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Digest: "You Have Not Spoken Rightly About Me As Did My Servant Job": Contemporary Jewish Theodicies and How They Answer the Challenge of Job

This thesis examines the nature and depth of the challenge that Job makes to both accepted Biblical and rabbinic theodicies, and some of the contemporary attempts to wrestle with the outcome. We hold that Job has most often been misinterpreted, even *dis*-interpreted in order to control or suppress the strength of its challenge to religious orthodoxies. We look to recover Job as a harbinger of both eternal and modern consciousness of the true nature of humankind's relationship to God, and even of the nature we ascribe to God.

We examine several modern thinkers who, each in their own way, look to resolve the problem of a divine justice lacking in the world. These thinkers include: Sigmund Freud, Mordecai Kaplan, Martin Buber, Emil Fackenheim, Eugene Borowitz, and Alvin Reines. Each of these thinkers has varying success with the problem. They make compromises in attempting to reach resolution, trading off either logical coherence or God as a source of psychological comfort in order to create a comprehensive system.

Finally we look to official expressions of Reform theology in both liturgy and platforms in an effort to evaluate their coherence, their accounting for the problem of theodicy as elucidated by Job, and the institutional biases that they reflect. Further problems are created in this area because of the difficulty of establishing any type of official theology in a liberal and diverse movement.

We conclude that the formation of official statements of theology for Reform is almost an impossibility. The best that we can look for is a system that allows one who has encountered the complaint of Job through one's own experience to be free to reach the conclusions that are dictated by one's own reason and evidentiary demands.

"You Have Not Spoken Rightly About Me As Did My Servant Job": Contemporary Jewish Theodicies and How They Answer the Challenge of Job

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Referees, Professor Nili Fox, Professor Alvin Reines

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination
Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
2001

Contents

Introduction

With a flicker as of a light going up, the casements of a window there suddenly flew open; a human figure, faint and insubstantial at that distance and that height, leaned abruptly far forward and stretched both arms still farther. Who was it? A friend? A good man? Someone who sympathized? Someone who wanted to help? Was it one person only? Or was it mankind? Was help at hand? Were there arguments in his favor that had been overlooked?...Where was the Judge whom he had never seen? Where was the High Court, to which he had never penetrated? He raised his hands and spread out all his fingers.[1]

- Franz Kafka

With these last, desperate thoughts, Joseph K., the protagonist of Kafka's *The Trial* goes without resistance to his own execution, convicted of a crime of which he was never charged, by a Court that operated in a manner and with an authority completely unrelated to the power of human society or in consonance with its body of law. Despite K.'s ignorance of the charge against him, and all of his protestations of innocence, the power of the Court was irresistible and inevitable. From the time of his arrest to the moment of his death, K. progresses from indignation, to anger, to despair, and finally to a resignation to his fate. He dies, in his own final estimation, "Like a dog!"[2]

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[1]Franz Kafka, The Trial, Willa and Edwin Muir, trans. (New York: Knopf, 1986), p.286

[2]Ad loc.

The landscape of nightmare and pathetic humor that Kafka draws within the pages of *The Trial* is simultaneously repellent and fascinating, as we are invited to watch what we perceive to be a good man march towards his own fate as a condemned criminal, without ever quite grasping the true nature of his situation. Kafka, a Czech Jew, wrote a novel that is steeped in imagery so reminiscent of Job that it opens a door with which we may begin our investigation.

Thomas Mann, when writing of Kafka,[3] had a great appreciation for the concerns that Kafka wrestled with. Mann saw him to be a person that was singularly focused in his life and in his writing on finding a way to live a good life before God. In Mann's estimation, Kafka struggled with his simultaneous feeling of being remote from God and his desire to be close. This struggle with the divine dominates *The Trial,* which Mann saw as dealing, "explicitly with the problem of divine justice."[4]

The power of Kafka's story and the concerns of the protagonist neatly align with those of Job in many places, with the notable difference of Jobs's boldness in place of K.'s frequent timidity. This difference may be explained by the setting for Kafka's tale. In the early years of the twentieth century, Kafka had already identified the problem of the loss of the individual as a meaningful being in modern, bureaucratic society. Timidity and paralysis in the face of social norms and institutions are frequent traits of Kafka's characters, and no less so in Joseph K. In the case of *The Trial*, K. is paralyzed before the

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[3]Thomas Mann, "Homage." The Castle, Willa and Edwin Muir, trans. (New York: Knopf, 1981), pp. ix-xvii

[4]Mann, p. xvii

proceedings of a Court which operates without his consent and without even his knowledge of the rules which they follow. With the plight of Job in our minds, we can see an additional facet to K.'s helplessness, which is the inability of people to get out from under a theological system which calls for the agency of God in human affairs at the same time it maintains a doctrine of divine inscrutability.

The closest that K. ever comes to reaching an understanding of his position is in conversation with a priest who is a servant of the Court. K. vests a certain degree of hope that the priest, although he is tied to the process, can offer him a way,

> not toward some influential manipulation of the case,[5] but toward a circumvention of it altogether, a mode of living completely outside the jurisdiction of the Court. The possibility must exist, K. had of late given much thought to it.[6]

K. has come to have a certainty that the transcendent and inscrutable power of the Court must be in some way dependent upon the individual who submits to it. He could not see the way to break free of the process himself, but K. invests his hope that the priest, the keeper and servant of transcendent values, will know how, at least in theory, one might break away from the oppressive reach and unknowable intent of the Court's judgment. K. approaches the priest for help, only to be told that he was deluding himself as to the real nature of the Court. The priest proceeds to give K. a parable that has the power to

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[5]The word in German, Prozeß, has two meanings that can be rendered into English. It is both "trial" and "process," an ambiguity which Kafka employs throughout the book. The priest is depicted as belonging to the Court, yet also with the possible knowledge of how to escape the trial/process that was unfolding for K. Here the translator chose to use "case" to represent Prozeß.

[6]Kafka, The Trial, p. 266

describe both his current situation and to break him free of the vicious system to which he is subject.

The parable describes a man who comes from the country to gain admittance to the Law.[7] When he arrives, he finds there is an open door, and next to it a rather fearsome doorkeeper, who tells the man that he is unable to enter at that time. When asked, the doorkeeper says that it is possible he would gain admittance at some point in the future. The man looks through the door, studies what lies inside, and the doorkeeper dares him to enter, despite having told the man that he may not enter. To further confuse and intimidate him, the doorkeeper says that even if he should enter the door, that there are successive doorways to enter if one wants to come before the Law. Each of these doors has a doorkeeper more fearsome than the last. Faced with this decision, the man, who thought that the Law should be accessible to all, decides to wait at the door until he is allowed to enter. He waits, first for days and then for years, always asking if he may enter, and always being told no. He gives everything he has to bribe the doorkeeper, who accepts it only so the man will feel that he has tried everything. Slowly the man ages and begins his descent to death. At first he would cry out loud about his fate, but as he grows older he only mumbles to himself, now seeing only the doorkeeper as a barrier to reaching the Law. Bent and broken, knowing he is near the end, the man can only think of one question that he would like answered before he dies. How is it that in all of these years no one else came and tried to enter the door and come before the Law? The doorkeeper

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[7] A point of language: "Law" in German is Gesetz. It is interesting to note that Kafka, as a Jew with some religious education, must have known that a Jewish reader would be well aware of the second meaning of Gesetz, "Torah."

answers, "No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended for you. I am now going to shut it."[8]

In addition to foreshadowing K.'s pathetic end, the priest's parable is overloaded with symbolism that must be examined to derive a useful meaning. When a simple person comes to appear "before the Law," one must wonder how a person can achieve physical proximity to an abstract idea. The Law represents more than a simple book of rules. Law is a repository of societal ideals, instructions, highest ethical values, and perhaps God's justice itself. It is, in an immanent form, the idealization of justice. How is it that a simpleton who thought the Law is available to all could be denied justice? Here we see the intervention of the physicalities constructed around an ideal that can at times obscure it. The Law, the ideal of justice, is manifest in the barriers that it erects for both society and the individual: courts, policemen, universities, and certainly religious institutions. If one is to approach the Law, it is necessarily mediated by one or more of its physical repositories. The man from the country, like K., was never able to break through these manifestations, and in the end concluded that they were impenetrable, or were synonymous with the very ideal that they cloaked.

The man's failure to enter the door is no mystery. He was waiting for a permission which could never be granted. For a servant, or adherent, to one of the institutions that surround and guard the Law to give admittance to any who came would be to demonstrate the often flimsy nature of those very institutions. Without the physical manifestations there might be no ideal at all, so it would seem logical that all who are

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[8]Kafka, The Trial, p.269

servants of the Law would protect in order to maintain their own positions. This explains why the doorkeeper would never grant the man entrance, but what of the man's failure to simply go through the door in contravention of the doorkeeper?

The man is the victim of his own fear, to be certain, but his fear is fed by a less than admirable trait. The man predicates all of his behavior on the reliability of the doorkeeper's report of what lies inside. He never looks for himself, or even attempts to enter the door to see what the doorman would do. This reliance on report and not on his own experience seals his fate. Word of mouth, tradition, and a speaker's official status cannot be allowed to substitute for actual evidence, yet this is what the man does. He accepts the answers he is given, and bemoans the fate that these answers have left him: a lifetime of uncertainty as to the Law's nature, while never once doubting the reality of its power.

The closing of this parable lends it a tremendous urgency. Only as the man is dying and no longer able to alter his fate does he hear the information that might have emboldened him while he still had strength. The door was open only for him, and now that he was all but dead it would have to be shut. The parable here contains an imperative not only to K. but to all who would seek entrance to confront all that the Law represents. Every person, at a time unique to the individual, will encounter circumstances in life that cause him or her to seek the Law and demand the justice that is thought to exist behind its institutions. This instant in time, when one is ready to challenge assumptions and the reliability of others' reports of what the Law is truly like, is the door that opens only for a unique individual. When that time comes, the choice is in the hands of every person as

surely as it was in the hands of the man from the country. One can wait at the gate, accepting what the servants of the Law say, or one can stride through the door, with all of the terrifying risks that accompany such a move, and attempt to confront the Law for oneself.

The concerns of Kafka do not belong to his locale or his time alone. The desire to know what lies past the doorkeeper stretches back throughout human history. We now turn to our examination of one man who strode boldly through his own door, caring not for his own life but only that he might approach the Law and demand justice. That man is named Job.

Chapter 1: Job the Pious, Job the Blasphemous

Oh Earth! Do not conceal my blood!
And may my cry not find a place to rest! (Job 16:18)[1]

When we examine the book of Job, a casual survey of scholarly materials selected from either recent scholarship or medieval and ancient sources, reveals a striking lack of agreement in any area of that scholarship. Despite millennia of effort, no theory as to the provenance of the work has gained complete dominance. The time in which the book of Job was written, the origin of the story itself, and the national affiliation of the author are all points of contention. Perhaps most troubling is the disagreement as to what the book, in the condition in which we have received it, actually says and signifies. The text itself has been subject to attempts at revision, clarification, and variant translations, as well as theological manipulations that have if anything, multiplied areas of disagreement. In the absence of conclusive archeological or paleographic evidence, the best that we can currently hope for is to establish a somewhat more narrow range of possibilities in which to physically and temporally locate the work. As far as the book's actual meaning, it is our contention that much progress can be made in the task of clarifying our understanding, some of which we will undertake in these pages. As it is best to begin at the beginning, we will first turn our attention to the origins of the book of Job.

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[1]Raymond P. Scheindlin, The Book of Job, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998)
All selections from Job used in this work are taken from Scheindlin unless otherwise indicated.

I. Ancient Parallels and Mythic Forbears

One of the hallmarks of Biblical criticism has been to increase our understanding of canonical texts by comparing them to works of ancient Near Eastern literature that are similar in style, content, and theme. The overall effect of scholarship has been to shed light on some of the obscurities in our Biblical texts, as well as to contextualize them in a greater social, artistic, and theological framework. The book of Job is no exception to this critical effort. In the introduction to his translation of Job[2], Marvin Pope assembles for the purposes of comparison several ancient Near Eastern works that coincide with Job either in thematic content or in literary style. The unique literary format of the book Job, namely the nesting of a poetic dialogue within a mythological frame rendered in prose, leaves Job without any exact parallels, however there is an abundant record of literature that either presages or reflects contemporary literary styles and concerns common to Job.

The basic story of Job, that of a good man who is stripped of all of his wealth, his family, and his physical well-being and is then eventually restored to his former state also appears in the Ugaritic epic of Keret[3] which has been dated to approximately 1600 B.C.E. In the unfortunately incomplete Ugaritic epic, Keret is a king whose family is killed and who himself is afflicted with deadly disease. At death's door he recovers, resumes his rule and with the providential assistance of the god El gets another wife and new children. According to Pope, the missing sections of the epic make it impossible to determine the

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[2]Marvin Pope, Job, v. 15 of Anchor Bible, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), pp xv-lxxxix

[3]James B. Pritchard, ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), p. 142ff

theological or philosophical concerns of the poem but the overall arc of the story bears great resemblance to our biblical book of Job, and may in fact be an offshoot of an earlier literary tradition.

Among the Mesopotamian sources that have been uncovered is a Babylonian text titled "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom,"[4] dated between 1600-1150 B.C.E. In the poem the hero, like the Job of our poetic dialogues, perceives himself to abandoned by providence, and as a result is suffering all manner of tribulations: physical ailments, social rejection and familial alienation. Throughout he maintains his innocence and his piety, laying the blame for his predicament at the feet of capricious gods who send evil despite the faithfulness of their worshipers. For all of the striking similarity to Job, key differences remain between the two works. On a formal level, unlike the discourse of Job, "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom" is written as an extended monologue. Perhaps more importantly in the content of the works the Babylonian poem reflects a preference to make oblique reference to the gods at fault, where Job is notable for his direct accusation of God.

Also among the Mesopotamian works is a text known as the "Babylonian Theodicy,"[5] which has been dated to approximately 1000 B.C.E. The work takes the form of a dialogue between a sufferer who has lived a life of misery, and a friend who attempts to substantiate divine justice before him. The dialogue is notable for its employment of argumentation very similar that in Job. The sufferer argues that he has always sought to

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[4]Pritchard, p.434ff

[5]Ibid., p. 601ff

cling to the correct path and behave as the gods would have him, yet it has done no good. Through simple observation he can see that the judgments of the gods are based upon no discernible system, and therefore it is useless to even try to influence them through pious behavior. The friend argues in return that no one can understand how the gods extend providential care to human beings, but to deny such divine justice is blasphemous. In the end repentance is the only hope open to the sufferer. By the end of the dialogue the sufferer is successful in persuading the friend of his viewpoint, and strangely there is no refutation or resolution offered in conclusion. There is no restoration of the sufferer and the charges that he makes against the gods are not refuted. To the extent that the poetic dialogue at the center of Job can be understood to contain the true meaning of the book, the parallel to the Babylonian Theodicy is striking. It results in a pessimistic and somewhat inconclusive stance, rejecting speculation about unobservable events in the inner life of the gods in favor of empirical evidence derived from real life. As with Job, it represents a brave departure from the theological party line of its time.

An earlier antecedent to Job is the Egyptian "Dispute over Suicide,"[6] which has been dated to the end of the third millennium B.C.E. Remarkably the work takes the same form as Job, with prose at the beginning and end separated by poetic exchanges. The Dispute is between a man and his soul over whether or not death is preferable to the state of suffering that is life. The soul is leaning towards the value of continued life, but is convinced by the argument that there is neither justice nor love in the world, and therefore death is preferable. The body sees death as an escape from the pain and sorrow inextricably bound with earthly

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[6]Ibid., p. 405ff

existence in an unjust world. In death the Egyptian writer foresaw a transformation to a god-like state. This favorable view of death, while understandable in light of the Egyptian valuation of the afterlife, is at variance with Job, whose author placed no positive value on death other than as the end of undeserved suffering, a place where even God could no longer torment him. "In no time, I'll be lying in the earth; when You come looking for me, I'll be gone."(Job 7:21)

II. Dating the Work

With knowledge of even the above parallels which do not comprise an exhaustive catalogue, it is clear that Job, while it may stand alone in the Bible, was not an isolated literary or theological work. Such thoughts were present and embodied in literature in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Ugarit. It is no wonder that they found expression in Hebrew literature as well. As to precisely when Job was written, theories abound yet provide no clear answer. When one attempts to date the composition of Job, it can be based upon theological content, literary form, philology, speculation as to its authorship, and even the reading of the work as an historical allegory. Great scholarly efforts have firmly fixed the composition of Job between the nineteenth and third centuries B.C.E. The range of dating reflects the use of the different methodologies.

A. Rabbinic Approaches

The rabbis posit a range of dates for the composition of Job from the time of Abraham to the time of Moses. A discussion over the authorship of the books of the Bible in the

Babylonian Talmud Baba Bathra 14a-16b contains an extensive exchange on the origins and nature of Job. At first, Rabbi Levi ben Laḥma credits the authorship of Job to Moses, which would place it at the time of the exodus from Egypt, approximately the thirteenth century. Interestingly, such a dating would push back the time in which the character of Job lived to a period either before or concurrent with the giving of the Torah, which would in turn muddy the theological waters through which one would have to consider Job's actions and words. More importantly, it also elevates the significance of the book by emphasizing its antiquity, placing it in the same foundational generation of literature as the Pentateuch as well as saying that its words flowed from the pen of Israel's greatest prophet. The ascription of such a provenance most likely reflects a deep rabbinic concern with Job and the canonized status of such a theologically explosive work.

