeck termed 'the mystery.' Meyer cites Baeck's description of the mystery, that "[in the Jewish faith], the mystery designates that which lies beyond inquiry, that which belongs to God and not to human beings, that of which one can have no more than a notion."[59] Therefore, human beings cannot know precisely what God's role is in the Covenant or how God is present in the world. However, Baeck does say that people can understand God's role in relation to the human task. According Baeck, God's role is to command: "The law assumes its meaning because it is the revelation of the Eternal, the word of the One God. Its power and permanence rise out of the mystery. For that reason, every commandment is inseparably united with the utterance: 'I am He-Who-Is thy God.' Only with the presentation of this utterance does the totality speak to us."[60]

According to Baeck, God speaks to people through God's commandments. Through those commandments, God makes it people's responsibility to do God's will on Earth. In Baeck's words, "The law comes from God, but with each and every hour it becomes the task of man."[61]

Even though God is shrouded in mystery, there is one thing that human beings can know — how human beings must respond to God. Meyer outlines Baeck's logic:

> Although Baeck relegated creation of the world to the realm of mystery… the goal that revelation set before humanity was clear: the establishment of God's reign on earth. This was the true response to the revelation of God's "Thou shalt," which was not an imperative transmitted only at Sinai but a commandment heard down through the ages.[62]

For Baeck that commandment was synonymous with morality, not halakhah: "Nature and morality thus share *one* origin, *one* root; they emerge out of the One. Together they are the

[59] Meyer, p. 67, quoting *Das Wesen des Judentums* (1926 ed.), in Werke 1: 77–78.
[60] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 22
[61] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 20
[62] Meyer, pp. 69-70

Covenant, the law of the One God."[63] For Baeck, the justification for moral action was not solely its impact on the welfare of human beings. Morality was imperative because it came from God: "Everything proceeds from the One God; everything returns to the One God…It is precisely this theocentricity which allows monotheism to achieve its character and its completeness."[64] Therefore, a system of ethical action without recognition that those ethics stemmed from God was insufficient.[65] Perhaps, for Baeck, that is why Germany, a pre-war paragon of ethical philosophy (including the philosophy of Christian Wolff, Immanuel Kant, Martin, Heidegger, etc.) was able descend so far into corruption. Following in the Cohenian Neo-Kantian tradition, Baeck argued that human beings had the potential to create a world redeemed through ethical action, but he thought they could only do so if they realized that their ethics was based on Divine command. Without God, without the Covenant, ethics are fungible, easily contorted or dismissed or used as justification for the worst actions.

Borowitz

Unlike Baeck, Borowitz articulated that the Holocaust disproved the modernist assertion that human beings could redeem the world on their own. He argued for the need to bring God back into the equation, especially after the Holocaust. Seeking God as a partner would give human beings "direction, worth, hope, and, in failure, the possibility of repair."[66] Unfortunately, Borowitz was not explicit about the form this partnership could take and it is unclear how exactly he envisioned this partnership functioning. It could be that the partnership with God resembles the human acceptance of a moral order ordained by God, such as that articulated by Baeck, that

[63] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 20, emphasis original
[64] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 23
[65] Meyer, p. 202
[66] Borowitz, p. 169

would negate moral relativism and excuses for treating groups of people as having different levels of human worth, as happened in the Holocaust.

However, in light of liberal modernity, Borowitz did not believe that God's commandment could be binding unless individual Jews, out of their own free will, decided to take on the burden of God's commandment. Therefore, God's role in the Covenant is that God is what gives the 'self' value and free will. It is out of a person's God-given worth and free will that he/she can then choose to be in Covenant. This is a Kantian position.

According to Borowitz, "The self gains its inestimable worth neither by the self-evident nature of its quality nor our willing it, but by being covenanted to God." Here is how Borowitz described this process in detail:

> Only God sets the order of creation and God alone has ultimate authority in all that follows. Moreover, being good, God cares about human beings and the quality of their action. God wills that singly and collectively they sanctify their lives by their deeds, manifest God's goodness in their character and direct their freedom by God's behests. Therefore, the supreme, unique God of the universe makes a covenant with humankind, all humankind…God creates beings who are free enough to say "No" to the One who made them. Then, apparently because of this distinctive power, God summons these creatures into an alliance of mutual responsibility…a Covenant with a special people to save the unique creatures from their obduracy and to realize the divine rule on earth.[67]

God's role is to enable individual 'selves' to choose to be in relationship with God, but in some sense God also convinces them that they are responsible to do so. How does God convince individuals that they have a duty to be in Covenant? Borowitz posited that revelation, which occurs in moments of transcendence usually born of relationship, engenders a sense of duty:

> What, then, does God "reveal" if not a detailed teaching that legend says has been kept in Heaven since before creation? God now makes known just what we make known in a relationship: self or, more familiarly, presence. God may be "right here," but we remain unaware of it. Revelation begins in our awareness but could not transpire if God did not also "come forth to meet us" and enter into personal intimacy with us.[68]