Of course the simple assertion that Job lived either immediately before or during the lifetime of Moses is not allowed to stand unchallenged in the passage in Baba Bathra. Given the rabbis' exhaustive knowledge of scripture, they are able to employ a scriptural parallel built off of the unusual use of the word "אֶפוֹ" in Job 19:23 to mean "now." The word is used the same way in the mouth of Moses in Exodus 33:16, albeit in a variant spelling. The same use of a word in an unusual fashion would indicate that Moses, who spoke in such a way would also write in such a way and therefore must be the author of Job. The trouble arises from the many parallels from other Biblical books that are then brought to show that Job could in fact have lived at different times. "אֶפוֹ" meaning "now" also occurs in Genesis 27:33 and 43:11 in the mouths of Isaac and Jacob. A parallel that is too common cannot prove a definitive point. In order to overcome this difficulty, two different parallels are brought out

to settle the point, the more salient of which follows. The continuation of Job 19:23 expresses his wish that his words would be inscribed "וְיֻחָקוּ" in a book. This could only refer to Moses the law-giver and inscriber who is the "מְחֹקֵק" as described in Deuteronomy 33:11.

Further evidence is adduced by the rabbis as to when Job lived. Using a similar technique of textual parallels and exegetical expansion, they find more possibilities for when Job lived. In the name of Rabbi Eliezer the tradition is taught that Job lived at the time of the Judges in Israel. How is this proved? By the mention in Job 27:12 that the friends speak in an altogether vain and foolish manner, Eliezer makes a connection to the opening words of Ruth that her story was set "in the days of judging of the Judges," which is to say a time of widespread vanity. This is contested by Rabbi Joshua ben Korḥa who finds that the characterization of Job's daughters in the epilogue, "there were no women as beautiful as Job's daughters in all the land,"(Job 42:15) to be proof that he lived at the time of Ahasuerus who searched out all the beautiful women inn the land. Without such a search being conducted, the Bible could not make the assertion that it does about Job's daughters. Further parallels show that Job lived at the time of kingdom of Sheba or at the time of the Chaldeans according to their respective appearances as divine agents in the prologue of Job, sent to kill his servants and seize his pack animals.

The last possibility given by the rabbis for Job's lifetime is that he lived contemporaneously with Abraham. This placement for Job is based upon a midrashic interpolation in the prologue of the book. When God asks the Satan before the collected heavenly court where he has been, the Satan replies that he has been, "roving and roaming

about the world."(Job 1:7) God then asks the Satan if he has taken notice of His upright servant Job. The order of the dialogue seems to make no sense. Why would God jump to the subject of Job without any antecedent in the conversation? The rabbis are sensitive to this, and fill in the missing parts of the Satan's speech. In the Talmudic version, the Satan tells God that he has walked the entire world and found Abraham to be the exemplary human being, not even complaining when he had to purchase a grave for Sarah in the very land that he had been promised as his own. It is this glowing report that prompts God to respond with his doubt that the Satan had seen Job in his journey. This explanation provides not only a possible date for Job, but also a view as to his merit being on par with that of Abraham, an idea which we will later return to.

B. Modern Approaches

In his substantial contribution to Job scholarship, *The Dimensions of Job*, Nahum Glatzer offers a fairly narrow estimate for the time of the book's composition. His survey of scholarship as of 1969 led him to think that, "half a millennium (from the fifth to the first pre-Christian centuries) is allowed as the probable range of its origin."[7] This dating comes out firmly for a post-exilic composition, but stretches beyond the approximate date of the Septuagint, where Job makes an appearance. If one uses the end of the third century as an a date for the Septuagint, whose translation included Job, then the date for Job's composition can be narrowed even further. However, problems do arise with such a narrow dating. Internal evidence from the Bible allows us to push back the composition at

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[7]Nahum Glatzer, The Dimensions of Job, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p.1

least one century. In Ezekiel 14:14, reference is made to Job along with Noah and Daniel as exemplars of virtue in times past. Ezekiel is thought to be a product of the Babylonian exile (approximately 586-516 B.C.E.), and his reference to Job, although it could conceivably be to a legendary character, certainly muddies the waters for those who wish precision in a late dating.

If one looks for evidence internal to Job itself in an attempt to set a date of composition, the effort will likely be frustrated. As Raymond Scheindlin notes in his recent translation of Job, the writer took pains to avoid using language or content that would lend itself to an easy identification within Israelite history or geography. At no point do the characters or author make reference to:

> "The people of Israel, its covenant with God, its Torah, or its history of kingdom (c.1000-587 B.C.), exile (587 B.C.), and restoration (538 B.C.) to the land of Judea."[8]

Furthermore the author seems to have made a conscious choice in avoiding reference to Israelite mythology and even God language. The use of the Israelite personal name for God, Yahweh, is restricted to the prose frame of the book, not to be used in the mouths of the characters who prefer pre-Israelite appellations such as El, Shaddai, and Eloah. The repeated references to non-Israelite mythology in the poetic work further remove the book from any mind of recognizably Israelite milieu. The book is effectively floating in a bubble, without the references to external events needed to set a definitive date. As stated above, the setting outside of history and outside of Israel was most likely an intentional move by the author. Such a setting provides a safe backdrop to make the rather radical

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[8]Scheindlin, p.11

statements contained in the book of Job, perhaps covering the author and the book from charges of heresy. Radical statements are not as threatening when in the mouth of a gentile.

In his commentary on Job,[9] Solomon Freehoff attempts to date the book by utilizing the beliefs present in the work to indicate the period of its origin. He recognizes that the setting itself, a pre-urban pastoral scene reminiscent of the lives of the patriarchs, reflects more the skill of the writer than any greater truth about the actual time the book was composed. Freehoff identifies two key beliefs that can be used to determine a date for the book. The first is the overall thematic concern of Job, that of the justice of the individual's fate. Early Israelite and particularly prophetic thought was concerned with collective destiny. Under this understanding of Divine justice, judgment and its dividend would be on the basis of the entire people's merit. This idea finds repeated expression in the words of the prophets who lived prior to the destruction of the first temple, perhaps best typified by Amos. The shift away from collective retribution can be seen at the time of the exile, and even in some of the words of Jeremiah who lived at the time of the destruction of the temple. It would seem that the catastrophe of exile and destruction caused a reassessment of what was a practical view of God's justice. If it could not be explained in collective terms, then individual fates would have to be understood. The second belief that functions as a time marker for Freehoff is the afterlife. The fate of all flesh in the pre-exilic period was thought to be Sheol. There is no mention of belief in an afterlife as a benefit for a life well lived, or anything we would really recognize as life after

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[9]Solomon Freehoff, The Book of Job; a commentary, (New York: UAHC Press, 1958)

death until well into the Second Commonwealth. The author of Job has no belief in an afterlife, and in fact rails against the fact that once a person is dead, his goodness or wickedness is in fact irrelevant as all men end up as dirt in the ground.[10] By triangulating from these two fixed points of belief, Freehoff comes to the conclusion that Job must have been written around 400 B.C.E., give or take a few years. Such a calculation is certainly a valid approach, but as Freehoff admits, there is no way to pinpoint a shift in prevailing beliefs. Further complicating the picture is the possibility that the author may have created a theological framework for the purposes of enhancing his mythological setting, without those beliefs being congruous with his own. Any reader of the book will readily see that the author did his best to passionately argue disparate viewpoints, so it is reasonable to suppose that his protagonist's mind set may not be in perfect harmony with his own, but rather was an imaginative elaboration of a mythical type as is commonplace in Greek tragedy.

Another approach taken in trying to date the book of Job, which is pursued by David Wolfers, is to read the book as an historical allegory.[11] Relying upon his own translation of the text, Wolfers finds the text of Job to be a description of the national destruction of Israel that took place from the end of the eighth through the beginning of the sixth centuries. Drawing parallels to other Biblical texts such as Isaiah and Deuteronomy, Wolfers finds similar language employed to describe both the punishment

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[10]vide Job 7:9-10, 10:18-22, 14:10-22, 21:23-34

[11]David Wolfers, Job : A Universal Drama, Jewish Bible Quarterly, vol 21 (Jan 1993), pp. 13-23 and (April 1993), pp. 80-89

for Israel's covenantal disloyalty and the calamities that befall Job. Wolfers finds a rough historical time line in place as well. The death of Job's ten children in the prologue represents the destruction of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom. God's instruction to Satan to afflict Job yet spare his life parallels the invasion of Senacherib that decimated Judah yet left Jerusalem secure. When Job makes his complaint against God, he should be seen as a personification of Israel, bemoaning the national catastrophe that has unfolded. In fact, Wolfers takes his analogy so far as to say that,

> "...Job, who in the dialogue is no longer the *symbol* of the Jewish people, but their representative and leader, Hezekiah himself perhaps..."[12]

Keeping in this mode, Wolfers thinks that Job's description of God as arbitrarily punishing those who cling to Him parallels Amos's prophecy (Amos 3:2) that God extends great punishment upon Israel because only they have been known intimately by God and are thus fit to have their actions judged. The restoration of the last chapter is nothing other than the restoration of Judah after the exile in Babylonia. Leaving Wolfers's theological analysis of the book aside, his translation of Job as an analogy for destruction and restoration would place the work's likely composition in the fifth century. While such a dating may have merit, it cannot be on the basis of Wolfers's work. While it is an intriguing notion to solve the problems posed by Job by changing their significance from the personal to the national realm, Wolfers stands alone in his scholarship, relying on his own translation to support his own conclusions, both of which are at a radical divergence

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[12]Wolfers, p. 21

from those of other scholars.

The philological evidence from Job is somewhat inconclusive in producing a date for the work. Job contains more *hapax legomena* (singularly occurring words) and infrequently used words than any other book of the Bible. This concentration of unusual usage makes it difficult to date the book by the vocabulary used in its writing. Job is written in classical Hebrew, but this is no evidence for a date in and of itself. A skilled writer could have employed an earlier idiom in order to lend his work an air of antiquity and authority. The God language is also of little help. The prose prologue and epilogue are consistent in their use of the later Judaean Yahweh as God's moniker, but this usage cannot be the basis to set a date or place because the poetic dialogues reject Yahweh in favor of El and Shaddai. These names reflect an earlier, even patriarchic usage, although again they can be as easily ascribed to authorial skill as to the age of the text.

As Pope points out, there are further difficulties than word choice. "The problems of Job, however, are not simply lexical, but also morphological and syntactic. The language is ostensibly Hebrew, but with so many peculiarities that some scholars have wondered whether it might not be influenced by some other Semitic dialect."[13] The scholarly speculation has ranged so far as to wonder if Job was in fact translated from another language, with both Babylonian Aramaic and Arabic having been suggested as possibilities. While there is no firm evidence to suggest that such a translation was made, these two languages do provide help in understanding the morphology of the Hebrew in Job. The unusual spellings verbal forms can often be decoded by reading them as Aramaic

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[13]Pope, p. xlviii

in origin. As for the unusual and singular words, Arabic, as the Semitic language with the broadest vocabulary, has often used as a source for probable meaning. In all the philological evidence in Job does not yield a firm date for its composition, but the presence of the large quantity of Aramaisms points to the probability of a post-exilic time frame.

As we have seen, there is no definitive answer as to when Job was composed, but we can put some boundaries in place as regards dating. The book's inclusion in the Septuagint gives us a cutoff of approximately 200 B.C.E. at one end. As far the earlier possible date goes, despite the rather creative musings of the rabbis, a more fruitful approach lies in using the content of the book to determine its time of origin. Freehoff makes a credible argument that the shift in concern from collective to personal theodicy forms another boundary for the book's age. While it is true that there are numerous theological antecedents to Job in other bodies of ancient Near Eastern literature, there is no evidence that these concerns had entered into Israelite thought at the earlier date of the foreign literature. A focus on personal theodicy does not appear in the body of Israelite literature until the sixth century. It is then reasonable to conclude that Job was composed between the sixth and third centuries B.C.E., recognizing that any more precise dating is somewhat suspect for lack of hard evidence. Barring any new archaeological finds, we will have to content ourselves with this range of a few centuries.

III. What Does the Book of Job Say?

When one undertakes to summarize or explain what the book of Job actually says, a challenge immediately emerges to separate the responses of various traditions to Job

from the actual text. As Nahum Glatzer points out in his survey of the traditional literature,[14] the normative responses to the Job in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam seem to be at odds with what is actually contained in the book. Various writers and exegetes over the centuries have been more comfortable responding to the legend of Job and to the majesty of the poetry, which has led to a persistent view of Job as typifying the values of faith, patience, and resignation to suffering. This history leads us to paraphrase Mark Twain's definition of a great book as being one that everybody talks about but nobody has read. This definition seems to function among the books of the Bible nowhere more so than with Job. Describing the tendencies of both Christian and Jewish interpreters of Job Glatzer says,

> Both sides, again with exceptions, avoided a direct confrontation with the text of the book, in order not to be exposed (or not to expose the pious reader) to the bluntness of the hero's speeches and the shattering self-revelation of God in His answer to Job. The heritage of faith and the belief in a benevolent, providential deity were too strong to admit a position so greatly at variance with the excepted basic religious attitudes. The book's frame, the folk tale, offered an escape clause. By concentrating on the story of the patient, *saintly* Job, the reader can absorb the shock of the drama of the impatient, *rebellious* hero; he could " interpret" the latter in the light of the former.[15]

As Glatzer notes, the operating principle in dealing with the content of Job has been, albeit intentional or not, one of misdirection. The faith of the interpreters of Job prevented them from reading what was actually on the page. The defense mechanism of such traditional readings is remarkable. Job, who more than any other character in the Bible

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[14]Glatzer, pp. 11-34

[15]Glatzer, p. 11

plainly and strongly questions God's justice and motivations is remade into a paragon of faith and undiminished fortitude in the face of a completely undeserved suffering. Attempts to find a fatal flaw in Job to somehow justify his suffering and bring his experience back in line with a theodicy promulgated elsewhere in the Bible are sure to meet with failure. The writer of the story has seen to this by making clear in the prologue that Job is truly being tested on the basis of a wager between God and the Satan. As Gilbert Murray so aptly describes it the book begins with,

> ...a sort of a bet upon the part of Satan that, though Job while prosperous is perfectly pious, he can be made to "curse God" if sufficiently tormented and afflicted. The Almighty enters into the spirit of this atrocious proposal and every kind of torment is showered upon the innocent man. It is like torturing your faithful dog to see if you can make him bite you.[16]

As horrible as the scene set by the prologue[17] is, it contains the essence of the mythological Job; a good man is put through hell for no particular reason. The distaste on the part of the reader for the character of God would in no way be eased unless the test never took place. Whether it is for the purposes of a wager or arises from a need to test a human being to determine if in fact he is still human with all of the attendant weaknesses, such behavior by God is sure to be questioned by the reader. By granting the reader access to the doings in the heavenly court, the author assures that his audience is on the side of Job, filled with the same doubts as to the fairness of God's administration of the world. This creates the space for the poetic dialogue that gives voice to Job's true take on the role that God plays in the world, which are at great variance with the portrayal of Job

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[16]Gilbert Murray, "Beyond Good and Evil", appearing in Glatzer, p. 195

[17]Chapters 1 and 2 of Job, which are rendered in prose.

as stoic and steadfast in the acceptance of his suffering. This is reinforced by the final description of Job in the prologue. After his children and servants have been murdered, his livestock stolen, and his very body afflicted with painful boils, we read that, "in spite of everything, Job did not sin with his lips."(Job 2:10) The legendary Job did not complain aloud, although he was sure of his innocence.

The poetic dialogue that occupies most of the book is filled with the sort of curses and accusations that are an anathema to the legendary Job. It is almost humorous that the first words we hear from Job to break his seven silent days of mourning, a period in which he is deemed praiseworthy because he would not "curse God and die,"(Job 2:9) are to speak a curse on the day he was born and on the fact that he drew breath. His preference for the state he was in prior to birth is by extension an implicit curse of God. By Job's own admission it is God that gives life and takes life. In some sense, the greatest curse that Job could level against God is to curse his own existence. In doing so, he states that the life that God has ordained is futile and senseless, a sojourn of suffering that is worse than undifferentiated blackness that preceded and will follow it.

Job's friends, who came to comfort him, instead add to the burden of his grief by arguing with him that there must be a reason why he is being tormented so. If only he would admit his own sinfulness and fall on God's mercy, his suffering would be at an end. God maintains a system of perfect retribution, which means that Job's condition is in itself evidence of wrongdoing. Eliphaz goes so far as to say that, "Man was born to trouble as sparks dart to the sky."(Job 5:7) All men are tainted by their very existence; there is no person who can stand in innocence before God. It is only through faith in God's mercy

that a man can survive.

Bildad offers the opinion that God administers perfect justice and cannot be accused of any irregularities in judgment. He backs up this claim by appealing to the wisdom of the elders who have witnessed the doings in the world for a long time and are qualified to make such a pronouncement. Furthermore, any suffering by the innocent will be overshadowed by future reward if only he begs mercy from God. As Bildad unequivocally states:

> No, God would not reject the innocent,
> would not take hold of a bad man's hand.
> He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
> fill your lips with cries of joy.
> Your foe will yet be clothed in shame,
> the wicked untented.(Job 8:20-22)

While Bildad's words and stance seem to be an assertion of traditional piety, they contain a very dangerous element. The reader can never set aside the insider information conferred by the prologue. We know who Job's enemy is, who has acceded to the murder of his children and servants, impoverished him and afflicted him with disease. To say that Job's foe "will yet be clothed in shame" can be construed as a statement against the very God it seeks to uphold.

Zophar, the third of Job's "comforters" speaks to the inscrutability of God. Man's position is one of little knowledge and hopelessly subjective judgment. Job's insistence on his own innocence serves only as proof of the fact that he does not have true understanding of his own position and the nature of his guilt before God, the righteous judge. Any claim that Job makes to innocence is based upon deficient knowledge.

Parroting Job's wish for a fair hearing before God and an enumeration of his offenses, Zophar tell Job that he, too would hope for God to speak in order to demonstrate his point.

> But how I wish the god would speak,
> open his lips when you are present,
> tell you some of wisdom's mysteries
> (for wisdom comes wrapped up in double folds)–
> then you would realize:
> The god is punishing you less than you deserve.(Job11:5-6)

As we see, it is Zophar's considered opinion that Job is suffering less than he should, given the terrible nature of his deeds. Of course by claiming knowledge of Job's inner life and presuming the presence of some terrible misdeeds to warrant his current situation, Zophar falls into the same pattern of behavior that he decries in Job: pretending to knowledge greater than he could possibly have. By issuing judgment on Job, he takes on the role that by his own words only God can fill.

As for Job, his complaint is direct and unwavering. He shares the opinion of his friends that God exists, is all-powerful, and responsible for every occurrence in the world. Nothing happens that is unknown to God. He also shares the belief that to pretend to have knowledge of God's motivations is impossible. He is fully cognizant of the limitations of human perception and that these limits make it impossible for a creature of flesh and blood to exercise any judgement over human behavior. There are too many variables for the human mind to comprehend and weigh in the scales of justice. Job's complaint lies in the discordance between the clear rules for human behavior as received from God and preserved by society, and the utter lack of divine justice according to God's

own rules. Job and his friends have the same beliefs about God's powers. Job, and the reader who is privy to the prologue, differ only in the appraisal of how well they are applied.

> Look, there is nothing my eye hasn't seen,
> nothing my ear hasn't heard and taken in,
> nothing that you know that I do not.
> I am no less a man than you.
> But I would speak to Shaddai,
> I want to dispute with El.(Job13:1-3)

Job argues that given the lack of knowledge common to all of the assembled, the friends must be reaching a false conclusion as to his sinfulness. Rather than give in to his friends' bullying, he maintains his own innocence according the rules as he understood them, and instead wishes to know why God would seek him out for punishment, given his adherence to the rules. In short, Job and his friends agree that:

1. There is only one God, who is omniscient and omnipotent.
2. There is no occurrence in either nature or the lives of men, either good or evil, that cannot be traced to God.
3. God presides over a system of retributive justice.
4. There are clear rules governing human behavior.
5. God's decisions regarding reward and punishment are inscrutable.

While none of the characters in Job differ from the above propositions, there is still disagreement between them, an argument centered on a sixth proposition, that God is just

and that this justice is evident in the world. The gathered friends argue vehemently that this is so, that any apparent injustice is only that, an apparent mistake that if only we had knowledge equal to God would be shown to be no mistake at all. As Matitiahu Tsevat forcefully argues, "Job and his friends hold fast to this belief because they have been raised in it; *because man has an intense need to abide by it.*"[18] As Tsevat says, the implication of this need to believe is that reality is altered to fit the belief. When the facts don't match up with the belief, it is undoubtedly the facts that will suffer. Job stakes out some different territory, to say the least. Despite the disclaimer of the prologue that Job "did not sin with his lips," Job's complaint is an affront to the image of God that was and is commonly held. In many ways Job puts forth that God, who exercises control over the universe, is *not* just. In the ninth chapter Job first speaks of God's unchallenged might, but then continues in one of his most damning descriptions of God's capriciousness.

> Even if I were right, I could not answer,
> could only plead with my opponent;
> and if I summoned Him, and if He answered me,
> I doubt that He would listen to my voice,
> since He crushes me for just a hair,
> And bruises me for nothing,
> will not let me catch my breath,
> feeds me full of poison.
> Is it power? He is mighty!
> Is it judgment? Who can summon Him?
> I may be righteous, but my mouth convicts me;
> innocent, yet it makes me seem corrupt.
> I *am* good.
> I do not know myself.
> I hate my life.
> It is all one; and so I say,

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[18]Matitiahu Tsevat, The Meaning of the Book of Job, Hebrew Union College Annual, 37 (1966), p.97, emphasis added

> "The good and the guilty He destroys alike."
> If some scourge brings sudden death,
> He mocks the guiltless for their melting hearts;
> some land falls under a tyrant's sway –
> He veils its judges' faces;
> if not He, then who?(Job 9:15-24)

Job sees the master of the universe as remarkably unconcerned with the feelings of his creations, content if they fall under a tyrant's control and satisfied to hunt them down and cause them pain for no reason apparent to the victim. There is no discernible pattern of retribution for those who have "suppressed the Holy One's commands."(Job 6:10) They flout the authority of God and still go happy to their graves where all men are equal. Neither do their descendants pay any price for the behavior of the wicked.[19] In 10:16-17 Job likens God to a lion who stalks him, maims him and then withdraws, pleased with himself for what he has accomplished. God spares Job's life only to maintain a source for fresh anger with him.

Job's only wish is for a chance to confront God in a manner that would allow him to make his case and force God to justify his own actions. This desire only adds to his pain because he knows that such a meeting is impossible. How could he possibly argue with God? Nevertheless Job receives part of what he wishes for which is a direct confrontation with God. In the closing chapters of the book, God makes an appearance, which given the previous dialogue, the reader might expect to resolve the problem of God's apparent injustice. Despite the grandeur of God's speech, it does not answer Job's challenge. Instead of explaining himself, God describes at great length the limitless nature

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[19]Job 21:6ff

of his power and knowledge, reaffirming the already agreed upon propositions concerning God's administration of the world. The overall effect of the theophany is only to make Job cower before God's might. God's answer is, in so many words, a query of his own; "Who are *you* to question *me*?" Faced with such a challenge, Job can say little but to acknowledge his own weakness before God. When prompted by God to speak, Job says,

> I see how little I am.
> I will not answer You.
> I am putting my hand to my lips.(Job 40:4)

This answer only infuriates God, who perceives Job's refusal to answer as a sullen challenge to his judgment and a condemnation of his actions. God is not satisfied until Job is humbled and makes a complete retraction of his words. The last words we hear from Job are these:

> I see that I spoke with no wisdom,
> of things beyond me I did not know.
>
> I knew You, but only by rumor;
> my eye has beheld You today.
> I retract. I even take comfort
> for dust and ashes.(Job 42:3, 5-6)

Having already lost his wealth, his social position, and his children, Job now loses his dignity. Job has been destroyed once again.

The epilogue is commonly known as Job's restoration, for in the final chapter of the book he once again is the beneficiary of God's good will, growing wealthy, regaining his status and having ten new children. Just as there is no justification given for Job's destruction, none is given for his restoration. What we do have is the curious statement by God to Eliphaz, repeated twice in one paragraph, that he and his friends, "have not

spoken rightly about me as did my servant Job."(Job 42:7, 8)

What was it that Job had stated correctly that his friends had not? They are all in agreement when it comes to acknowledging the extent of God's might and knowledge. If there were any lingering doubts, God's thundering appearance from the whirlwind would certainly have laid them to rest. The point upon which they differ is the crux of Job's complaint: he is innocent and undeserving of God's wrath. This means that there is no humanly discernible pattern in God's actions. We have no way of knowing who God will favor and who he will destroy. Righteousness does not seem to be any guarantee of a favorable outcome for any person. God metes out retributive justice, only we have no way of knowing what will give him offense. This is a rather remarkable conclusion to the book, which is perhaps the reason that God then makes Job wealthy again. Rather than leave the reader with God's confirmation that there is no way to know what to expect as a result of one's behavior, we are left with a vision of a generous and compassionate God who brings an end to Job's suffering and elevates his position. The reader, whose faith has been tried alongside that of Job, is left with some hope for comfort from God.

IV. The Rabbinic Response

The reaction of the rabbis to the book of Job is not surprising. The first response that concerns us is that of canonization. The inclusion of Job in the Septuagint reflects a fairly widespread acceptance of the work as having the status of a holy writing. Why this was so cannot be known with certainty, but it is reasonable to suppose that the tale of the righteous Job was well known and easily thought of as a part and parcel of Israel's literary

tradition. This familiarity coupled with the author's masterful use of poetry would guarantee the book a place in a pre-rabbinic, proto-canon. Why, however, it would have been included in the Biblical canon that was closed by the rabbis, who had the power to exclude the book, is cause for speculation. The content of the book, so greatly at odds with the rest of the Bible, exclusive of Ecclesiastes, would seem to be a huge impediment to its inclusion in the Bible. It may be that the book was so widely known that it could not have been excluded by the rabbis without raising suspicion of their motives, but there is another credible, and less sinister, possibility. The interpretive traditions that had grown up around Job may have been so much a part of the rabbinic mind set that the actual content of the book was no longer troubling. Furthermore, the inclusion of the book in the canon would provide a method of control over its understanding, a control that would have been impossible if the work fell outside of the canon. The rabbinic tradition was premised upon a legacy of orally transmitted understanding, without which one could not make an accurate reading of the sacred texts. If one accepted the authority of the rabbis, it meant accepting their received tradition of exegesis and interpretation as the only legitimate way to understand Torah.

Just as the inclusion of an openly erotic poem, Song of Songs, in the Bible meant reading it as an allegory about the love of God for Israel, the embracing of Job essentially defanged it. The open challenge to the prevalent beliefs about God are made subservient to rabbinic theology. Troubling argumentation in the text can be interpreted away from its plain meaning, and the protest against belief in universal retributive justice can be made to support the very system that it seeks to overthrow. Any reader who would approach Job

and attempt to read it as it is could be dismissed as a simpleton who is unaware of the text's true meaning.

The rabbi's exhibit a steady trend of either aggrandizing or denigrating the character of Job beyond those qualities named in the book. It may be that they drew on the folk tales that were then current in order to embellish his character, as well as having resource to midrashic traditions present within their own communities. In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Baba Bathra 15b-16b, many of the tales about Job are brought together in an extended discussion of his merits. These tales and comments about Job go so far as to describe him alternately as a prophet and a blasphemer. There is little in the way of middle ground when it comes to the character of Job.

The rabbis contend that Job was in fact a prophet who arose among the nations in order to speak primarily to those outside of Israel,[20] a subtle move which ensures a grand stature for Job as a man close to God, while at the same time distancing him and his inflammatory words from the body of the people Israel. Nothing about Job is allowed to stand for very long, and immediately after Job is granted the extra-Biblical status of a prophet, he is torn down as a deeply flawed person. The anonymous objection is raised that Job was a pious man who arose among the nations who lived only to receive earthly reward. When God made things difficult for him התחיל מחרף ומגדף, he began to *blaspheme and revile* God. In return, God doubles Job's earthly reward in order to deny him the world to come. Here we have a reading that is true to the textual source, that Job did indeed blaspheme and challenge God's actions, however its resolution is almost

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[20] b. Baba Bathra 15b

nonsensical. The rabbinic view that Job was denied the world to come doesn't fit with the text of Job's complaint. In the course of the dialogue he repeatedly denies any afterlife and wishes only for the grave as an end to his sufferings and a place beyond the reach of God. If Job had believed in a world to come, he could have taken comfort in the idea that the scales would be balanced in the next life. With such a belief, Job never would have had cause to argue with his friends in the first place! This rabbinic opinion, while it may be rooted in a received tradition, is seemingly unaware of, or unable to accept the stated reasons that Job is so deeply pained. A belief in an afterlife was so firmly rooted in the rabbinic tradition that they were unable to imagine that it was not an eternally held article of Jewish faith.

The passages in the Talmud that follow serve to fill out the exceptional character of Job. As was mentioned above, the rabbis see Job's righteousness as comparing favorably with Abraham, which is why God points him out to the Satan in the first place. Furthermore, after the binding of Isaac, the angel says to Abraham, "Now I know that you fear God,"(Genesis 22:12) while Job is described as being, "innocent, upright, and God-fearing, and kept himself apart from evil."(Job 1:1) Such a description, including more positive qualities than that of Abraham means that Job's righteousness was at least on the same level if not higher than that of the patriarch. R. Abba b. Samuel took this to mean that he was generous with his money when it came to his workmen.

The rabbis even attribute semi-miraculous qualities to Job. When the Satan said that God had "blessed everything he does,"(Job 1:10) this meant that if anyone that took a coin from Job was sure to find it a source of luck. That his "cattle had spread out all over

the land,"(Job 1:10) meant that they no longer followed the laws of nature. Where wolves would ordinarily victimize the flocks, Job's goats would kill the wolves. Job merited such a life of blessing, that R. Yoḥanan took the statement that Job's "cattle were plowing and the donkeys were grazing by their side,"(Job 1:14) to mean that seed was cast as the cattle plowed and immediately sprang up for the donkeys to eat. Job was getting a preview of the world to come, when crops would be ready on the same day they were planted. Rava further expands upon the goodness of Job, adding the claim that he was the friend of widows and orphans. He would improve the real estate of the childless for them and associate his name with unmarried widows that they might have an easier time finding a new husband.

Although Job's worthy attributes are exaggerated, there is also ample cause to point out his shortcomings. Rava, commenting upon the statement that Job did not sin with his lips, says that he did sin with his heart. When Job says that the earth's rule has been given over to the wicked and that God keeps the faces of its judges covered, this is sinful belief. His words seek to invalidate all of God's creation. Furthermore, Rava contends that Job, in declaring his own innocence, would render every person innocent. According to Rava, Job made the case that God creates all things including good and evil people. How can people be held accountable for their actions if they are simply following the nature given them by God? His friends responded that indeed God created everything, including an antidote to the evil impulse, namely the Torah. Rava also says that Job sinned in denying the resurrection of the dead, by saying that once a man is dead and has

left the earth for Sheol, he will never come up again.[21]

Rab singles out Job for three faults, for all of which he deserved to have dust put in his mouth. First, he puts himself on an equal footing with God by demanding that his case be heard before a neutral arbiter. Second, he is a blasphemer for the presumptuousness of arguing with God. It is as out of place as a servant contending with his master. Lastly Rab faults Job for gazing lustfully at his own wife, a fault which Abraham, with whom Job is often compared in the passage, did not possess.

There is an attempt to reinstate Job after so much criticism. In b. Baba Bathra16b, after an extended defense of God and a denigration of Job's characterization of himself as an enemy of God, Rava steps in with an excuse for Job. Quoting Elihu's words that "Job is not speaking from wisdom; his speeches make no sense,"(Job 34:35) Rava concludes that a valid lesson is to be had from this. A man cannot be made responsible for his thoughts and words at the time of his greatest distress and sorrow. This is to say that yes, Job sinned, but that he could not really help himself at the time.

All of the objections the rabbis of the Talmud make in the above passages are predicated upon Job being a rabbinic Jew. If not, there would be no sin in denying resurrection, claiming that the evil in people came from God, demanding a fair hearing before the Almighty, or even in denying the goodness of God's creation. The world view of the rabbis, their exegetical stance regarding the scriptures, and the theology that they hold leaves them doing much the same thing as Job's friends: conforming the facts before them to fit their existing beliefs.

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[21]vide Job 7:9

The medieval commentators faced the task of interpreting Job much further removed from the cultural and literary setting from which it arose. In addition, theology had grown more hardened over time, with a belief in the doctrine of retribution largely unchallenged. Despite a thousand years passing, the Diaspora belief that it was God's decree against Jews that had caused them to be expelled from the land of Israel was still accepted.

The medievals also had a sharp focus on the language of scripture, engaging in very close readings of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, seeking to wring every possible meaning and nuance out of the text by elucidating potentially conflicting, repetitive, or unclear meanings. In the case of Job, such a task is particularly demanding. The number of loan words, unusual syntax, and uncommonly used vocabulary consumes much of the commentators efforts. The sum total of these words also presents a difficulty, the same difficulty that the rabbis of the Talmud encountered, which is their plain meaning running contrary to the accepted belief of the day. They also had to contend with the legendary Job, long suffering and pious, who had been preserved in the popular conception alongside the actual book. While a commentator's position should presumably not be one of openly challenging the meaning of a text but rather to illuminate it, the commentary often serves to soften, and even undo the statements it seeks to clarify. We take as our representative of this trend, Rashi, the eleventh century progenitor of Biblical commentary.

Rashi does spend a great deal of his commentary on the most basic *peshat* question of "What does it mean?" The poetry and syntax of Job is some of the most complex in the Bible and presents challenges to even the greatest of scholars. When he is not engaged in

deciphering the text, his commentary invariably serves to soften the words of Job so that his open blasphemy can be contained and harmonized with accepted theology. After all, those living in the Diaspora who saw themselves as somehow receiving God's just punishment did not need to be confronted by a Biblical argument that suggested that their suffering had, in fact, no larger purpose or meaning.

When Job is at his most inflammatory, Rashi steps in to save him. On one of the most famous lines of Job, "Let Him kill me!–I will never flinch,/ but will protest my conduct to his face,"(Job 13:15)[22] Rashi comments, "Even if He should kill me, I will not be separated from Him and I will always trust in Him, therefore there is no rebellion or transgression in my words." This is remarkable given that Rashi is responding to the potential for a direct reading of the written version of the text; the Masoretic text already softened the verse by switching a ו for an א in the word לֹא, changing it from "I will not trust/wait" to "I will trust in Him."

When Job bemoans his fate and describes how his "enemy" is tearing him apart,[23] a clear reference to the tribulations God has showered upon him, Rashi steps in to identify the enemy as Satan. This identification is repeated in Rashi's comment on 9:24. When Job says that the earth has been given over to the hand of the wicked, Rashi sees the "wicked" as none other than Satan. Rashi's move, which helps to deflect criticism from God and place it upon Satan, is fairly transparent, as well as illogical. Neither Job nor his

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[22]Traditionally rendered "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him; But I will argue my ways before Him."

[23]Job 16:9

friends ever mention Satan in their dialogue. They are all consistent in their ascription to God of all good and evil in the world, his power is unchallenged. Furthermore, the reader knows from the prologue that if Satan is the most immediate cause of Job's suffering, it is only because he acts as God's agent.