[67] Borowitz, p. 228
[68] Borowitz, p. 274

However, even though he argued that we can connect to these immanent manifestations of God, he contended that God must also have transcendent elements in order to command: "I believe God is immanent and that this conditions the tone of Jewish religious life. But when God becomes virtually only what can be identified on the human level, then we have an imbalance that demands correction. The critical issue is the authorization of duty: a merely immanent God cannot command for it has no status greater than anything else in nature."[69]

Borowitz aligned with Heschel when he stated that a transcendent God makes human beings less central and more realistic about human potential:

> All these theories of transcendence, whether rationalistic or nonrational, leave us with a more realistic view of human potentiality than that of humanistic modem Judaism. Restoring a significant independence and qualitative over-againstness to God frees us of the false optimism of belief in human perfectibility without taking away a strong sense of our being commanded to improve the world.[70]

Borowitz pointed out the shortcomings of Baeck's view that human beings can redeem the world on their own that the Holocaust exposed. However, though he argued for an increased role for God, the role for God that he put forth is not sufficiently clear to fully supplant Baeck's position. His role for God and human beings is too circular to make sense of what he really thought God should do in a renewed Covenant. Baeck wrote that God is the source of morality, and that human beings must do the work of bringing moral order to the world. Borowitz stated that God gives human beings free will to choose whether or not to do God's will, and that God inspires them to do it. If all God does is give human beings choice and inspiration, that sounds strikingly similar to Baeck's God, who does not act in the world Gods self. Therefore, while Borowitz did identify problems with a person-centered worldview, he did not provide a convincing alternative.

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[69] Borowitz, p. 91
[70] Borowitz, p. 107

Heschel

For reasons not entirely clear to people, according to Heschel, God hides God's face, obscuring God's presence from human beings. The Holocaust is a key example. On the other hand, Heschel argued that God is a God of pathos, in that God desperately yearns to be present in the lives of the human beings that God loves. Even though God's face is hidden, God still communicates in a way people can understand:

> There are times when He goes out to meet us, and there moments when He hides His face from us…Man may pray to God equally at all places, but God does not speak to man equally at all times. Sinai does not happen every day, and prophecy is not a perpetual process…And yet this does not mean that God is utterly silent in our age…There are many ways and many levels on which the will of God communicates itself to man."[71]

God still speaks to humanity, yet not always with the same intensity or accessibility. Even if God is striving to be heard, human beings must actively listen and let God's presence in. In Heschel's words, "The ultimate meaning of God's ways is not invalidated because of man's incapacity to comprehend it; nor is our anguish silenced because of the certainty that somewhere in the recesses of God an answer abides."[72] Therefore, revelation is "a moment"—a rare moment— "in which God succeeded in reaching man."[73]

Revelation, the phenomenon in which God strives to enter the lives of human beings and human beings welcome God's presence, is precisely the role that God plays in the Covenant. God reveals God's self to humankind. In revealing God's self, God shows human beings how they must act, how to respond to God. God makes people responsible to do God's will:

> "Man is responsible for His deeds, and God is responsible for man's responsibility. He who is a life-giver must be a lawgiver. He shares in our responsibility. He is waiting to enter our deeds through our loyalty to His law. He may become a partner to our deeds. God and man have a task in common as well as a common and mutual responsibility… What is at stake is the meaning of God's creation, not only the meaning of man's existence. Religion is not a concern for man alone but a plea of God and a claim of man,

[71] Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* p.129
[72] Heschel, *A Passion for Truth*, p. 293, quoted in Held, p. 174
[73] Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* p.184

> God's expectation and man's aspiration. It is not an effort solely for the sake of man. Religion spells a task within the world of man, but it sends go far beyond."[74]

For Heschel, God's role in the Covenant is to show people what they must do. Yet the things they must do are not solely for their own sake: God God's self depends on them. This idea echoes Baeck's notion of God's role in the Covenant. Baeck contended that God reveals the commandments to people, generating a responsibility to act morally. Whether or not people follow the commandments determines whether or not God is made manifest in history. For Heschel, God is even more desperate for reciprocation, since Heschel's God of pathos deeply yearns to be in the world and to be seen and loved by humanity. For Baeck, God's motivations are shrouded in mystery. Yet whereas for Baeck, God cannot enter the world other than through human actions, Heschel insists that whether or not people sense God's presence in their lives, God is working wonders for them always. Reflecting a very traditional theological position, Heschel argued, "The Rabbis remarked: It is not written here: Who *did* wonders, but Who *does* wonders…He did and still does wonders for us in every generation…every day miracles such as those that occurred at the Exodus come upon man; every day he experiences redemption, like those who went forth from Egypt; every day he is fed at the breasts of his mother."[75] Even if people do not always notice, God is always working wonders. God is never far from people's lives. Yet Heschel's God of pathos deeply hopes that people will recognize those wonders and find awe in them.

Raphael

Raphael's God is a relational God whose role is to be ever-present with people, in the midst of their joy and their pain. She describes this dynamic:

> Within the logic of the model of God I am proposing it is not meaningful to ask why God did not protect us at that time because it is not the nature or function of God to be reduced

[74] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 286-287
[75] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp. 49-50

> to that of a fortification against particular suffering. God is not a supernatural arsenal. Rather, it should be asked how we could and can protect God's presence as it is this which makes it possible to know God in the other and for God to know God-self in creation.[76]

Accordingly, Jews have a necessary role to play in allowing that God to be present among them.