When Job challenges God for allowing the wicked to prosper, saying of them, "They could not have made their own prosperity,"(Job 21:16) he implies that God not only permits the wicked to have wealth but is the source of it. Rashi turns this phrase around into a question, "Is not all their good in their hand?" to mean that they may prosper now, but that is because they will be denied their true reward in the world to come. Job continues this line in 21:31ff, wondering who could challenge the wicked and powerful, take him to task for his deeds and repay him for them. This is spoken in complete despair, knowing that such people go to the grave in peace all of the time, and rest in honored sites. Rashi turns this on its head, taking Job's hopeless question to be an expression of faith in God's justice. As he comments, "Who is this great king who will tell him to his face about his deeds and will not have fear of him from how mighty he is? It is the Holy One, Blessed be He, that will do it." In both of these cases one can only maintain such a view if one ignores the sections of the book where Job directly dismisses the possibility of such a future reward or anything at all happening to a person after death. Rashi even takes Job's complaint that God ignores the suffering of people to be a sign of divine goodness. When Job says "In the town, they die groaning– the cut throats of

corpses still screaming. The god attaches no blame."(Job 24:12)[24] Rashi finds sunshine even here, commenting that this means that the good of such a city moan for fear of the wicked, but that God forbears in mercy by not growing angry and taking vengeance for them.

Rashi even attempts to remove Job's anger at the injustice to which he is subjected. In one of his most remarkable comments, Rashi takes the verse "By the life of El who denies me justice, by Shaddai who has turned my soul to gall,"(Job 27:12) and finds evidence for Job's love of God! Rashi takes this direct indictment of God and correctly points out that it is in the form of an oath. Since Job is taking an oath in God's name Rashi cites R. Yehoshua in saying that Job served God out of love, for only a person that loves a king will take an oath in his name.

The collective effect of comments like this on the book are to change its meaning. The book as it existed was too unpleasant or unsettling to deal with and so it had to be altered. Since the text was fixed, the only avenue available was to change the way people read it. Rashi, in effect, creates a different book. It is yet another example of a pious and learned individual altering the facts before him to conform with his beliefs. It is not until we move to the next century and different land that we find a Jewish thinker who is willing and able to do otherwise.

Maimonides is the first thinker we find who takes on the book of Job and deals with it in a comprehensive manner, and successfully harmonizes it with his thought. He is

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[24]JPS renders, "From out of the populous city men groan, and the soul of the wounded cry out; Yet God imputeth it not for unseemliness"

able to do this because as a matter of principle, Maimonides did not read scripture on a literal level. He considered such an activity as appropriate only for the simple minded. If one was to ascertain the true meaning of the Bible, then one had to be able to see the text for what it was: an allegory designed to illuminate those who had adequately developed their intellects. Scripture could serve a needed role as a source of moral instruction for those unable to comprehend any more, but for those who could, it was the well of knowledge of science, metaphysics, and philosophical truth.

In his *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides devotes two chapters to the problem of Job and how it relates to his theory of God's exercise of providence. He sees Job as an allegory *par excellence* of how different people's ideas of providence function, and which among them best fosters a clear understanding of the nature of the world. In addition to his general method in reading scripture, Maimonides finds support for his allegorical reading from the anonymous assertion in Baba Bathra 15a that Job never was, and never existed except as an instructive story. If this is the case then the reader must be inclined to take instruction.

Maimonides notices that Job is described as having great moral virtues, but never as having great wisdom. This is the key that unlocks the text for Maimonides. In his theory of providence, it is the development of the individual's intelligence into the acquired intellect that elevates him closer to God, and makes him able to participate in providence.[25] It is only the development of an acquired intellect that can relieve suffering.

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[25]Alvin J. Reines, Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theology, Hebrew Union College Annual, vol. 43, 1972, pp 188-194

The absence of such wisdom is a source of evil. For Maimonides, evil does not exist unto itself but derives from the privation of some positive quality. In the case of Job, it was his lack of wisdom that allowed evil into his life.

Job receives an education through his experiences which allow him to develop his wisdom, and thus participate in providence by the end of the tale. His protestations of innocence were all based upon his doings in the moral realm. It took the speeches of Elihu and then of God to show him that it was his privation of knowledge that caused him to fall into the clutches of evil. Job is instructed in the vast gap between his knowledge and that of God. Just as he comes to conceive of the difference between God's areas of knowledge and concern and those of a person, he comes to realize the difference between the way God exercises providence and the way that he would. Job's mistake was in thinking that there was any parallel between human words and deeds and those of God. A person may make the mistake of describing "the hand of God" in action somewhere and actually think of it as a hand, when in fact it is no such thing. There is no equivalence between a term used in connection with a person and that same term used in connection with God. As this is the case with a term such as "hand" so too is it the case when it comes to "providence" or justice." God's understanding and application of these terms is completely different from the way that we understand them. Job's realization of this is the cause for him to recant his words after God speaks. God is just as that term may be applied to God, and any suffering Job had must have been deserved because of his own intellectual privation.

Maimonides solves Job's problem, but in a rather harsh way. As his system stands, the vast majority of people will never know any meaningful form of providence and will

live their lives subject to chance. Most people do not possess the ability to develop an acquired intellect and thus participate in providence. Such an idea is consistent with his thought, as the feature that distinguishes people is the presence of their rational minds, which when fully realized house the point of potential transcendence from the imperfection of material existence. The more one's mind is developed, the more one is detached from the concerns of matter, the closer a person grows to God, a being devoid of matter.

While we do not concur with all of Maimonides's thought he makes an invaluable point. When he brings in the view that: איוב לא היה ולא נברא אלא משל היה, Job never was, and never existed except as an instructive story, he opens up the book to a more critical reading. Surely, this nameless rabbi in the Talmud implies that the Bible contains stories that are valued for their moral truth if not their perfect coincidence with reality. While the suggestion is refuted and receives no further discussion from the rabbis of the Talmud, it plays significantly in the mind of the contemporary reader when he or she attempts to ferret out the meaning of the Job. The ancient but nevertheless forward thinking opinion that Job should be considered as an uncorrupted work of literature to be read and understood for what it says most directly, without the need to argue over its time of origin, authorship, or redaction, provides the basis for how we wish to conduct our current evaluation of the book and the validity of the modern solutions offered to the problems that the book poses.

Chapter 2: The Search for God's Justice in Modernity

> *Men cannot remain children forever; they must in the end go out into 'hostile life'. We may call this* 'education to reality'.[1]
>
> – Sigmund Freud

Job reaches the end of his torturous trial in much the same place that he began it, with an unquestioning acceptance of God. The difference lies in what he has accepted. The Job of the prologue is a wealthy and respected man, secure in the knowledge that his pursuit of a morally virtuous life has secured great reward from God, the very God who is known to run the universe and administer perfect justice to all who obey his commands. The Job of the epilogue acquiesces to the superior might of God, an inscrutable God who controls every detail of the universe and who administers it independent of human morality and in a way that is utterly unknowable to man. It is not the end of the book that concerns us, but rather the pointed challenge and complaint that Job makes against the prevailing beliefs about God. To conclude with the inscrutability of God does not serve to help with Job's problem, but only to increase it.

As noted in the previous chapter, Job and his friends are in substantial agreement about the powers which God wields over all creation. It is in the area of disagreement that Job's problems arise. To state plainly the propositions with which Job must grapple:

"1. God's dominion over every aspect and nuance of nature, including human

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[1]Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, James Strachey trans. (New York: Norton, 1989) p. 63

fortune, is unchallenged.

2. It is observable reality that the good (moral) suffer and the bad (immoral) go scot free.

3. Death is the end of the line for human existence; there is no reasonable expectation of anything to follow.

4. God is known by humans to be responsible for the administration of justice, including retribution for their behavior according to revealed law.

5. The ways of God are unknowable."

As is clear, one cannot hold all of the above propositions to be true at the same time. The fifth of these propositions should be easily agreed to, but is not. Even in the case of Job's friends, who in their arguments appeal to the awesome might and wisdom of God, they lay claim to knowledge of God's mind in order to lay blame at the feet of Job. They encourage him to beg forgiveness for his sin whose existence is known only by God, and by virtue of the friends' assumption, themselves. In the end these friends are reprimanded for speaking falsely about God, and so we can leave aside their presumptuousness.

Of the remaining propositions, any one of them can stand on its own, but they cannot stand together. This leaves us with the challenge of choosing which, if any of the propositions can be eliminated. Each option presents clear choices as to what can and cannot be maintained within a system of consistent thought. The philosophers and thinkers that we will examine each make a choice within this framework, retaining those propositions most dear to them and discarding those they cannot reasonably maintain. By doing so, each in his own way will give an answer to the challenge put forth by Job. Our

evaluation of the systems of thought and their validity will rest upon the following fixed criteria:

1. Does this system acknowledge the presence of evil and tragedy in a way that does not distort observable reality?
2. Does this system reflect an understanding of God that doesn't distort observable reality?
3. How does it understand the desire for justice and this desire's origin?
4. Does it present a credible explanation of why we do or don't receive justice?

The extent to which any given system responds to these demands will determine its value both for the purposes of our investigation and for those who wish to avoid the intellectual dishonesty identified by Matitiahu Tsevat, who says it is typified by one who,

> distorts his experience of reality, disregards facts, imagines figments, fashions *ad hoc* theories, and erects superstructures, all so as not to give up or substantially change the principle [of retribution].[2]

Our exploration of modern thinkers begins with Sigmund Freud, not only because of his chronological primacy, but because of his daring and devastating critique of religion in general, and specifically of belief in a merciful and just God. His ideas on the function of the mind of the individual, which is after all the seat of faith, have enjoyed a broad dissemination and influence on Western thought. While the specifics of Freud's theories may not hold great currency in our time, the broad outlines of his thinking have such a wide acceptance that they have become commonplace in our culture, to the extent of

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[2]Matitiahu Tsevat, The Meaning of the Book of Job, Hebrew Union College Annual, 37 (1966), p. 97

reshaping it. With his overarching presence, Freud serves not only as a sensible starting point, but as a tool with which to prod the other thinkers and see how well they stand up to his critique.

I. Sigmund Freud

Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, his treatise on the nature of religion within society and within the individual, makes a fundamental reversal in the traditional thought process about religion. Rather than ask the theologian's questions of "How can I grow closer to God?" and "How do I know what God wants of me?" Freud wants to know how we have constructed an image of God and of nature that conforms to *our* needs. He finds the origins of this effort in the fundamental experience of every human being, that of helplessness.

From the instant of birth, the human being is completely dependant upon others for the meeting of every need, both physical and emotional. Left on its own, an infant would be unable to cope with the demands for food, warmth, and affection that its system requires from a hostile and unforgiving world. The first source for comfort and protection from the world is the mother, who is able to provide for all of an infant's needs. As the child grows, its awareness of the dangers of the untamed world grow with it, and we witness a change in the child's choice of protector to the father. The father is the more powerful figure and is more able to keep the child safe from the dangers of nature. Along with this fealty to the additional power of the father comes a recognition of the danger that accompanies the father's strength. The relationship to the father is thus characterized not

only by love, but also by fear. As long as the individual is in need of protection from the superior forces of nature, the appropriate communication with the father then must contain both an expression of love and obedience, as well as some form of propitiation, lest the protector no longer take interest in the weaker party.[3]

Freud also theorizes that a similar mechanism is at work in society as a whole. Just as the individual as a child needs protection from the world, so too does the adult. In the case of the adult this protection is provided by the structures of society, which regulate life in such a way as to minimize the threats posed by nature and by the behavior of other people. Society does not act as a parent, but it does harness the power of law to keep harmful behavior in check, and it organizes people to create ever newer technologies to keep the dangers of nature at bay. In an ever rising spiral technology has grown greater in its ability to protect human beings from the forces, that would otherwise overcome us. In return for this protection, people must renounce a ceratin degree of instinctual satisfaction and be willing to forgo their every pleasure. What Freud outlines is essentially a psychologized version of the social contract, where the freedoms surrendered by the individual to the state are the rights to behave according to the instinctual makeup of the human mind. All of this is to achieve some measure of physical security in life. As Freud succinctly states, the "principle task of civilization is to defend us against nature."[4]

These two tracks of development for the person, both as an individual seeking protection and as a member of a society that organizes to provide it, are not completely

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[3]Freud, The Future of an Illusion, pp.29-30

[4]Ibid, p. 19

successful. The great mysteries of life and death remained unsolved, and despite all progress it remains doubtful that technology will ever succeed in completely subduing nature or in staving off the inevitable death of every person. Given that the principle task of civilization and of the individual is eternally frustrated, some form of resolution must be reached in order to continue with the business of living.

> Man's self-regard, seriously menaced, calls for consolation; life and the universe must be robbed of their terrors; moreover, his curiosity, moved, it is true, by the strongest practical interest, demands an answer.[5]

The answer that is demanded must lie not in our ability to control nature but in our ability to explain it. In the early circles of primitive people this explanation took the form of anthropomorphizing nature. The evil that arose from nature could be seen as familiar and analogous to the evil that we know from wicked people. Just as evil from people can be mitigated through our relationships with them, people created gods associated with natural phenomena that can also be pleased or angered and thus afford a certain degree of control over the evil that arose from nature. In the instances where nature was uncontrolled and dangerous, this could be described to either a rebellious god or to and improperly appeased god. Freud identifies three tasks that these gods would have to fulfill in order to relieve the anxiety that would arise from living in a chaotic and violent world. The gods must:

1. Relieve the terrors of uncontrolled nature
2. Reconcile people to the cruelty of fate and their inevitable death

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[5]Ibid, p.20

3. Offer compensation for the suffering brought about by the civilized demands for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction.

In order for faith in the gods or in one God to be effective, these tasks must be accomplished. Traditional faith does provide for all of them. Nature, while not perfectly understood, is at least running according to the will of a being greater than ourselves with a clear purpose, even if it is unknown to mortal man. Religious faith most often tells us that death is not the end of life but merely a transformation into a different phase of existence. This phase may offer either reward or punishment, but it clearly guarantees continued existence. The compensation offered for the privation of instinctual satisfaction comes in the form of morality. Morality, as ordained by God, provides a path for the perfection of human nature. This journey of self perfection gives meaning to our lives and binds us to God, who is the exemplar of a morality so perfect that it provides an ideal we must strive for. Indeed, it is morality that allows for the persistence of religious faith. As science proceeds, nature is understood to be regular in its habits and, in some respects, even predictable. We are more likely to look to a network of seismographs than irreligious behavior to explain the occurrence of an earthquake. As far as reconciling humanity to the cruelty of fate, most religions admit to the inscrutability of God. Once one admits to this, faith offers no real shelter from the cruel arrows of fate. There is no practical difference, at least as far as one's acceptance of senseless evil in the world, between faith in an inscrutable God and having no God at all. In either case tragedy strikes and humanity has no practical recourse but to stoically accept what life brings us. As Freud sees it, all that is left for religion in the age of science is to promulgate morality.

As far as the other claims of religion go, they are unsusceptible to proof; such beliefs fall into the category of "illusion" and as such cannot be proved or disproved. An illusion is defined by Freud to be, "a belief, not necessarily false, that is prominently derived from human wishes, where we disregard its relation to reality." The larger claims of religion about the nature of the deity, the order of the world, the origin of morality and the like cannot be proved or disproved and have no verifiable connection to reality. As Freud pointedly notes,

> ...It would be very nice if there were a god who created the world and was a benevolent Providence, and there were a moral order in the universe and an after-life; but it is a very striking fact that all this is exactly as we are bound to wish it to be.[6]

For Freud, it is clear that religious beliefs, which he defines as the repository of the highest values in any given culture, are no more than a fervent wish that the larger order of the world was in some way in tune with our desires. Freud goes so far as to cut away any religious claim to God being the source of morality. As he understands the genesis of law, it arose to meet the demands of emergent human society. The suppression of the coarser instincts would take place within a family structure, where the urge to violence and an unrestrained sexuality would be just as dangerous as they are in the larger social group. The finer points of morality would emerge as a matter of necessity to run a well ordered society. The appeal to a law that applied to everybody, both the powerful and the weak, would also follow as the only way to keep society in line. The poor would never acquiesce to their situation if they felt the rich had acquired their positions by cheating.

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[6]Ibid, p. 42

Only through the establishment of a societally constant and unbending law would the culture be maintained and the masses kept in check. There is no need to appeal to God as the source of such laws.

Freud finds further proof of the weak claim religion makes to its own authority in its historical unwillingness to be questioned in any way that would require proof acceptable to one who wished for it. As seeing a religious idea can be neither proven nor disproved, there must be some rationale for excepting the belief. When asked to give proof positive as to the system of belief professed, religious authorities tend to answer in one of three ways. The first possibility is that the current group holds a belief because it is the same belief of their ancestors. Freud responds to this with the comment that ancient peoples believed all manner of things that we no longer do. Why should this one area of knowledge be granted an exception from the forward progress of the mind? The second answer would be that the proofs for the faith are contained in traditional sources that have been handed down to present-day. These proofs may not suffice to an outsider, but they hold water for those initiated into the faith. Freud points out that these proofs are truly of no use because they often resort to such things as divine revelation, which is precisely the issue at question. The final response to questions of veracity is that it is forbidden to raise such questions. This stance raises an immediate red flag for Freud who sees a clear sign of insecurity in the belief. If any sort of proof were available why would there be any resistance to questions?

The last possibility for pruning a system of religious thought is that of personal experience. Throughout history there have been those who have had religious experiences

which they were able to utilize not only to their own benefit, but for the dissemination of their experience to others in order to form religious communities. Coming from a later philosophical tradition and stressing the structure of experience theorized by psychology, this sort of proof is not adequate for Freud. As he says,

> If one man has gained an unshakable conviction of the true reality of religious doctrines from a state of ecstasy which has deeply moved him, of what significance is that for others?[7]

Such an experience may hold validity for the individual, but how can the internal mental processes of one person's sensory and cognitive faculties be substituted for another's? The subjective experience of one person can in no way be proved or verified because it is an artifact of that individual's mental life, and is not necessarily connected in any meaningful way with outside reality. If a person has not had a religious experience himself, or is not capable of doing so (which seems to describe a great number of people), then there is no reason for him to accept the experiences of another in place of his own.

Freud's wish, and closing argument, is that the psychological ideal will be realized for all of humanity. This would entail replacing our drive for instinctual satisfaction and our affective attachments to illusory beliefs with rational arguments. In the area of religion, this means that we must eventually admit our impotence in the face of the universe, realize that we are not the center of creation, and shed the illusions that cause us to believe otherwise.

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[7]Ibid, p.36

In terms of responding to the criteria we have set out for an effective answer to Job's problem, Freud does pretty well. He is fully cognizant of the presence of evil and tragedy in human life, and in no way minimizes them. In fact, their presence fuels his theory as to the origin of human religious faith. Life often presents tragic circumstances, so tragic that some form of illusory faith that they held greater meaning was an inevitable byproduct of human existence. Such is the power of evil and chaotic nature in Freud's thought.

Freud's understanding of God does no disservice to observable reality. God exists solely as a product of the human mind, a conflation of the tremendous powers of nature and a stern father figure into a single character to which we owe reverence. As relatively helpless creatures in the midst of an often hostile environment, the existence of a powerful and caring God is no more than an illusion resulting from a fervent wish. To prove otherwise is impossible; as Freud points out, systems of religious faith are subject to neither proof nor disproof. Given the evidence from human experience, it would seem the burden of proof lies much more on those who would seek to prove that God has an active role in the administration of human affairs. Those who claim that God does act only in an inscrutable manner to which we must unquestioningly submit would receive Freud's question, "Why bother with the detour?"[8]

Man's desire for justice is a natural outgrowth of this societal affiliation and the concomitant suppression of instinct. If one is to forgo the right to respond to the demands

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[8]Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, James Strachey trans., (New York: Norton, 1989), p. 36

of instinct in favor of society's needs, it is necessary to receive in return some measure of justice. Where once the individual would be responsible for himself exacting vengeance if wronged, now the institutions of the state must be responsible for the administration of justice. It was not much of a stretch for ancient people to assume that God, the exemplar of morality and correct behavior, would also be supremely just. Our human institutions responsible for enforcing morality and thus helping us along with our life's work must be derived from the impulse for justice implanted within us by God. Given the atrocious behavior of many people and the seemingly random fashion in which natural occurrences bring tragedy, the human need for justice is acute.

Despite the need for justice and some sense that the world does operate according to a fixed order, humanity is denied justice from any divine court. In the Freudian system this is obviously because the administrator of said justice exists only as an illusion. If we wished to receive justice in regards to the behavior of other people it is well within our reach in the application of our own laws. All that is required is to be consistent and thoughtful in their use. A system of retribution already exists to control human behavior, but its power derives from the state and not God. To thirst for justice on a grand scale with a reward for our good behavior is only to chase after rainbows.

Freud does an effective job of answering Job albeit at the price of faith in God as the arbiter of justice. This may be a small price for Job or one in a similar position to pay. Job has already lost faith in God as a force for justice and wishes to take him to a neutral court so he may file suit against him. As far as the rest, Freud does leave room in his system for an all-powerful deity (although he sees no reason to hold such a belief, it is

beyond proof and disproof), which would conform to Job's complaint that God is capable of doing justice and chooses not to. Either way, they real casualty of the Freudian system is the comfort derived from a religious system. Job does not require religion to reconcile him to death. He is quite aware that there will be nothing more after he perishes, and even relishes the thought if it will mean an end to suffering. What Job, and those in his situation of unrelieved suffering require is something that will reconcile them to their fate and give some meaning to pain. Freud strips away this very comfort that religious faith provides. He himself is aware of this criticism of his theory, that it would remove the only source of comfort for the downtrodden masses of humanity. Freud's response is that it is unlikely that any person of faith would be persuaded by his argument, intellectually bound as he is in the lifelong indoctrination in an all encompassing religion. If, however, his venture should have success it would not be a bad thing. The implication of Freud's thought is that any system that reconciles people to the cruelties they endure in life only serves to perpetuate the source of trouble. If they would wake from their illusion they would be focused on undertaking the personal and societal changes that would ease the pains humanity was capable of confronting. As far as those forces of trouble and pain that are beyond our control, Freud would rather have humanity live with the knowledge that they are a small piece of the universe in no way favored than to labor under an unsupported illusion that dictates otherwise. As difficult as it may be, the truth is always preferable.

II. Martin Buber

Martin Buber, the existentialist philosopher and creator of the I-Thou interpretation of human experience, has had a sustained impact on religious thought in general and on Jewish thought in particular. By shifting the focus from the exercise of reason to the relationship of the individual to his environment as the source of knowledge, personal experience was made the ultimate source of truth. The reasons for this shift are manifold, and beyond the scope of our current inquiry. Suffice it to say that the emphasis on personal experience informs Buber's work and thought in every area. Buber sought to work out the implications of his system for the phenomena of evil in two works, *Images of Good and Evil* and *Right and Wrong*. The first of these works takes the form of a mythological retelling of the origins of evil, utilizing both Persian and ancient Near Eastern myths re-imagined in the light of Buber's philosophy in order to yield an explanation of the human inclination toward wrongdoing. The second of the works is a meditation upon five psalms, oriented to answer the problems posed to the faithful by the seeming lack of justice in the world. It is with this work that Buber seeks to answer the untold millions, among them Job, who want to know the meaning behind their suffering.

Buber reads Psalms 1, 12, 14, 82, and 73 and finds in them confirmation of his own experience of the world and of God. As is consistent with his entire reading of the problem of evil, Buber limits his discussion to evil that arises due to human action. He gives no consideration at all to those acts which occur naturally and cause great harm and suffering to human beings, or to those acts that are directly attributed to God's malice as in the book Job. In his exploration of human evil Buber finds "the lie" to be the source of wickedness in human conduct. As he sees evidenced by Psalm 1, the lie is told by those

who assert their independence from any Lord and live their lives without fear of retribution. The lie is furthered when they spread this disbelief to others. In Buber's estimation the lie is all the more reprehensible because the people who spread it do not themselves believe it. All of this is done by the wicked in order to further their own oppression of the weak.

Opposed to the wicked are those who strive to live in truth. Buber equates truth to a property flowing from God's existence. Any person who makes a goal of attaining truth is necessarily growing closer to God. As Buber inimitably states,

> The truth is God's alone, but there is a human truth, namely, to be devoted to the truth. The lie is from time and will be swallowed up by time; the truth, the divine truth, is from eternity and in eternity, and this devotion to the truth, which we call human truth, partakes of eternity.[9]

This appeal to an eternal truth that all human beings strive for and against which all human truth is measured is necessary for Buber to further define evil as it occurs in human beings. The split between those who strive for truth, which is synonymous with God, and those who don't is illustrated by Psalm 14. In Buber's reading this Psalm does not speak of outsiders against Israel, but rather a division within Israel. Those who strive for truth may still be called Israel but those who don't are "nothing but decomposed tissue, the rotting substance of a people."[10] While this internal rift between the good and the wicked apostates may not always be apparent, in times of distress the difference is made clear.

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[9]Martin Buber, Good and Evil, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1953), p.13

[10] Ibid., p. 18

Psalm 82 details a situation in which God has delegated the authority to exercise judgment to lesser beings who have not lived up to their job descriptions. Whether these lesser beings are national angels as detailed in the book of Daniel or earthly kings with divine mandate makes no difference. These judges are warned by God to make their rulings conform to God's truth and goodness, but they refuse. Instead, in the description of the psalmist they "go about in darkness." This darkness is their lack of understanding of the essence and intention of God. They erroneously see the history of humanity as nothing more than an extension of the history of nature. In a swipe at Darwin Buber notes that "they persist in the delusion that the way of man can be determined in the general customs of the animals."[11] It is only while operating under this falsehood that the powerful are able to assert a doctrine of might makes right. In the psalmist's closing call for God to arise and take action to bring about a fair judgment, Buber finds not despair, but the certainty of a man who only waits for God to bring an end to the "false history" humanity has created and to begin a new era of "true" existence.

In Psalm 73, Buber finds a direct answer to Job's questions by means of clarifying what he means by "experience." Buber argues that the most important events in our lives are only gradually understood, gaining clarity over time. Our first impressions of the event convey only a surface appearance.

> Not that our experiences have deceived us. But we had turned them to our use, without penetrating to their heart. What is it that teaches us to penetrate to their heart? Deeper experience.[12]

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[11] Ibid., p. 28

[12] Ibid., p.31

For Buber, Psalm 73 tells a story that is a counterpoint to Job. The righteous speaker has suffered greatly in his life and has seen the wicked prosper. The difference between this speaker and a Job, however, is that this sufferer maintains silence and does not challenge God's administration of the world. This is because he is, to use Buber's terminology, "pure in heart." Such a person could never think ill of God because he understands that God's goodness is experienced through revelation not in the receipt of any reward. It is only one who is "impure in heart" that could draw a conclusion that God was anything but good. Those who are wicked are the ones that deliberately maintain an impurity of heart. In this system Job's suffering is rooted in the fact that his heart's impurity prevents him from experiencing the nearness and goodness of God. If only he would purify his heart he would again know of God's goodness. Buber's system thus presents a neatly closed circle of logic which leaves no room for disagreement. Any who cannot accept it are either deficient in "deeper experience" or persistently "impure in heart." These are the only options left for one who has not reached the same conclusions as Buber.

Our pity is extended to Job, who now in addition to his friends' accusations of sinfulness must now also contend with Buber's charge of impurity. Not only is Job's misery his own fault, but his experience of the world is false and his desire for some measure of justice in his life is completely unnecessary. If he was focused on the deeper experience of God's goodness his earthly troubles would melt away and lose any significance. As Buber says in his analysis of Psalm 1, the pursuit of apparent happiness in

this world is a meaningless task and suffering and pain are nothing compared to the attainment of true happiness.

> However cruel and contrary this destiny might appear when viewed apart from intercourse with God, when it is irradiated by His 'knowing' it is 'success', just as every action of this man, his disappointments and even his failures, are success.[13]

So then the suffering of the good is really a success. What of the prosperity of the wicked? Their happiness is not what it seems. Relying upon an existentialist legerdemain Buber finds that the wicked who have predicated their existence upon falsehoods, such as God not being caring or present in the affairs of man, do not have a true existence. No essence can follow an existence based on a falsity. When God arrives on the day of judgment to set all accounts straight, the wicked will not be punished but only made to see that they do not truly exist. They will come to know that their "life has been a shadow structure in a dream of God's. God awakes, shakes off the dream, and disdainfully watches the dissolving shadow image."[14] The sum total of this viewpoint serves to deny the reality of this world and denigrate our existence in the here and now in favor of the mystical union with the constancy of God's goodness that will take place when the pure in heart die. It will all work out as long as we focus on our experience of God's presence and goodness in our lives.

Taken as a whole, Buber's thought does little to answer the problems that Job poses. Rather than offer answers, Buber changes the questions. As far as Buber is

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[13] Ibid., p. 57

[14] Ibid., p. 40

concerned evil does not exist in any real way but only as the existence-denying lies and wickedness of people who are impure in heart. The evil we suffer is not truly evil but only a byproduct of our imperfect thought and lack of "deeper experience." It cannot hope to speak to the situation in which Job finds himself, a victim of God's wrath, a possibility flatly denied by Buber. The book of Job presents a picture of God which one would struggle to put the label "good" upon. Job's desire for justice, indeed any person's desire for justice, is a misplaced emphasis, a mistake that can only be corrected through a purification of the heart and acceptance of the revelation of God's goodness. Justice is an unnecessary pursuit rooted in an attachment to the surface appearances of life. The wicked who corrupt society and oppress others are not really a source of concern for the pure in heart because they have no "true existence." This is a response that seems to do violence to what can be seen with distressing regularity in the world: tragedy and evil behavior are common and those who callously prey upon the weak often get away with it. The sort of elaborate denial of what is plain to see may be acceptable within the theoretical constructs of one man's mind, but it is less than adequate to deal with observable reality. Buber admits as much in his positive appraisal of death as entering "into eternity as into perfect existence."[15] This life and the types of experiences that it provides are only a prelude to that which is to follow. With such a belief, there is no problem with evil befalling the good or the wicked prospering; they comprise a meaningless category which will be lost in the translation into perfect existence. Given the lack of evidence, other than

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[15]Ibid., p.50

Buber's own testimony, that such a thing ever has or will occur, we are not yet ready to abandon Job to the status of one who is "impure of heart."

III. Mordecai Kaplan

Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of the Reconstructionist movement, puts forth a novel method for understanding the presence and nature of evil as well as man's role in overcoming it. Kaplan shies away from ontological definitions of phenomena both in the world and in human life. He operates with knowledge, long since derived by rationalists and reinforced by psychology, that our opinions of what exists outside of ourselves is more reflective of our internal mental processes than of any verifiable reality. Rather than negating the force and importance of human knowledge and experience of the world, Kaplan instead endeavors to create a more functional definition of those phenomena that impinge on human life and religious belief. Kaplan sees his own efforts as an inevitable concomitant of the scientific and social advancement of human civilization. Religious belief and the God that people subscribe to have undergone distinctive periods that are reflective of the larger society from which they grew.

Kaplan is in agreement with Freud that the idea of a personal God somehow in control of nature arose out of feelings of human helplessness in the face of the universe. As Kaplan plainly states,

> It is the sense of man's dependence for the satisfaction of his wants on powers in the universe other than himself which gave rise to the God idea. It is the organization of these wants in terms of personal ideals that gave

> rise to the conception of a personal God. When the Bible tells us that "God created man in His image," it testifies to the modern historian that man created God in his image.[16]

In contrast to Freud, this understanding in no way minimizes the importance of God. For Kaplan the importance of God is rooted in the function that the divinity plays in the lives of people. For a primitive people unsure of fulfilling even its most basic need for a secure food supply, it is not remarkable that a God idea would coalesce around a being capable of meeting this most essential requirement for the continuance of life. Control over nature, the most wished for item in human society, was assigned to the gods. This was only natural as an outgrowth of the desires of a primitive society. This characteristic was common among all primitive religions and explains the animism that arose amidst early peoples. Just as tribes that hunted would worship those animals that gave them life, beasts that worked the fields, such as a bull, would be logical deities for agrarian societies. The critical leap forward in religious and theological thought took place when the existing cultures *were* fairly secure in their basic, physical existence and so their attention turned to other societal needs that could only be fulfilled by God. Next in line in the divine titles after "Provider of Food," came "Giver of Law." This shift in divine characterization mirrors a shift in societal ideals. The anthropomorphic and anthropopsychic view of God that arose can be explained by the very human mental trait that is contained within the new God idea: a thirst for justice.

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[16]Mordecai Kaplan, The Meaning of God In Modern Jewish Religion, (Detroit: Wayne State, 1994), p. 86

Since such a conception as righteousness could be associated with no identifiable object in nature except a human being, God was conceived in human form.[17]

In this phase of development, which is typified by the Biblical writings, God is valued as the originator of righteousness and the final seat of judgment. Given the inequities of ancient society decried by the prophets, it is again only natural that the society's highest ideals would crystalize in the person of a god of justice. This is reflective of the evolution of the God idea keeping pace with the evolving needs of the individual in society. God was then a person with size and strength that would allow him to accomplish all of the aims unattainable by mere mortals. When the encounter with and influence of Hellenism gave rise to a more philosophic era in Jewish thought, the division between soul and body became a popular tool with which to analyze the human being. Accordingly, the God idea then changed to a conception of God as a completely incorporeal person, consisting only of soul, the loftiest and most idealized part of the human being. God's "body" was then thought of as the universe in which the presence of His spirit was felt. As human knowledge of the physical world has continued to grow there has been less and less space available in it for God to act or be present. The medieval views that reinforced the soul-body split and division between physics and metaphysics have been swept aside by science. As Kaplan says,

> We cannot conceive of God anymore as a sort of invisible superman, displaying the same psychological traits as man, but on a greater scale. We cannot think of him as loving, pitying, rewarding, punishing, etc.[18]

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[17]Ibid., p. 88

[18]Ibid., p. 88

In no way does Kaplan lament this development in human thought. He sees a continuous unfolding of new God ideas throughout human and Jewish history in which the present is no exception. He actually embraces these changes as necessary if God is to remain a relevant factor in the lives of people. How then does he allow for God's significance if the space people allow for divinity in the world is constantly shrinking? For Kaplan the answer lies in the constant function that God maintains, no matter the God idea associated with him. As the repository of any people's highest ideals, God is then defined as the Power that makes for salvation. This functional definition of God (essentially "God is as God does") then rests upon Kaplan's notion of salvation, which is divided between the personal and the social. Personal salvation relies heavily upon a psychological definition of fulfilment. It consists of a state in which the personality is integrated and its disparate parts are integrated and harmonized in such a way as to promote positive feelings towards the self. Kaplan tell us that,

> When our mind functions in such a way that we feel that all our powers are actively employed in the achievement of desirable ends, we have achieved personal salvation.[19]

Of course no individual is completely self sufficient, and so there must be the aspect of social or collective salvation as well. This social salvation can be defined as a collaborative effort on the part of people or the common good in a way that allows each individual the maximum of "creative self expression." These two modes of salvation are mutually dependent, neither of them capable of existing on its own. The denial of the one will upset the possibility of the other. That salvation seems certain to lie in the future and

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[19]Ibid., p.53

not in our present is no discouragement or reason for disbelief. It is only those people who have faith that they are dedicating themselves to a future that is better than their own present who can feel any sense of purpose in their own lives. As such, "salvation must be conceived mainly as an objective of human action, not as a psychic compensation for human suffering."[20]

Kaplan is sensitive to the criticism that his God idea seems to reside solely within the human mind, and may even be a creation of the human mind. He resists this notion, arguing instead that human awareness of ideals and the future orientation of productive and satisfying human life provide evidence that the Power that makes for salvation is other than man. Our awareness of an ideal that lies beyond ourselves means that the Power is real and has in some way ordained that we have awareness of it.

> All that religion calls upon us to believe is that the element of helpfulness, kindness and fair play is not limited to man alone but is diffused throughout the natural order.[21]

This faith insulates us against any sense of futility in life, even if in our own lifetime the order that we hoped for is not achieved. Humanity as a whole, and Jews as a people are dependent upon a faith in the ideal, which is synonymous with our God idea, in order to avoid despair. To abandon faith in the God idea is to abandon any hope for personal or collective salvation and the possibility of any larger significance to life.