Noting that she is building upon the embodied theology of Michael Wyschogrod, Raphael contends that since God enters the world through human bodies, God's power is limited by human *hesed* towards one another. She writes, "where God is among us as an assembly of suffering bodies, God's power, therefore, is limited by the conditions of embodied finitude and, God being wholly good, is manifest in the exercise of the beneficent power of *hesed* or human love and kindness within that assembly."[77] Raphael lays out the implications of a God who is manifest through human relationship:

> God's presence is produced in and by relation…The social transformation of human relationships by love and justice is the means by which God's judgment is manifest…Relational care, rather than quasi-military intervention or the miraculous suspension of the laws of cause and effect, is the sign and medium of God's power within the world.[78]

In a way, she parallels Baeck, since he too argued that God's return will be accomplished through individual human action, although his prescribed action is ethical, whereas Raphael's is relational.

Instead of a God who controls every outcome, Raphael uses the metaphor of God-as-mother to describe God's specific actions in Covenant:

> "God's maternal love for Israel can be figured by women as that countermand to wanton destruction which comes of bearing the increasing weight of their creation within their own bodies, suffering to bring it safely from the tight darkness into light and air, and knowing its absolute dependence on their protective presence. The face-to-face relation of the mother and new-born child is the first form and moment of presence. And more than that, feminist spirituality and the maternalist epistemology it commonly proposes

[76] Raphael, p. 156
[77] Raphael, p. 39
[78] Raphael, p. 41-42

> has insisted that the motherhood of God bespeaks a commonality between divine and female personality.[79]

By identifying God as a mother, Raphael re-envisions what we expect God to be. Raphael's God's love for Israel is as unbreakable as a mother who gestated and birthed a newborn in her own womb. God bears Israel's suffering as if were greater than God's own suffering, as any mother would. And instead of hiding Her face, God waits longingly at the precipice of her children's spirits, pleading for access to Her children so that She can offer Her presence and they don't have to suffer alone.

Raphael's mother-God is made manifest through *imitatio dei,* human actions of nurture and care that imitate God's own nurturing and loving attributes. She provides a Talmudic example that illustrates the Godliness embedded both the outcome of caring actions and in the caring manner in which they are undertaken:

> It is notable that the Talmud (Sukkah 49b) urges not only that we give charity but that we speak tenderly to those who receive it; this may mean more to them than the gift itself. Yet more significantly, the Talmud urges the imitation of God through compassion. Just as God clothes the naked, visits the sick, comforts mourners and buries the dead, so too should we (Sotah 14a). This Talmudic identification of God's activity with that of the carer is what should be affirmed of the women in the camps who were able to show compassion to those who were yet more broken than themselves, or who were as much objects of compassion to the tended other. **It was their acts that were presentative of God for all women, for the imitation of God brings God among us.**[80]

In her understanding of how God is made manifest in the world, Raphael's Mother-God is functionally similar to Mordecai Kaplan's. Kaplan envisions God as the "Power that makes for salvation,"[81] an inner source of strength and inspiration that allows people to act in an ethical and humane manner. Raphael parallels this idea when she writes, "As Mother-God this God is ethically interruptive, interceptive, protective and consoling. But this is not to attribute to God

[79] Raphael, p. 121
[80] Raphael, p. 115, emphasis added
[81] Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 104

any power other than that which is productive of power in others within the conditions of a given situation: here, the power to resist violence by the spectacle of love."[82]

For Raphael, God's power to nurture is a force that is embedded in the fabric of each person's soul. God is the power that makes it possible for people to care for one another through acts of love. Even though Raphael argues against a transcendent God who controls the outcomes of history, through this attribute of being embedded in the deeds between people, Raphael conceives of a God who can be manifest in history. She posits transcendence as the sum of all of God's immanent moments, arguing, "There is no reason why a God who can be likened to a mother is not also a God whose will and whose suffering the consequences of her own immanence is revealed in history."[83] God is revealed in history when human beings choose to treat each other people with relational acts of care.

On this point, Raphael strongly recalls Baeck, who stated that "However much human beings may suppose that they fashion the course of history, its outcome is determined by God."[84] Nevertheless, concludes Meyer, "it is human beings who take God's presence into their lives, who accept the moral task, and who nurture the hope of realizing the universal messianic goal."[85] For Baeck, it is the moral actions of human beings that reveal God's presence in history. For Raphael, that same result is brought about more specifically through nurturing acts.

How to Say *Hineini*: Jews 'Role in the Covenant

For the four theologians discussed in this essay, the Holocaust did not eliminate the Jewish people's responsibility toward God. Yet their depictions of those responsibilities are

[82] Raphael, p. 127
[83] Raphael, p. 111
[84] Baeck, "Die religiöse Erziehung" (1930), in *Werke* 4: 369, quoted in Meyer, p. 70
[85] Meyer, p. 70

shaped by the post-Holocaust reality in which many liberal Jews choose not to follow *mitzvot* in the traditional sense. In light of the Jewish people's ongoing secularization, they conceive of Jewish duty as a way of both connecting to and serving a non-omnipotent God.