So how does Kaplan's system fair when applied to the enumerated problems besetting Job, our prototype of the individual sufferer? His evaluation of evil is a curious

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[20]Ibid., p.54

[21]Ibid., p.75

blend of Maimonidean thought and an abiding faith in the inexorable progress of human will and technology. Kaplan sees evil as a form of privation, pockets of chaos in the universe that have not yet been reached by the forces of good. He writes, "Evil is chaos still uninvaded by the creative energy, sheer chance unconquered by will and intelligence."[22]

To Kaplan's credit, his evaluation of a phenomenon's status as evil is completely reliant upon human perception. He makes no recourse to arguments that would seek to relativize or minimize evil by claiming that the subjective human experience and perception of evil is somehow so deficient in knowledge or perspective as to be false. As such, death is not considered a change of life or somehow an improvement over life, but it is seen for what it is, an end to life and an unwelcome evil.

When evil arises out of human action, it is plain that it is up to human beings to further the scope of God and of salvation by stopping all evils which we are capable of ending. When evil arises out of nature, such as when a great wind arises to collapse a house on Job's children, this is "simply that phase of the universe that has not yet been completely penetrated by godhood."[23] Here Kaplan echos some of the Maimonidean cosmology, describing evil as a privation of goodness. In his analysis of Job, Maimonides found confirmation for his view of evil from the description given in the prologue of Job, where the lesser gods come to attend to God, and "Satan came among them." The appearance of evil in this case is evidence that it is always a necessary accompaniment to

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[22]Ibid, p.72

[23]Ibid., p.76

the physical matter characteristic of beings in the spheres of existence lower than God. In the case of the sub-lunar sphere, where humans reside and matter is predominant, evil is a necessary concomitant. In the higher, non-material spheres evil fades away as God's overflow of goodness dispenses with any privation, or in Kaplan's formulation they are "penetrated by godhood." While Kaplan most likely made his observations about evil in awareness of Maimonides, there is a critical difference: Kaplan holds that evil can be more or less vanquished in the human realm, while Maimonides saw evil as something that the individual could overcome only through the application of the intellect which would allow for an escape from material concerns. In any case, Kaplan's assessment of evil, while hopeful in attitude in no way diminishes the reality or human experience of suffering.

Kaplan's view of God also does no damage to observable reality, as he completely dispenses with the idea of a supernatural God that intervenes in human history by overturning the laws of nature. God's presence is known and felt in the world through the agency of people that act in order to realize personal and collective salvation. The Power that makes for salvation is deduced and known through its function. Such a vision of God, while it may not offer any comfort for those who wish to transcend the human condition or those who will insist on God's historic and continuing supernatural intervention, does not excessively strain credibility or make claims that can in no way be substantiated. Kaplan's assessment of God's presence is intimately tied to his sense of justice as well. He is of the opinion that any traditional theodicy is certain to fail because it is based upon faulty premises, namely a supernatural God that controls the affairs and fates of men through interventions in the natural order. Trying to maintain a traditional

theodicy is worthy of condemnation. In quoting Job 24:12[24] Kaplan goes so far as to say that, "to try to prove by logical argument that this conclusion of Job is unwarranted would deservedly earn one the rebuke God meted out to Job's friends."[25] The fact that we don't always receive justice is not, however, cause to lose faith in God. In as much as the desire for justice wells up from within every individual human heart and mind, it is an ideal that transcends the individual and is evidence of God's presence, not his absence. As long as people have a sense of justice growing in the world, we know that God is with us. Just as with evil, those instances where justice is not felt are places where godhood has not yet penetrated. Past and present evidence of progress are indicators of eventual success in the matter.

It is hard to imagine Kaplan offering much comfort or resolution to Job, as even by his own estimation, his system is an outgrowth of modern thought and reflects the cultural assumptions in which it partakes. For the contemporary thinker who is troubled by the story of Job, however, it offers a very hopeful and even overly optimistic outlook. Any forward progress in human affairs towards the state of salvation that he has described is evidence of God's continued presence and a validation of the course of human events. His view embodies an almost Hegelian sense of the necessary progress of history, and as such is open to the same criticism as Hegel: past atrocities and horrors in such a system become necessary phases in historical development. Anything that has led to the present moment

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[24]"In the town they die groaning–/ the cut throats of corpses still screaming./ The god attaches no blame."

[25]Kaplan, The Meaning of God, p. 140

was a good thing, even if it only served as the necessary antithesis to which progress had to respond. While Kaplan would not characterize his thought as such and even takes pains to describe evil as devoid of any instrumental purpose, in the end he does make evil the entity that is necessary to see humanity's forward progress. Without the injustices we strive against, we would have no evidence of God's existence, which in Kaplan's estimation is necessary if we are to achieve salvation. Evil spurs us to cleave to our vision of the ideal, the Power that makes for salvation, and work to make the world better.

Kaplan's system is ultimately a form of pragmatism. His evidence for God's presence in the world resides within humanity, and as such does not necessarily need God in order to function. As long as we are dedicated to working for the betterment of the world and ourselves we will achieve, even if not in our lifetimes, a state ever closer to salvation. For Kaplan, this progress is best achieved if we do believe in God. Put simply, it is better for humanity to believe than not to believe, but in the end, we have nowhere to look beyond ourselves if we wish to improve the condition of the world. Such actions, whether or not they are done out of faith, are the only way to assert God's presence. To look for a reason for why there is suffering, as Job does, is a pointless task. The person of faith looks only to alleviate the pain.

IV. Emil Fackenheim

Emil Fackenheim approaches Jewish theology with firmly delineated boundaries to his thought process. As he lays out the methodology necessary to arrive at a valid Jewish theology, there are certain ground rules which he extracts from rabbinic writings. If one

goes outside of these principles, the product may be useful to the individual, but it is not an authentic Jewish response. Furthermore, he consciously focuses on developing a descriptive theology, but not an explanatory one. As Fackenheim is aware, attempts to explain *why* God would or wouldn't act in a given instance are too easily corrupted by the needs of human psychology and when rationally examined often border on the obscene. Accordingly, Fackenheim sets a goal for himself in developing his theology: he strives to describe to the modern thinker the continuing presence of the God of Israel in human history. For Fackenheim, any other view of God constitutes a deliberate step away from Jewish belief and tradition.

The impetus behind Fackenheim's thought is never far from the surface in his writing, and is directly stated in his biographical asides. Fackenheim is a German Jew who came of age during the Nazi regime. He was ordained in Berlin in 1939 and was intimately acquainted with the commonplace barbarity of that time. His theology is a description of how he, and by extension others, can continue to believe in the God of Israel with the reality of Auschwitz ever before him. He makes an interesting case to relate to that of Job, because like our Biblical protagonist, he operates with certain *a priori* assumptions about the reality and agency of God that he cannot cast aside. Fackenheim's overriding interest lies in preserving the validity of the Jewish historical experience of God, to which end he employs the "midrashic framework."

The midrashic framework comprises certain criteria which must be obeyed in order to yield valid Jewish theological thought. To operate within this framework one must

first, "reflect upon the root experiences of Judaism,"[26] those past occurrences, witnessed by the Jewish public that play a decisive role in the lives of all future generations through their dialectic relationship to and continuing accessibility to those in the present. Fackenheim points to the rescue at the Red Sea as the prototype of such an event; it was a public event witnessed by a multitude and is accessible to the following generations through the continuing power of the experience which still engages in a dialectic with the present moment. Second, the midrashic framework demands that any observations that are made should take into account the inherent contradictions in these root experiences, such as an infinite and eternal God appearing in a finite space for a short duration. Third, midrashic method assumes from the start that it will not take any stance that undermines or destroys the validity of the root experience. This leads to the fourth guideline that whatever contradictions and consistencies may arise in the process must be allowed to stand, even if this leaves the theology fragmentary and incomplete. Lastly, the appropriate literary form for these reflections is story or metaphor. This is the only way to abide by the strictures of the previous guidelines. Regarding these guidelines Fackenheim says,

> Unless we shall find cause to judge otherwise, to this day their [the rabbis who wrote midrash] stance remains normative for the Jewish theologian. Having engaged upon a second-order reflection upon Midrash as a whole, he must himself retell the old Midrash – or create a new.[27]

The task which Fackenheim sets for himself is great. Fully aware of the possible criticisms of such an approach from those who are more concerned with logical

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[26]Emil L. Fackenheim, God's Presence in History, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994), p.20

[27]Ibid., p.20

consistency in the face of a world that so often seems to indicate that God is not involved in human history, he nevertheless pushes for a view that he feels is the only legitimately Jewish one. In a presentation in 1982, Fackenheim eloquently addressed the concerns of logic in the face of evil, noting that the problem of God's seeming absence is hardly new to the Jewish tradition.

> You get a class of freshmen and put three statements on the blackboard. Number one – "God is all powerful;" number two – "God is good;" number three – "There is evil." In two minutes, at most five minutes, you come to the conclusion you can have any two of these three but not all of them. If God is good and all powerful, then there can be no evil or (which is the same thing) evil is a means to a good. If God is all powerful, and evil is real, then God cannot be good. And, if God is good and evil is real, then he can't be all powerful. Five minutes –that is all it takes a freshman to make this discovery! And having made it, it is obvious which of the alternatives they will want to choose. It is possible to say that evil isn't real, but that would require some kind of mystical experience that denies the obvious. So one generally does not want to take that road. Certainly no one wants to take the road of saying God is all powerful and evil is real, for then God is indistinguishable from an evil demon. So we are left with the most attractive possibility, namely, that God is good, and evil is real, but God is powerless to prevent it. Now comes the puzzling question. All this takes bright students a few minutes: can the Jewish tradition have been so obtuse, can pious man of so many generations so deeply acquainted with evil have been so foolish that they didn't understand all these thousands of years what young students can understand in a few minutes?[28]

Operating under the assumption that the rabbis did indeed encounter this problem is what spurs Fackenheim to stick with the midrashic framework, a system that can account for inconsistencies and irrationalities through narrative. The above exercise would seek to form an explanation for the nature of God and the world, and how the two interact.

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[28]Fackenheim, Kushner, and Wurzburger, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, transcript of Theology Roundtable: Theodicy, (New York: 92 St Y, 1982), p. 9

Fackenheim sees any such attempts as completely inappropriate and even beyond the bounds of religion. To bring explanation for why a given event occurred is for Fackenheim impossible. Such efforts would necessarily lead to an explanation of why the Holocaust occurred which he finds completely unacceptable. For an evil of such enormity there is nothing that can be said to justify it before God or other people, even if one would resort to the inscrutability of God's will. To associate such an event with God in any way would destroy the framework of assumptions that Judaism makes about God. The Jewish religion and the people that cling to it have enjoyed longevity with an abiding belief in a good and just God, not with an explanation for every event in history and God's involvement therein. "Radically put, the category "explanation" doesn't belong in the realm of religion at all, or at any rate not in the realm of Judaism."[29]

Fackenheim finds support for this view in the inconclusive epilogue of Job. After Job has made justifiable questions and demanded to know why he has been stricken by God, he is answered by an appearance by God that does no more than to confirm the divine presence and power. God's inscrutability is not inferred from any philosophical propositions, but is part of the reality of God which confronts Job. Yet, without an answer to the questions that tormented him, Job seems to be satisfied. Explanations are in the end irrelevant if one maintains faith in the God of history. As Fackenheim restates it, Job's problem is not how to explain evil, but how to live with God in the face of evil. Faith in God operates independently of any experience, be it within or without.

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[29]Ibid., p.12

> Good fortune without reveals the hand of God; bad fortune, if it is not a matter of just punishment, teaches that God's ways are unintelligible, not that there are no ways of God. A full heart within indicates the Divine Presence; an empty heart bespeaks not the non-existence or unconcern of God, but merely His temporary absence. Religious faith can be, and is, empirically verifiable; but nothing empirical can possibly refute it.[30]

In the end, despite his efforts to keep authentic Jewish thought on a different track than the secularism that threatens to tear it down, Fackenheim reflects the position taken by Freud that a person of faith will never be swayed by irrelevancies such as empirical evidence. Fackenheim would prescribe the same course for modern Jews that he sees Job having taken; "His faith is reduced to utter unintelligibility, yet he persists in it."[31]

Fackenheim is in no way deterred by evil, and even finds that it must, in certain circumstances, reinforce faith rather than weaken it. Fackenheim finds that the greatest instance of evil in our times, and perhaps ever, the Holocaust, actually serves as an event to strengthen the faith of those who lived through the Holocaust and those who live after. Having exhausted other midrashic possibilities as untenable, Fackenheim settles upon the example of Rabbi Eliezer and his reaction to the destruction of the second Temple and its aftermath. At that time Eliezer determined, as it were,[32] that the gates of prayer were

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[30]Emil L. Fackenheim, "On the Eclipse of God," in Essays In Jewish Theology, [compilation] (Toronto: Canadian Council of Reform Congregations, 1964) p. 46. Emphasis is Fackenheim's.

[31]Ibid., p. 45

[32]This is the rendering of the rabbinic phrase, כביכול, the device employed when the rabbi in question makes a statement that would contradict scripture or inherited tradition. It is a hedge against charges of heresy.

closed and that God was separated from Israel as by an iron wall.[33] This idea finds expression in contemporary language as the eclipse of God. As the metaphor implies, the eclipse can only be temporary or it would mean an end to God's presence in history. As a device used within the midrashic framework, the eclipse is limited to description; no explanation of why God would be absent during the Holocaust is possible or necessary. While shying away from explanation, Fackenheim furthers his description of the Holocaust so as to include an element of revelation, elevating Auschwitz to the level of a root experience. Reason would dictate that to live as a Jew after the Holocaust is too dangerous and disadvantageous to warrant continuing to do so. Faith is prepared to do so, but the root experience must have something to communicate to present and future generations that can be incorporated into the faith and the people. As Fackenheim sees it, the will to go on living as a Jew after the Holocaust and to resist the forces that would destroy us cannot be of a human origin and constitutes part of the experience of the Holocaust.

> Jewish opposition to Auschwitz cannot be grasped in terms of humanly created ideals but only as an *imposed commandment*. And the Jewish secularist, no less than the believer, is *absolutely singled out* by a Voice as truly *other* than man-made ideals - an imperative as truly *given* - as was the Voice of Sinai.[34]

The voice commands no less than Jewish survival and unity, remembrance of the victims, and a refusal to grant any posthumous victories to Hitler. The voice also commands that it is forbidden to give up on the God of Israel. No matter how grave the evil, there is no

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[33]Fackenheim, God's Presence, p. 78 This is Fackenheim's reading of B. Berakhoth 32b

[34]Ibid., p. 83. Emphasis is Fackenheim's.

reason to give up faith. If we use the above thought process to answer Job, what does it leave for our suffering hero?

Fackenheim does nothing to minimize the experience or reality of evil. If anything, he goes so far as to sacralize its most glaring eruption, the Holocaust. In doing so, he makes the argument that the existing Jewish framework was and is adequate to handle the experience of any other evil, without the special innovation needed to deal with the Holocaust. In his insistence upon the unique nature of the evil at Auschwitz, and so the unique suffering of those who are the survivors and the relatives of the dead, misses the point. When one is a victim of evil or tragedy, in that moment there is no relative scale of suffering. Whether your children were murdered by Nazis or as in Job's case a collapsing house crushed them to death, the pain is no different. The questions arising from the victims' survivors will be the same; "Why did this happen?" "How could God allow or sanction such a thing?" Fackenheim's insistence that in cases other than the Holocaust one must accept an answer from within the traditional framework and not search for explanations of God's behavior ring false. It also misses the point of Job, a canonized protagonist of tradition, who refused the answers that tradition gave him as woefully inadequate. Job insists on a justice that conforms to what he believes must exist, because of God's prior revelation. This revelation through scripture and the activity of God in history that it records is the same source for justice that Fackenheim insists upon, only his faith is not troubled, nor may anyone's faith be troubled by a lack of said justice being executed. When and where God's presence brings about justice falls under the category of "explanation" and is therefore beyond the bounds of religious concern. All that people

of faith can do is to continue with faith, despite the evil that befalls them. This is what Fackenheim sees in Job's behavior in the epilogue, but Job's silence in the face of overwhelming might is not necessarily confirmation of his acceptance of God's inscrutable ways. It could, as Eli Wiesel suggests, be quite the opposite.

> By repenting sins he did not commit, by justifying a sorrow he did not deserve, he communicates to us that he did not believe in his own confessions; they were nothing but decoys. Job personified man's eternal quest for justice and truth – he did not choose resignation. Thus he did not suffer in vain; thanks to him, we know that it is given to man to transform divine injustice into human justice and compassion.[35]

Fackenheim would be most uncomfortable with such an assertion. Not only does it assert divine injustice, which he would reject as an explanation of God's behavior, but it posits a human justice, which operates independently from, and at times in a superior fashion to divine justice. For Fackenheim, the source for all transcendent human values, including that of justice, is the commanding voice, whether it is the commanding voice of Sinai that resulted in Torah, the commanding voice of Auschwitz that resulted in the will to survive, or any of the other values that were revealed as a consequence of God's involvement in history. Such thought offers no answer to Job, who has already arrived at the conclusion that despite a hostile God who cares little for justice, he himself will insist on a universal application. This is an ancient, scriptural acknowledgment of an ultimately human standard of justice that Fackenheim is unwilling to accept. In the end, Fackenheim's basis for legitimate Jewish theology prevents him from an accurate reading of a book of the

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[35]Elie Wiesel, Messengers of God, (New York: Touchstone, 1994) p. 235

Bible and the concerns and insights that it brings. His insistence on traditional methodology restricts him, from the beginning, to a traditional outcome.

V. Eugene Borowitz

Eugene Borowitz is the theologian most closely aligned with current Reform thought. His impact has been felt most acutely in the statements of the movement in 1977 and 1999. Borowitz tries to walk a fine line in his thought, predicated upon the ultimate autonomy of the individual in all matters, yet resorting to notions of covenantal responsibility which place limits upon the individual. Borowitz finds historical evidence to reject all religious humanisms and rationalisms, yet relies upon his experiences of human institutions and relationships to make sense of the world. It is out of this seemingly contradictory situation that he strives to clarify the conflict's implications for how one thinks about God and man and the relationship between them.

Borowitz begins his investigation of theology with certain baseline assumptions which he knows separate him from traditional approaches to thought about God. As he is free to admit, any attempt at systematic theology must involve some "accommodation to the surrounding culture,"[36] even in Orthodoxy. Such attempts are differentiated in the sphere of liberal thought, however, when classical Jewish beliefs must be altered in order to make way for generally recognized truths from the larger culture. In Borowitz's case, the specific truth that Judaism must accommodate is the, "root belief that personal dignity

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[36]Eugene B. Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, (New York: JPS, 1991), p. x

means having substantial self-determination."[37] This idea finds expression in Borowitz's writings in the language of autonomy, which is a recurrent motif in his struggle to construct a Jewish theology. However the individual encounters God or traditional knowledge and teachings, the autonomy of the individual cannot be sacrificed to make the relationship function.

The absolute insistence on autonomy results in a view of God deliberately taking on restrictions on his own transcendent power in the realm of human affairs, leaving space for the individual to act in freedom, thus giving meaning to the "covenant" as Borowitz has defined it. In his way of thinking, "covenant" signifies a relationship between an individual and/or group with God in which the individual's/group's awareness and experience of God leads him to take on behavioral obligations in order to fulfil what he has intuited that God wants him to do. These obligations vary from individual to individual, even as the experience of God does. Membership in a faith community places additional boundaries on the individual's interpretation of God's desires through its framework of tradition that assists in bringing the ineffable experience of God into the cognitive realm of behavioral choice. For a Jew, this membership comprises the access to an historical collective experience of God which is just as powerful as the individual experience when it comes to formulating the specifics of a covenant. Every individual comes to a sense of self through the process of education and socialization within a specific group, so the boundaries between the covenant with the group and the individual are murky.

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[37]Ibid., p. x

The personal experience of God is not only Borowitz's source for his own religious duty as defined by his personal covenant, but provides him with a method for understanding something of God's continuing role in human affairs at large. Borowitz's relationship with God is modeled on the relationships that he has with other people, with God standing as a full person. As he says,

> That is not to make a detached, metaphysical observation concerning the nature of God but only to say that this is the best basis I have found for drawing an analogy to the God with whom I stand in Covenant when I try to think about God. Persons being the most complex thing in creation, I find this an intellectually reasonable procedure. Further, my experience of being involved with God being a personal one, this envisagement seems appropriate.[38]

This relationship with a person that Borowitz describes allows him some degree of explanation in the face of God's seeming absence. Just as a true relationship with a friend does not require constant confirmation to know that it still stands, so too with God. Long silences from God do not mean that the relationship is broken or is no longer existent. Trust in the relationship means that there is a reasonable expectation that at some point the relationship will be reaffirmed. Even in the instances where great evil happens during God's absence do not imply that the relationship is broken. No matter how much an individual or a people has suffered, it cannot be used, "to deny that God has since been present in our lives as individuals and in that of the people of Israel."[39]

God's continuing presence is felt through the transcendent values to which we are

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[38]Eugene Borowitz, Liberal Jewish Theology in a Time of Uncertainty, A Holistic Approach, paper, p. 31

[39]Ibid., p. 32

called within our covenant relationship. Along with Fackenheim, Borowitz sees recent history as grounds for a thorough rejection of any possibility of a human origin for the ideals which guide us and extend beyond the lives of individuals. The liberalism that placed people at the center of the world and made them the responsible actors in redemption cannot stand after the barbarism of the last century. Borowitz says,

> We are conscious that a real God, not ourselves, meets us, and that our very existence rests upon God's ever-present challenge and command, God's judgment and support. With the idolatry of liberalism behind us, the living God now emerges rightfully as our Lord.[40]

With our "very existence" resting upon God, how can we explain the presence of so much suffering in the world?

Curiously, whereas Borowitz explicitly rejects rationalism as an approach to theology, he embraces it when it comes to outlining a theodicy. He begins with one of the classic rational attempts to preserve God's justice, the free will defense. As he restates the argument,

> If God wishes people to be meaningfully free and achieve righteousness by the proper use of their unique freedom, God's reward and punishment cannot be mechanical.[41]

In his formulation of the argument, a mechanical action on the part of God (presumably a system with predictable and regular outcomes for given actions) would reduce people to an unthinking and automatic behavior pattern. Drawing upon his own knowledge of God, this is not what God wants.

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[40]Eugene B. Borowitz, God and Man in Judaism Today: A Reform Perspective, Judaism, vol. 23, no.3, 1974, pp 303-304

[41]Borowitz, Renewing, p. 148

The second piece is to rely upon recent scientific descriptions of the universe, as delineated by quantum physics, which seem to undercut previous visions of the world as an orderly place of cause and effect. It was the previous paradigm that allowed for philosophical naturalism to eliminate God's place in the running of the universe. Newer quantum theory shows a great deal of randomness within certain bounds at the molecular level. Borowitz finds this to be a useful analogy to describe the freedom that people have within the world, even though the bounds are drawn by God. For Borowitz this constitutes evidence that God is functioning within nature, a possibility which he feels cannot be set aside as it was in previous rationalisms.

The ultimate determinant for God's justice is for Borowitz his own experience of God. Perhaps it is best to allow Borowitz's own words to speak on this subject.

> Though I cannot affirm direct and immediate retribution, that does not require me to deny the presence of *any* justice in human affairs. Seeking its presence we are tempted to itemize all the occasions on which we were not rewarded. "I didn't deserve that" mostly means we found God or the world unresponsive. It does not often mean all the good that comes to us on which we have no claim, life being the most obvious case. If we wish to be fair when we speak about God's justice and ourselves, then we must begin with all that God has given us that we had no right to or had not earned. In my experience, what God gives most people hour by hour most generously exceeds what, as a simple matter of justice, they deserve. When one lives in gratitude, the absence of justice stands out primarily in the astonishing benevolence showered upon people.[42]

With this statement, Borowitz greatly minimizes the problem of God's justice and undeserved human suffering. Evil as a consequence of a natural act or even as an act of God is not accounted for, as all he mentions is the case of human behavior. It does still

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[42]Borowitz, Renewing, p.149

cause him anguish that God, as Borowitz understands him, seems to refrain from enacting justice at times that he should. This understanding does not cause him to think that God never acts in human affairs or even to diminish his sense that God still has a regular effect in the lives of many people. He can still, "dimly but really discern God's shaping power making itself felt...in the ordinary flow of reality."[43] All of this adds up to a simple defense of God's inscrutability. No matter what happens in the world, or how distant God may seem, the gift of life alone would be enough for Borowitz to affirm that God is still present and at work in human affairs. Horrible evil would certainly cause him pain to witness in others or to experience himself, but it would not cause him to doubt his relationship with God, or the correctness of the transcendent ideals that arise from his communion with the deity. Borowitz then finds himself in a similar position to Fackenheim regarding his faith in God. Faith comes first, and cannot be broken by any attempts at evidentiary proof. He does differ from Fackenheim in that he has no *a priori* objection to explanation as a religious undertaking, and in fact goes so far as to offer explanation and evidence that counters any attempt to refute God's justice in the world. He may not understand every application of justice, but it is there more often than not. Furthermore, he makes the scandalous suggestion that most people are often getting better than they deserve! Justice is therefore in force and operating almost all of the time, if only we would open our eyes to see it. Would such thinking help Job in his hour of need?

Borowitz does not really address the issue of evil coming from sources other than human conduct, and as such does not address Job's problem. His response to the evil in

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[43]Ibid., p.150

the world that he cannot explain from his basis as an individual in a relationship to God is simply to leave it unexplained. He will persevere in the relationship and learn to live with the fact that he doesn't understand what or why God does what he does. He also wants to reframe the question of God's justice to center on those who do not deserve a good fate so often getting one. Job is painfully aware of this aspect of the problem, but it is not the one that causes him to demand an explanation from God. He is concerned with his own miserable condition after having lived an exemplary life. This is a problem to which Borowitz does not offer an answer.

Borowitz's understanding of God, by his own methodology, is irreconcilable with that of any other human being who has not had a similar relationship, or any reality that has been ascertained through the use of reason. His entire approach to God is based upon his own individual relationship to the deity. The apparently frequent and ongoing exchanges that Borowitz has with God have given rise to his knowledge of God as good, just, and present. These experiences, however, are by their very nature non-transferrable. The experience of one individual cannot be substituted for that of another if it is the dynamic of the relationship itself that gives rise to meaning. The perceptions and intuitions of any given individual have validity beyond that individual's mind only in as much as he can communicate them through the use of cognition and reason to another individual. There is no way to make one's own relationship binding upon another. Borowitz also runs into the difficulty of other individuals having had distinctly different relationships with God that result in very different estimations of the deity. Job has a relationship with God that is not one of an autonomous individual standing in a covenant

that reveals higher truths and reinforces positive behavioral traits. He has clung to a sense of justice despite God, not because of him. Job is a plaything that has loyally served God only to be treated cruelly, smitten with disease and have his children murdered. His is a position of abject servitude with no apparent benefit. Job's picture of God as uncaring and inconsistent cannot be reconciled with Borowitz's vision if reason is not allowed in the effort to describe God. Instead, both must stand unchallenged, as long as the individual perceives his own relationship to God to be a valid one. Any other questions about how God functions in the world or treats human beings must be answered from the context of the individualized relationship that Borowitz posits as the source of his theology. This leaves him with answers that may be satisfying to himself, but cannot reasonably be applied to the individual experience of another, be that person Job or a present day thinker concerned with the same problem.

VI. Alvin Reines

Alvin Reines stands at the opposite pole of current Reform thought from Eugene Borowitz, firmly in the tradition of rationalism. He is the originator of the concept of polydoxy, a term he uses to describe both the multiplicity of belief and the underlying covenant of freedom and mutual tolerance for varying belief that operates under the name of Liberal Judaism. As an outgrowth of his work in polydoxy, Reines holds that when it comes to formulating a theology, nobody can claim to have a concept of God that will hold true for all persons. Although a rationalist, Reines accepts the limits of human reason when it comes to apprehension of the external world. Each individual psyche is

profoundly separated from any certainty of knowledge of external existents, and can only know its own sensory data and internal thought. The evidentiary requirements of every individual are different, and as such it is inconceivable that the sensory input and internal thought process that results in the belief in a particular concept of God for one person would be adequate or convincing for all others. A further implication of this epistemological stance is that no objective evaluation of differing God concepts is possible, as objectivity itself is an impossibility. That being said, Reines maintains that any God concept is authentic for an individual, provided that his or her evidence leads to the conviction that it is true. A concept of God is inauthentic when it is accepted by the individual without sufficient evidence as to actually convince one of its truth.

With the above understanding that his concept of God has no necessary claim on any other person, Reines arrives at hylotheism , a type of process theology, as the idea of God that best satisfies his own evidentiary requirements, and requires the least number of assumptions in order to be proved. In the interest of applying reason to the task of describing God, Occam's razor is brought to bear, with the elimination of any and all unnecessary assumptions. As Reines succinctly states,

> If a God-view is validated by assumptions without limit, then any and all God-views are established as true simply by assuming them to be true, no matter that not a shred of evidence can be brought to substantiate them.[44]

This means that Reines jettisons some assumptions that are common to many theologies, namely God's personhood, omniperfection, and absolute power to overcome nothingness.

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[44]Alvin J. Reines, Hylotheism: A Theology of Pure Process, in Jewish Theology and Process Thought, Lubarsky and Griffin, ed. (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), p. 258

These common assumptions on the part of theologians are seen to be without merit, as they are not based upon evidence. They are more easily understood as the unconscious projections, at times gross and at other times subtle, of the individual's parental image onto God. With these assumptions shed, Reines is free to ponder an idea of God that relies only on the evidence that is reliable to the individual: sensa, the information that "appears to immediate awareness as a presentation of one of the five senses,"[45] and is the only verifiable link to reality outside of the mind, and selfa, the remainder of current awareness which consists purely of thoughts that correspond to internal mental events and impressions.

The sum of sensa and selfa in the current moment, which is all that can be experienced by the individual, comprise being. Being is necessarily in the present moment of awareness, and so all that is past no longer has being and does not exist. Anything which is past exists only as selfa in the memory. For purposes of theological investigation, Reines chooses to rely only upon sensa as a source of information about God (the same source as is used to gain knowledge of any other extramental reality), which relegates historical or traditional arguments to irrelevancy. Therefore arguments from Jewish tradition or historical understandings of God have no claim upon the individual unless they help to correctly classify and harmonize one's sensa and selfa with an empirically verifiable reality. Correspondingly, Reines freely admits that there is nothing specifically Jewish about his theology, but that in no way diminishes from its truth. As he says when considering the breadth of opinions that have been held by various Jews as to the nature of

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[45] Ibid., p.256

God,

> Whether the God-views of Jews in the past or present agree with my theology is irrelevant to my belief; all that is germane is that the evidence for the theology creates within me the conviction of its truth.[46]

The definition of God which Reines arrives at satisfies his evidentiary requirements and makes no unnecessary assumptions. Hylotheism defines God as the enduring possibility of being. Being, or the experience of sensa or selfa, is marked by its finitude. As can be empirically observed, any existent will eventually cease to exist. This is the hallmark of *actual* existence, that it will someday cease. It is impossible to have actual existence and to have the quality of endurance. All actual existence necessarily leads to extinction. For every actual existent, however, there must first be the *possibility* of existence, which as possibility is in no way limited in time. God is then identified as this enduring possibility of being, characterized by the lack of actual existence. If God were to enjoy actual existence, then God would necessarily be subject to extinction. It is only as possibility that God can have duration. In Reines's words,

> Actual existents (being) overcome nothingness at the cost of future and total annihilation. God overcomes nothingness by incorporating it into the divine existence; God is thereby emptied of actuality and must forever remain possibility.[47]

Human beings, as all existents, are necessarily cut off from the God that exists as possibility, separated by their actuality and its accompanying finitude. The only point of contact between the human beings and God is in the enduring possibility which exists in

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[46]Ibid., p.258

[47]Ibid., p.260

the world, the continually flowing process of future actuality arising from the present.

God's status as the possibility of being means that without the world of actual existence, God cannot exist. The world's existence is necessary for God's existence. Possibility has no meaning without actuality. Thus God coexists with the world, in that the possibility of every future being flows from present being, which can be empirically verified by observing the regularity of causation in nature. God is always present in the world as the possibility of future being, and conversely without the world to lend future actual existence, God could not exist.

Hylotheism as described explains the existence of the world not as a planned creation on the part of God but as a necessary concomitant to God's own existence. This being said, there is no higher purpose to the world's existence than to provide the actuality that allows for God to endure as possibility. There is no valuation possible of actual existents. From the perspective of God, any existent is "good," whether it is an influenza virus or a kitten, as its actual existence allows for God to endure as possibility. Of the many implications of hylotheism this is the most germane to our investigation. No occurrence in the world or actual existent is evil from the perspective of God. Every existent, no matter how irredeemably and completely evil it may be from a human perspective, flows from God as an actuality that arises from God's enduring possibility, and plays the same role in sustaining the godhead as any other. Good and evil are purely human valuations.

The impact of this thinking on Job's concern for the presence of evil in the world and the seeming lack of any divine justice in human affairs is interesting to consider..

Hylotheism makes ready acknowledgment of evil in the world as a regular feature of human existence, as well as the lack of any divine desire or plan for justice. God, having been outlined with the fewest possible assumptions, is not described in any role in the world that cannot be observed, nor assigned powers and concerns that seem to be at odds with reality. What human beings understand to be evil can in some sense be understood to come from God, in that everything that exists in actuality had to first exist as possibility, but there is no personal connection to the existence of evil. It is not "sent" by God as a form of affliction. The existence of evil is no different than the existence of a tulip. Both are real and both fulfill God's need by existing in actuality. For that matter, Job's own existence, which he curses and wishes had never been brought about, fills a similar role. Job's question of justice, why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, assume conditions that do not exist. God is not a person and is incapable of showing concern or administering justice. If one person receives justice and another does not, it is a purely human concern. Justice, and all other such concepts that transcend the individual human existence, are purely human inventions for which human beings are responsible. Success or failure in the application of justice is a matter of human institutions and social organization and their proper development.

In a point of agreement with Job, Reines holds no belief in an afterlife, as the price for all actual existence is inevitable annihilation. The urgency which this gives to human activity is notable, as there is no parental God that will make an entrance into human affairs to set them right, nor is there the opportunity to receive compensation in another life. If there is to be improvement in the situations of individual's lives and in the

communal lives of human societies, then it is up to us to make it so. If God is present in evil, then God is also present in the good, in that the phenomena and existents that humans perceive to be good flow from God's enduring possibility into actual existence. In a somewhat hopeful vein, humans, as actual existents in the chain of natural causation can effect a change in the godhead by altering what is possible. When we alter our current being, we necessarily change those possibilities that can flow from it. God then changes with us, for the better or for the worse. God is absent of any valuation other than the good of any and all actual existents, so if we wish to improve our human condition and strive for a more equitable social and economic organization, God will not "approve" but will necessarily change along with us.