Baeck

For Baeck, to be alive is to be commanded, or in his words, "Every 'Thou art' is also a 'Thou shalt.'" [86] What specifically are we as Jews commanded to do? According to Baeck, the Jew's commandment and role in the Covenant is to act morally. In his words, "The great commandment, which never ceases and never changes, this miracle…this miracle of morality makes him truly man."[87]

God is the source of the world and of morality, but it is up to human beings to bring morality into existence in the world: "Through the covenant, the law, the world exists. But within the world of man it exists first and only through him; he creates its existence."[88] The key role for the Jewish people is to bring God's morality into the world, for while God is the source of morality, God cannot make the world a moral place without human beings as partners. In Baeck's words, "Man waits for God, and God waits for man. The promise and the demand speak here, both in one: the grace of the commandment and the commandment of grace. Both are one in the One God. Around the One God there is the concealment. He does not reveal Himself, but He reveals the commandment and the grace."[89] God's power is therefore not unlimited but is subject to this constraint.

God's presence is manifest to the Jew through the (ethical) commandments that God revealed. By following the commandments, by bringing morality into the world, people come to

[86] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 15
[87] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 400
[88] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 21
[89] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 397

know God. Yet for Baeck, the Covenant cannot be fulfilled by individuals alone. It must be fulfilled communally, by the collective Jewish people, who each individually choose to obey God's command:

> "Not only the conduct of individual life, but the form of communal life in which the individual participates, is converted into a matter of personal decision. Man is born both into individual life and into communal life, without his willing it and without any action on his part. Man, with his own will and actions, with the self given to him by God, stands amidst both his lives and makes them into his task."[90]

The Jewish people remain a people only when individuals choose to carry on the commandments, or in Baeck's words, "By the commandment a people must truly become itself."[91] For Baeck, maintaining the commandments as part of a Jewish community places each individual in an eternal chain of tradition. He explained:

> "Individuals among this people often were and are predisposed to an inconstancy toward every impulse…they are inclined to empty dreams and imaginings approaching futility. But the people as a whole, ever since its growth, always preserved vast vision and patience…Because it gazed into distant vistas, it could endure and persevere in each day as it came…A permanency was promised here, this life from 'generation to generation.'"[92]

That eternal continuity occurs because of the people's continued devotion to itself and to God. As Baeck argued, "The greatness of this history lies in the fact that this people constantly returned to itself…This people returned to the commandment of God, in which the promise dwells. This people can only be a people in relationship to God. It can only find itself when it seeks God; when it is distant from God, it becomes estranged from itself."[93]

The continuity of the Jewish people was of the utmost importance to Baeck. Though he advocated universal ethics, Baeck would not have been content with secular ethics replacing

[90] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 8
[91] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 8
[92] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 151
[93] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 390

Judaism. He argued that the world needed the Jewish people to continue to exist in order to bring about a moral world. And further, such consciousness by the Jewish people of its destiny would lead to its perpetuation. In spite of the Holocaust's devastation, Baeck remained hopeful for a Jewish rebirth: "Above the ruins, descending to earth and ascending from it, coming as if from the Infinite and the Eternal, stretches the 'bow of the covenant,' a symbol of the law of the rebirth. The return will draw near."[94] Baeck's optimism was drawn from his faith, as he reflected, "Nevertheless, ever again a child is born; an individual, a promise of the likeness of the image of God; the great miracle within humanity is reborn…It always re-enters humanity in the sequence of the generations, and in history."[95] His emphasis on the hope that each new child brings is an expression of his theological framework, that each individual must bear the task of bringing God into the world.

Heschel

Even though Heschel imagined that God hid Godself, he insisted that human beings can still be in relationship with God: "The extreme hiddenness of God is a fact of constant awareness. Yet His concern, His guidance, His will, His commandment, are revealed to man and capable of being experienced by him."[96] For Heschel, the human task is to experience God, to bring God into the world. In one of his most famous quotes, Heschel wrote, "God is in search of man, in search of a home in the soul and deeds of man. God is not at home in our world. Our task is to hallow time, to enable Him to enter our moments, to be at home in our time, in what we do with time."[97] For Heschel, the way to bring God into the world is by being open to the awe-inducing world that God has created. Such openness to awe will lead to recognition of God.

[94] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 156
[95] Baeck, *This People Israel*, p. 394
[96] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 66
[97] Heschel, "On Prayer," p. 73

He claimed that part of being a Jew is cultivating "the profound and perpetual awareness of the wonder of being."[98] For Jews, "Awe precedes faith; it is at the root of faith. We must grow in awe in order to reach faith. We must be guided by awe to be worthy of faith. Awe rather than faith is the cardinal attitude of the religious Jew."[99] Therefore, the first part of duty towards God is cultivating what Heschel called 'radical amazement;' for Heschel "wonder or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious man's attitude toward history and nature."[100] Yet recognizing the wonder of God's world was only the first step of Jewish duty. A Jew must stop not stop with feelings of wonder, but "must keep alive the sense of wonder through deeds of wonder."[101] In other words, wonder must lead to action. Heschel taught that it was through both wonder and action that people encounter and serve God:

> There are three starting points of contemplation about God; three trails that lead to Him. The first is the way of sensing the presence of God in the world, in things; the second is the way of sensing His presence in the Bible; the third is the way of sensing His presence in sacred deeds. These three ways correspond in our tradition to the main aspects of religious existence: worship, learning, and action. The three are one, and we must go all three ways to reach the one destination. For this is what Israel discovered: the God of nature is the God of history, and the way to know Him is to do His will.[102]

Because feeling and understanding awe is insufficient, Heschel insisted that "a Jew is asked to take *a leap of action* rather than a *leap of thought*" [103] Human action should arise out of human concern for other people, just as Heschel's God of pathos is deeply concerned for humanity. Reflecting a Hasidic ethos, for Heschel, as Held explains, "Part of our task as Jews is to imitate God's sensitivity and care — To turn fully to God is thus also to become crucially like God."[104]

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[98] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 48
[99] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 77
[100] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 45
[101] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 349
[102] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 31
[103] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 283, emphasis original
[104] Held, p. 227

The Jews' task is to prepare the world "in what we do with time," in other words, through actions mirroring the Divine pathos, so that God may "enter our moments" and find "a home in the soul and deeds of man."[105]

When Jews make space for God to "enter our moments," our actions take on a cosmic meaning beyond what we can sense in the present. As for Baeck, when we engage in Covenantal action, we link ourselves to all the generations of Jews who came before and who will follow. In Heschel's words, "The meaning of history is to be a sanctuary in time, and every one of us has his part in the great ritual. The ultimate meaning of human deeds is not restricted to the life of him who does these deeds and to the particular moment in which they occur."[106]

Like Baeck and Borowitz, Heschel insisted that part of the Covenant with God is the cultivation and perpetuation of the Jewish people. He argued, "Israel is a spiritual order in which the human and the ultimate, the natural and the holy enter a lasting covenant, in which kinship with God is not an aspiration but a reality of destiny….Abandoning Israel, we desert God."[107] Consonant with Borowitz, we serve God through individual action, but those actions have collective meaning for the Jewish people. Like for Baeck, Jews link themselves to every other generation by serving God, since in Covenant "we act both as individuals and as the community of Israel. All generations are present, as it were, in every moment."[108]

While Heschel kept the traditional *mitzvot* and viewed the *mitzvot* as a means to bringing holiness into our lives and God into our world, he admitted that the Jews' task was not to do *mitzvot* for their own sake. They served a broader and deeper function:

> Jewish existence is not only the adherence to particular doctrines and observances, but primarily the living in the spiritual order of the Jewish people…It is neither an experience

[105] Heschel, "On Prayer," p. 73
[106] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 423
[107] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 423
[108] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 423-424

> nor a creed, neither the possession of psychic traits nor the acceptance of a theological doctrine, but the living in a holy dimension, in a spiritual order…What we do as individuals is a trivial episode, what we attain as Israel causes us to grow into the infinite.[109]

For Heschel, that is the task: That is why Jews cultivate awe and what drives them to act for the sake of the other. That is why Jews insist on perpetuating the Jewish people. Binding themselves as a people in Covenant binds each Jew to the infinitude of being, uniting the God and our world together as one.

Borowitz

Borowitz viewed Jewish action as an essential part of the Covenantal relationship. However, it is difficult to tease out exactly which actions he thought were necessary, since his insistence on individual autonomy led him to the conclusion that communally-imposed specific actions (i.e. *mitzvot*) were not binding unless the individual found them personally meaningful:

> Because I know myself to be related to God as part of the people of Israel's historic Covenant with God, I can be true to myself only as I, in my specific individuality, am true to God, to other Jews, to the Jewish tradition, and to the Jewish messianic dream. And while that truth is found more in the doing than in the thinking, it is by reflection on what constitutes true Jewish doing that Jews in every age have kept themselves alive to their responsibility as partners in the Covenant.[110]

Though he was not specific about Jews' actions in Covenant, he was emphatic that each Jew has a duty in Covenant, and that each person develops that a sense of duty towards God through relational encounters, which reveal God. In Borowitz's words, "identifying revelation with genuine relationship renders communication with God an ongoing, everyday occurrence…[This revelation] will do what Jews have always known revelation to do: direct us to our duty as participants in the Covenant."[111] While this resembles Heschel's notion of awe and wonder, it differs in a key way. Heschel articulated that there is a loneliness inherent to being alive even

[109] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 423
[110] Borowitz, p. 299
[111] Borowitz, p. 283

though God is always there, if hidden; people can overcome their loneliness by realizing that God is always present. For Borowitz, who channels Buber, God was at less of a distance from the human experience. God could be accessed anytime and at any moment through relationship, even though Borowitz admitted that for himself, these experiences of Divinity were fleeting and rare.

Borowitz stressed that the "autonomy of the self must somehow be a foundation of any contemporary theory of Jewish duty"[112] because "despite the others with whom it is so intimately intertwined-God and the Jewish people, present, past, and future—it is as a single soul in its full individuality that the Jewish self exists in Covenant."[113] Even so, Borowitz insisted that there are three partners in the Covenant - God, *Am Yisrael*, and the autonomous Jewish individual.[114] The self is the starting point, but it is insufficient on its own. Instead, it is through the autonomous self that we can choose to recognize our people's historic relationship with God:

> I believe it necessary to carry out this polemical argument [against the secular empowerment of the self] not because I wish to deny that the self has any significance but only to indicate that on its human own it cannot command the dignity and worth we have found it to possess. When, however, we understand all human selves to be covenanted to God we can understand their inalienable dignity and the ground of the responsibility that properly makes them human. And Jewish selves relate to God not simply as one of humankind but as part of the people of Israel's historic, ongoing Covenant relationship with God.[115]

Yet because individual freedom of choice is foundational for Borowitz, the collective Jewish people cannot establish rules that are binding for every individual. Each person must choose how to respond to his/her own duty. On the other hand, even though he is scant on specifics, Borowitz's Covenant does include an ethical imperative. Since individuals can connect to the

[112] Borowitz, p. 293
[113] Borowitz, p. 293
[114] Borowitz, p. 226
[115] Borowitz, p. 265

transcendent God through relationship, Jews must treat every person as if they could someday encounter them as a Buberian Thou, as if each person bears potential to be the relational partner yielding a transcendent experience of Divinity. He argued:

> Perhaps I can extend my case for personalism by showing how its second-level application can provide one with an I-it ethical principle. Its equivalent of the Kantian categorical imperative may be put this way: To the extent that you can, treat everyone as if they had been or now might be a thou you have known in encounter and create forms of interacting with them that reflect and foster that kind of personhood.[116]

While lacking in specificity, Borowitz's mechanics for Jews in Covenant are as follows. A person encounters a notion of the transcendent God through true relationship. That experience engenders a sense of duty towards God. Recognizing that duty, the individual chooses to commit himself/herself to fulfilling that duty as part of the Jewish people and the people's historic Covenant with God. Then each individual must choose, based on what he/she finds meaningful, what actions he/she will undertake to fulfill their duty. However, part of this obligation must be ethical action toward other people, since each person reflects the Divine image and can potentially facilitate an experience of God.

Raphael

Like Heschel's God, Raphael's God is not entirely at home in this world. Not only can her God, to use Heschelian terminology, be 'exiled' from the world by human action, but her God can be damaged and broken by human evil towards one another. Therefore, the Jews' task in Covenant with God is the Luriainic Kabbalistic notion of *tikkun*, or repairing God. This is accomplished, again echoing Heschel, through actions that imitate God's own qualities of pathos - caring and nurturing relational acts towards other people.

She contends that the "the central moral *telos* of religious experience" is "the sense of God's will for the restoration of the human(e) to creation so that it is properly God's and not the

[116] Borowitz, p. 279

colony of other powers."[117] In other words, she argues that God's deepest desire is for human beings to restore the dignity of God's creatures who are suffering and being oppressed by other people. Because God is a like a mother who is deeply pained by the pain of Her children, mending broken human beings mends God. When human beings, who are made in the image of God, have their humanity reduced or nearly eliminated by the evil of others, as occurred in the Holocaust, redeeming or repairing their humanity redeems and repairs God. Such redemption can be achieved by treating other people relationally, in a way that recognizes and honors their humanity and thus their inherent divinity. Raphael explains how Jews accomplished this restoration in the Holocaust through their relational care for one another:

> "The sanctification of the world through the redemption and restoration of the divine image from the pit of holocaustal impurity is a revelation of God's face/presence that is also a revelation of the human face/presence because when humankind is truly human, God is known as God: the very essence of the eschaton."[118]

Therefore, Raphael bases her framework of the Jews' role in Covenant on the kabbalistic concept of *tikkun olam*, "the mending of the world, [or] the means by which Judaism can, in fact, offer conceptual resources by which redemption can be conceived on both the intra- and extra-historical planes."[119] Raphael explains how this process was manifested in the Holocaust:

> Where Auschwitz had broken God's heart, female good deeds (no less than male ones) were not only for the suffering other, but also for God so that, in their image, God's own wounds could heal. The theology of image, like the mystical theology of the redemptive gathering of the holy sparks, is a reciprocal or recursive one. In Auschwitz, women's humanity was completed in the restoration of God's image in their own face just as God's female face was restored and completed by taking on the suffering face of women. Perhaps God created humanity in her own image so as to bear some of its burdens.[120]

[117] Raphael, p. 135
[118] Raphael, p. 134
[119] Raphael, p. 135
[120] Raphael, p. 149

In Auschwitz, Raphael contends, "each relational act elevated the profaned spark of the divine image in the self and other and reunited that spark with God."[121] In elevating the power of individuals to make God's will manifest in the world through their actions, Raphael echoes Baeck. She writes, "What (post)modern Jews find above all congenial in kabbalism is its view of *tikkun* as a reconciliation, healing or completion in God above and in the world below which can be initiated by human agency."[122] In this way, her Covenant closely mirrors Heschel's. Both include elements of theurgy, the Jewish mystical notion that human action can impact God. For both Heschel and Raphael, God can be healed and brought into this world through the actions of human beings.

The essence of this Covenantal framework is that:

> "the turbulence, fragmentation and rupture of world and cosmos are a function of one another and…humanity has an active role to play in righting the wrongness. The redemption of the world and God from evil is brought about when Jews consecrate the world by their goodness, if necessary by descending into the very abyss of impurity to rescue the hidden or imprisoned sparks, and, by their elevation, return them to God."[123]

Therefore, acknowledging the irony, Raphael claims that this *tikkun* occurred in Auschwitz. Although counterintuitive, nurturing mothering acts in the Holocaust actually served to redeem and repair God. In Auschwitz, "in women's demonstration of the humane, in their acts of separative resistance to the engulfing profane, God's presence, as that of the exiled *Shekhinah*, mends and cleans the world of Auschwitz and takes Israel out to meet its future."[124]

Today, nurturing relational acts are not the only way to redeem God. Raphael contends that feminist theology itself offers a *tikkun* since it uncovers previously obscured qualities of God. Raphael writes that patriarchal conceptions of God actually cause "human alienation from

[121] Raphael, p. 148
[122] Raphael, p. 146
[123] Raphael, p. 147
[124] Raphael, p. 12-13

the divine, where what is worshipped in its place is a masculine numen; an idol whose name and will is perceived and articulated by the projections of the patriarchal interest."[125] Patriarchal conceptions of God obscure God's true and holistic nature in that they restrict the ability to perceive and appreciate God's non-male attributes. She argues that Jewish feminist theology, such as her own which recognizes the divinity in women's mothering and nurturing actions, can actually reveal more of God's true essence: "When Jewry comes to honour women's divine image, obscured as it has been by the sin of patriarchy, it is engaged in a restorative struggle – the very process of *tikkun*."[126] Therefore, the Jews' task is not only to bring God into the world and repair God's brokenness through acts of nurture and care for other human beings. Jews also must recognize repair their own broken conceptions of God by recognizing the divinity in femininity, and in the nature of all beings created in God's image.

Mitzvah? Halakhah? Ethics?

Mitzvot, the system of commandments originating in both the written and the oral law, are generally understood as the Jewish people's role in fulfilling their end of the Covenant.[127] Yet, as discussed in the preceding sections, not all Covenant theologies consider the traditional *mitzvot* as integral or binding in the post-Holocaust context. Some of the theologians view the *mitzvot* as Jews' central obligation in the Covenant, while some reinterpret and re-prioritize the specifics of the obligations. Others change the definition of what it means to be 'commanded.'

Though Baeck personally observed the traditional *mitzvot*, he did not think of all of them as divine commandments. Instead, following Abraham Geiger and Hermann Cohen, he considered only those related to the "moral sphere" as divine commandments. [128] Baeck

[125] Raphael, p. 149
[126] Raphael, p. 149
[127] A classic example of this is expressed in Deuteronomy 30:16-20. If the Israelites obey God's commandments, God will bless them, and if they disobey God's commandments, God will curse them
[128] Meyer, p. 13

considered the *mitzvot* that were not moral in nature to be purely ceremonial, although that is not to say that he did not consider them important. On the contrary, he posited that the ceremonial *mitzvot* were essential for making Jews "'conscious of the sublime command of the Divine Law,' by which Baeck meant the moral law."[129] This reflected the way that many early Reform theologians conceived of Judaism, namely as a religion of ethical monotheism. Therefore, following the *mitzvot* is still the Jews' central task in Covenant, yet their scope is limited to the moral arena.

On the other hand, of all the theologians covered in this paper, Heschel placed the most emphasis on the importance of the traditional *mitzvot*. He argued that God cared deeply as to whether or not people fulfill them, and that they serve as the primary connection between a Jewish person and God. Heschel contended that God is full of pathos and has a deep desire to be recognized and loved by human beings. For him, "A mitsvah, unlike the concept of duty, is not anonymous and impersonal. To do a mitsvah is to give an answer to His will, to respond to what He expects of us. This is why an act of mitsvah is preceded by a prayer: 'Blessed be Thou…'"[130] For Heschel, *mitzvot* are ways of addressing God directly, such that they satisfy God's deep desire to be in relationship with us.

Furthermore, if the Jews' task is to make God at home in the world, then the *mitzvot* have sacred and cosmic significance for Jews because they are their unique way of bringing God into the world. Heschel insisted, "Sacred acts, mitsvot, do not only imitate; they represent the Divine. The mitsvot are of the essence of God, more than worldly ways of complying with His will."[131] *Mitzvot* bring God's essence into the world.

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[129] Meyer, p. 201
[130] Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 378
[131] Heschel, p. 288-289

Borowitz contended that *mitzvot* were necessary and that an individual's experience of God will lead him/her to feel duty-bound to fulfill them: "In response [to our encounter with Divinity], we determine what we now must do, exercising our autonomy not as isolates but keeping faith with the God to whom we have been and to whom we yearn to remain close."[132] Traditional *mitzvot* were not necessarily binding on individuals, because God gave individuals the autonomy to choose their own path: "We must decide on the mix of modernity and tradition we believe to be faithful to what God demands of us. That, more than any other issue, will determine what we mean by Torah and how we envision its substance."[133] For Borowitz, every person must take on only the commandments they personally feel obligated to uphold.

While Raphael does not take an explicit position on the role of *mitzvot* in Covenant, she does emphasize that Jews bring God into the world through relational and nurturing acts. Since to her, those acts are a means of *imitatio dei*, of imitating God, it is reasonable to assume that the *mitzvot* that encourage such acts would be the most important in her Covenantal system.

Because of its exclusion of women's perspectives, Raphael explicitly critiques Rabbinic Judaism's patriarchal perspective that shaped the halakhic system that governs how traditional *mitzvot* are practiced. Yet that does not mean she would oppose a system of *mitzvot* that reflects the aspects of God that her feminist theology emphasizes and reveals. Such a system might resemble Baeck's notion of *mitzvot*, which view only the moral commandments as binding. Like Baeck, Raphael's system of *mitzvot* would surely emphasize that, "the moral, spiritual and material cleanness of relationships are the ethical and aesthetic means by which the conditions of God's presence are preserved."[134]

[132] Borowitz, p. 274
[133] Borowitz, p. 253
[134] Raphael, p. 61-62

Conclusion

I was interested in exploring this topic because I wanted to explore the implications of Covenant with a non-supernatural God. If God does not intervene in the world supernaturally, then how could the Jewish people expect God to hold up God's end of the Covenantal bargain? If I don't expect God to reciprocate, then what benefit or purpose is there in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Covenant?

The Holocaust provides the starkest example in modern times for testing and exploring these questions. Even though I don't believe in a supernatural God, I wasn't ready to reject theism, as Rubenstein did. I therefore wanted to study thinkers who had experienced or reflected deeply on the Holocaust, yet who had come away with faith in God's existence and who retained a sense of Covenantal duty in spite of God's seeming unresponsiveness.

Leo Baeck, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Eugene Borowitz, and Melissa Raphael all responded to the Holocaust's devastation by articulating a God who does not control all of history. None assert that human beings have the ability to understand God's true nature in its entirety. Raphael, in particular, does not try to give an all-encompassing description of God's essence, and instead focuses on articulating discrete qualities of God. However, all affirm God and the Jewish people's role in Covenant—despite our inability to understand exactly why or what God wants. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, they assert that Covenant is needed to perpetuate the Jewish people, to repair the world, and even to redeem God.

I found many of their arguments and images compelling. Heschel's notion of a hidden God may not be logically consistent, or at the very least is beyond human comprehension, since it does not make sense that a God of pathos would choose to turn away from humanity in the midst of such suffering. Yet, his notion that we can make God manifest in the world through

radical amazement and awareness gives expression to the many ineffable moments of awe I have been blessed to experience over the years. I appreciate that in Heschel's notion of Covenant, such moments of awe are not the end goal. We don't serve God simply by reaching nirvana. Instead, those moments lead to action, whether by serving God directly through *mitzvot* or by serving God indirectly by serving other people, God's beloved creation. That is one reason why Baeck is so compelling, in that he articulated a service to God whose mechanics are all about serving other people.

At the same time, these thinkers have reminded me that Covenant also involves perpetuating the Jewish people. I was inspired and moved by Baeck and Heschel's depictions of Covenant as a means for connecting a Jew in any age to Jews in the past and the future. I now see Covenant as a path towards eternity for my people.

While each thinker has changed and deepened my own sense of God and Covenant, taken together, they do not clearly specify a path forward for Jews in the contemporary world. How do we live in Covenant with our uncertainty about God's reciprocation and about our own specific purpose?

Perhaps, what I most appreciate about these thinkers is their humility. For the most part, they do not attempt to systematically explain the entirety of God. They convey what they know to be true about limited aspects of God's essence. Baeck expressed that God gives us morality. Raphael posits that God is simply present for us always, and that physical or historical intervention is not within Her nature. They helped me realize that one of my tasks in Covenant is not to be able to explain everything about God. Instead, they suggest, I simply might strive to reveal and appreciate aspects and elements of God that have been heretofore overlooked. Raphael's Covenant theology embodies this perfectly, and it is her thought that has most

impacted my own. For Raphael, our role in Covenant is to repair God – to let God enter our world through relational acts, but also by revealing aspects of God that were previously unseen. As she points out, the classical Jewish conceptions of God are patriarchal in nature, and their images of God as all-powerful cannot be reconciled with a catastrophe such as the Holocaust. Her feminist theology reveals nurturing and loving aspects of God that the patriarchal viewpoint had obscured.

While I cannot hope to know the entirety of God's essence, I can strive to find holiness in all things. Just as people do not feel complete unless they are fully 'seen,' I can help to complete and repair God when I notice new aspects of Divinity in this world. For me, this typically occurs in nature, when I can see firsthand the interconnection and interdependence of all things.

I know God exists in many more places and forms that remain yet undiscovered or unappreciated. I perceive my task as a Jew is to be open to a God who is always there, waiting to be let in, if only I can cultivate my awareness. In doing so, I know I have the power to repair myself, the Jewish people, and God. Wherever and whatever God is, this task is my duty, and in it I feel connected to the chain of Jewish eternity. In the words of Rabbi Tarfon, לא עליך המלאכה לגמר, ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה – It is not incumbent upon you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it.[135]

[135] *Mishnah Avot* 2:16

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