If there is a weakness to the hylotheistic concept of God, it is that it holds out comfort for neither those who demand a personal God, those who demand a specifically Jewish God, nor for those who wish to see themselves in some way as immortal. Hylotheism arrives at a philosopher's God, consistent with the requirements of reason. Such God concepts have long been criticized, mainly in that they contradict the accepted wisdom of religious tradition, and that they would strip away any comfort that might be derived from belief in a personal God. A philosopher's God concept, often a remote deity that does not interact with nature, is more likely to emphasize the profound aloneness of humankind in the universe. This is a disquieting thought for many. Such God concepts are also subject to the criticism that they may not leave anything around to be an object of prayer, much less the foundation for a religion. Such criticisms, while they have a certain validity for those in need of psychological comfort or those who are unwilling to follow

the dictates of reason wherever they may lead, are not new, and have often been leveled at philosophers throughout the ages. Philosophers are at a disadvantage when it comes to combating such charges. It is impossible to logically refute those who insist that their belief structures require no rational or evidentiary proof. We need only think of Maimonides, who chose to write his major philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*, in Arabic so as to keep its rationally based, philosophically consistent, and utterly unreachable God away from the masses of Jews that would find it heretical. As history shows us, he was only partly successful.[48]

For all of these potential criticisms, hylotheism, however, does provide a path emphasizing reason to a God that doesn't require elaborate justifications to conform to observable reality. It is ready to meet the needs of those who have confronted their own mortality and, like Job, concluded that it is the inevitable and absolute end of life.

As can be seen from the above discourse, the modern mind has thought of many possibilities for the character and nature of God. All thinkers in the arena, confronted by both their own psychological needs and the struggle to reconcile God with observable reality must cut a path that veers closer to either one or the other of these concerns. The result is represented by the various theologies that arise, with all of their attendant strengths and weaknesses. One may resolve the problem of God's nature in such a way

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[48]Controversies erupted throughout the Jewish world after the death of Maimonides and the wider dissemination of his work. Many communities went so far as to ban it.

that is personally satisfying and offers needed comfort, but yet cannot be subjected to reason for those who wish to do so. Another may be so driven to reassert the correctness of a traditional standpoint that the resulting God concept stands only if it is protected from any questioning. Still others may be so driven by the dictates of reason and scepticism that they have *a priori* excluded any possibility of God's existence. In every case, choices are made in an either unconscious or deliberate manner which dictate the possible direction a theology may take as well as its attendant theodicy. When such choices are made not only on behalf of an individual but on behalf of entire religious movement, they are deserving of the highest level of scrutiny. In the next chapter we will consider some of the manifestations of Reform theology in both the latest platform and in some of the current liturgy which represent a vision of God to the movement as a whole.

Chapter 3: Official Reform Expressions of Theology

> *Platforms have their legitimate place in the sphere of politics, and hence within the political activities of religious movements. But in regard to the actual religious life of a religious movement, they are not only useless, but capable of doing actual harm. A platform, designed to express an area of agreement, inevitably states the lowest common denominator of belief, and gives the impression that this is sufficient...It is not an expression of religious thought, but a substitute for it.*[1]
>
> – Emil Fackenheim

We have previously examined the origin and nature of Job's complaint, and looked at a variety of modern thinkers that offer potential solutions to the sufferer who, like Job demands from God a response to his undeserved fate. As we have seen, the process of responding to such a complaint requires the balancing of oftentimes conflicting concerns. One might attempt to remove from God direct responsibility for earthly justice by locating God in the transcendent values that are found among humanity. Such a God located within nature and subject to its laws, is available to every human heart, but is robbed of much of the grandeur and power that for many would make a deity worthy of worship. One can find a logically satisfactory answer for God's apparent lack of justice by removing from God any agency at all, by labeling any attempts to characterize God as simple projections of the individual, or by formulating a God idea that precludes the possibility of interaction between God and humanity. In

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[1]Emil Fackenheim, Essays in Jewish Theology, (Toronto: Canadian Council of Reform Congregations, 1964), p. 4

doing so, a price is paid in the stripping away of much or even all of the comfort that is commonly derived by belief in God. As Freud correctly observed, such a God view may be consistent with the dictates of reason but is unlikely to hold much fascination for the masses of humanity. One may also attempt to uphold a traditional view of God as an active participant in human history and in the lives of individuals, much as is outlined in the Biblical and rabbinic traditions. Doing so also entails the payment of a price that many are unwilling to make, namely an abandonment of reason as a primary faculty for understanding the world. Any path that leads to a reification of the traditional God necessarily turns its back on Biblical criticism and other academic analyses of sacred texts. These disciplines, which undermined any traditional notions of revelation, have long been the hallmark of Reform Judaism. Whichever way one turns in attempting to answer the theological dilemma posed by the suffering of the innocent, unintended or perhaps undesirable consequences seem certain to follow. It is with great interest that we then turn our inquiry towards how the official expressions of Reform Jewish theology, as they are reflected in both liturgy and ideological platforms, grapple with the matter.

I. Liturgy

The gateway through which the great majority of Reform Jews will enter into "official" theology is the liturgy used in the synagogue, in the home, and utilized by a rabbi at life-cycle events. Within these sources, we find a variety of theological expressions, albeit all operating from a somewhat duplicitous stance. The first thing to take into account with Reform liturgy is its assumption that the typical Jew in a congregation is not Hebrew literate. This allows for the frequently large divide in

meaning between Hebrew passages and their attendant English language companions. This split requires us to examine each of these liturgies as separate entities for the theologies that they contain and transmit to those who use them. For the purpose of identification of these different strands, we will identify the two different books contained within the covers of the Reform daily prayer book with their respective names, *Gates of Prayer* and שערי תפילה[2].

The God view that is promulgated as an expression of Reform thought in שערי תפילה, is barely distinguishable from that of traditional or Orthodox thought. The daily, Shabbat, and festival services make only ideological changes that focus on the political realities of Reform life in America, with no substantial effort to reflect a modern theology within its prayer formulations. Among the notable changes driven by political ideology that mark the prayers as in any way Reform are: the absence of a מוסף on Shabbat and holidays, reflecting a turning away from the desire to reinstitute sacrificial worship at a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem; the emendation of messianic prayers to focus on the hope for a messianic age rather than a personal messiah; the absence of פייוטים as unnecessary historical accretions to the original body of prayers; the elimination of prayers that lower the status of women.

On the theological front, the most significant emendation of שערי תפילה is the elimination of the second and most of the third paragraphs of the שמע, those which most closely identify God with the agricultural cycle and with the strictest retribution for the failure to carry out all of his Biblically mandated commandments. The second prayer of

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[2]Chaim Stern, ed., Gates of Prayer/ שערי תפילה, (New York: CCAR Press, 1975)

the weekday and Shabbat תפילה has also been altered in order to soften, although not repudiate, the doctrine of resurrection. With these exceptions noted, the God that emerges from daily and festival services of שערי תפילה has definite characteristics. God is a person, listening to prayer and available to all who call on him. God is an actor in history, inextricably linked to the history of the Jewish people and their savior in times of need, by miraculous means if necessary. God has a special link to the people of Israel that entails the exercise of a special providence for Israel, as he has from the time of the Patriarchs. God has chosen Israel from among the nations, setting it apart for a unique destiny intimately bound up with God. God's revelation of the Torah to the people of Israel is an emblem of this special love and favor. For those who live in righteousness, God will offer reward, which may be seen in the way he causes the earth to yield its bounty, the continued existence of the people Israel, or the special protection from evil that God can extend to the individual. For those who do not live in righteousness, God is quick to forgive and abundant in mercy should they wish to repent. God's power extends over all nature and is manifest in the orderly running of the universe according to his plan, as can be seen with the regular rising and falling of the sun and moon, and the regular paths of the stars in the sky. Part and parcel of the natural order that God maintains is the implantation of an immortal soul in every human being, which after life will be joined with God in an unspecified manner.

In שערי תפילה, we see little more than cosmetic differences from traditional Orthodox theology. This can be present as an expression of official Reform theology only if it is assumed that the vast majority (nearly a totality) of Reform Jews in America cannot read and understand Hebrew. As Lawrence Hoffman points out, this experience

is not a new one in the history of Reform. When the nineteenth century German reformers made the decision to render the traditional prayers into the vernacular, they faced an unpleasant consequence. They,

> made its literal meaning suddenly and often uncomfortably, obvious to all, while at the same time eliminating any positive symbolic overtones which might have made the Hebrew text palatable. Moreover, the German founders of Reform hailed from a society where intellectuals studied philosophy and theology. They were, therefore, conditioned to search out the theological implications of the plain text and to take them seriously.[3]

The return of these prayers in the Hebrew implies that the conditions that Hoffman finds in Germany of the last century, are likely present in the American community as well. Leaving the prayers in Hebrew isolates them from the open exchange of ideas and any possible criticism. Hoffman construes the other side of this insulation from open criticism in a positive light: it preserves the emotional value of the words by virtue of their symbolic value. Hoffman holds that the actual experience of prayer, the sound of the words and the ritual clothing and actions, is of greater value to the average Jew than the plain meaning of the words that he or she prays. It is only when they are translated that potential trouble arises. As Hoffman cynically notes,

> We would be painfully mistaken to assume that the nominal Orthodox Jew – that is, the Jew who says he is Orthodox because he attends an Orthodox synagogue, even though he many not subscribe to the totality of Orthodox Jewish law, really subscribes to the literal meaning of the entire *Siddur*...He believes in angels, bodily resurrection, and the like, no more than does the average Reform Jew. But the Reform Jew, lacking the positive symbolic association with the Hebrew, has translated the prayers

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[3]Lawrence A. Hoffman, "The Liturgical Message," contained in, Gates of Understanding, Chaim Stern, ed., (New York: CCAR Press, 1977), p. 139

and then is forced to worry about their meaning.[4]

One can only assume by the bulk of Hebrew prayers that occur in שערי תפילה, that something akin to the process of the Orthodox Jew in prayer is what the leadership responsible for the liturgy desired for Reform Jews. The unspoken message to the Reform Jew is that if one has the Hebrew literacy to understand שערי תפילה, then chances are that theology is not a concern. For those without such literacy, the Reform Hebrew prayer consists principally of talismanic properties. The sound of the words and the shapes of the letters contain all of the meaning that is necessary for prayer.

The problem arises for those who do have theological concerns and Hebrew literacy. The uncritical repetition of traditionally theological prayers would likely be deeply troublesome for individuals who have in any way been unwillingly put into a Job-like position. If some of the ugly realities of life had intruded into one's experience in such a way that they caused a reappraisal of traditional theology, שערי תפילה could conceivably preclude one's participation in Hebrew prayer. As long as one is not in the position of either Hebraic and theological ignorance that שערי תפילה assumes, or are in agreement with the nominally Orthodox viewpoint, the value of the Hebrew prayers is at best doubtful. Even if one was in agreement with Hoffman's assessment that the meaning of the prayers was not contained in their words but in their performative aspect for those who recite them, further problems arise. Why, if performance is the essence of prayer, should the words remain the same? If the sound of Hebrew and the intent of the individual are the bulk of prayer, it would seem that for those who focus on the meaning,

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[4]Ibid., pp. 139-40

some accommodation could be made, perhaps reflecting the theological variety present in *Gates of Prayer* with a similarly diverse Hebrew liturgy. After all, the stated purpose of the book is, "to make available the full potential of Jewish tradition from which individual theological self-images may be sustained and nurtured."[5] It would seem that the "full potential" of tradition is carefully circumscribed to disallow for theological beliefs that are outside of mainstream rabbinic thought, as long as one prays in Hebrew.

Curiously, the second book contained within the same cover, *Gates of Prayer*, intentionally reflects a wide variety of theological possibilities, all available by simply choosing from among the many services. The prayer book's companion volume even goes so far as to identify the various English services by their predominant themes and the theological slant that it wants to embody. The embraced theologies include a variant on Kaplan's naturalism, Borowitz's covenant theology, a take on Reines's polydoxy that strives for equivocal God language, and even a more mystical search for God. This breadth of choice for those who pray in English is an attempt to deal with the heterodox nature of the Reform community. As Hoffman says, *Gates of Prayer* was written in recognition of the fact that,

> We have grown in the variation of theological views represented among us, and the vision of Reform Judaism as a confirmation of the individual's right to choose intelligently from within Jewish tradition finally becomes reality.[6]

Difficulties arise when one attempts to choose which parts of Jewish tradition will

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[5]Ibid., p. 155

[6]Ad loc.

be represented among the potential choices for the masses that may not have easy access to them otherwise. The choices made on their behalf, become by default the breadth of tradition. It is interesting to note what is deemed to fall outside of the tradition by virtue of its exclusion. On the whole, negative theology is left outside of the book. Any person in the theological tradition of Maimonides, who philosophically demonstrated the lack of any attributes of God,[7] would be outside of the community addressed by *Gates of Prayer*. The same holds true for anyone who follows Maimonides, or a later thinker, on the impossibility of God hearing prayer, having any other contact with humanity, or exercising any special providence. People who have attained a philosophical certainty along these lines seem to have crossed over the bounds of the Jewish tradition supported by Reform Judaism. The possibility that someone who had experienced suffering to such a degree that Job served as a source of inspiration, or at least companionship in defying traditional notions of theodicy, is not allowed for within the English liturgy. These exclusions from the English, coupled with the retention of a traditionally theological Hebrew liturgy leaves one with the impression that despite the rhetoric in favor of diverse opinions and varying beliefs within the Reform community, the liturgy cleaves to a much narrower range of theologies than it might have. The tension that exists in *Gates of Prayer*/שערי תפילה runs through other Reform liturgies as well.

The Passover Haggadah[8], which was published just the year before *Gates of Prayer*, utilizes a different strategy in regards to the distinction between the Hebrew

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[7]Vide, Guide for the Perplexed, Book I, Chs 50 ff.

[8]The Passover Haggadah, Herbert Bronstein, ed., (New York: CCAR Press, 1974)

passages that have been preserved in the book and the English translations and additional readings that constitute the meaningful section of the haggadah for the majority of its users. In a more forthright fashion, the Hebrew passages of the haggadah were pared down to eliminate those elements seen to be more troubling for moderns, such as a call for God's vengeance upon his enemies and upon the enemies of Israel. The story told in the haggadah is, of course, that of God's personal action in history to miraculously redeem the people of Israel from the tyranny of Egyptian enslavement. While the traditional telling is not altered significantly, the optional English readings play a curious role. Published in the midst of a burgeoning Holocaust consciousness, the haggadah includes several readings taken from both victims and survivors. What is striking about these readings is their overall humanistic stance, and the power that they bring to stir the emotions that the ancient tale may not always possess. Strong Holocaust references serve to offer powerful evidence that the traditional theology contained in the ancient sources was completely lacking in the face of recent history. The theme of the haggadah is redemption, and it is hard to imagine that a contemporary reader would not feel the urge to ask, "If God could make a miraculous redemption three thousand years ago, why couldn't he have done it for the poor people who perished at the hands of the Nazis?" In this fashion, the *Passover Haggadah* may be the most Reform liturgy of those currently produced. It presents the traditional voice, as well as the contemporary experience that seems to undermine it. The individual is then free to choose how he or she wishes to resolve the problem of evidence and tradition in conflict. The book does not do it for one.

Gates of Repentance/שערי תשובה, the movement's prayer book for the High

Holy Days is much more constricted in its possibilities than is its sister weekday and Shabbat volume. The length of the holiday liturgy and the lack of space to accommodate a wide variety of services within a single book no doubt contributed to logistical problems when it came to allowing for diverse theologies. There was more at work than simple space restrictions, however, and the rather singular nature of the theology presented in the book is very traditional. In his extensive commentary on the book, Hoffman gives us some insight as to the theological outlook of Gates of Repentance. The prayers were written to tell us that,

> God is the Monarch who has created the world and selected Israel to carry out a mission;[9]
>
> At Sinai we accepted the Torah as our obligation, while God promised, in turn, not to abandon us;[10]
>
> However we conceive of God, we claim bravely in the face of history itself that human history is not capricious. There is a divine purpose, underwritten by a divine Author who created a world, revealed Torah (its blueprint), and promises redemption in the end;[11]

What emerges from the Gates of Repentance goes even further than the Gates of Prayer in establishing a traditional theology: God's presence is clear in history, the Torah is a divine revelation to Israel that provides a clear path for those who wish to enjoy God's protection, and as is clear from other passages, God maintains retribution and the wages of sin is death. What is more, the Hebrew formula that affirms a belief in bodily

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[9]Lawrence A. Hoffman, Gates of Understanding 2, (New York: CCAR Press, 1984), p.21

[10]Ibid., p.20

[11]Ibid., p. 40

resurrection for the righteous at the end of days finds its way in to the prayers. This solemn invocation of such a strict theodicy takes place on both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Intelligent choice from the full tradition seems to have been set aside for the most widely attended services of the liturgical year. Little account is made for those who differ from this theology, or who, like the German Jews of a century ago, are trained to seek out the implications of what is being said. Not the least among the problems such people might identify is how to justify such a theology as relevant to Reform Judaism, when the academic research supported by the movement has effectively undermined the historical and revelatory authority of all the texts that are being mined as sources of theology.

The most recent liturgy that is likely to intersect with the lives of most Reform Jews is the *Rabbi's Manual* /מעגלי צדק[12]. The words it contains are heard at all moments of the life cycle: births and adoptions, deaths, weddings, divorces, and conversions. On the whole, these events serve as opportunities to again assert a traditional theology. Beginning with birth, we read that, in agreement with Psalm 127[13], children are a direct reward from God. As they grow, these children may approach marriage, at which time they will hear of God's abiding presence in history, being the one, "who blessed the men and women of every generation,"[14] and takes an interest in

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[12] Rabbi's Manual, David Polish, ed. (New York: CCAR Press, 1988)

[13]Ibid., p. 9

[14]Ibid., p. 46

consecrating every Jewish marriage to this day.[15] Should a couple ever split apart, they are reminded of the ultimate source of their comfort, "truly, God is your helper." (I Chron. 12:19)

It is perhaps at the time of death and immediately afterwards that the *Rabbi's Manual* shows its deepest theological concerns. In the face of tragedy and the experience of evil, people are more likely to question any theological assumptions that do not account for their present reality. Yet it is at this time that the liturgy reaffirms traditional notions of theodicy, providing a lengthy Hebrew deathbed confession[16] that covers a full range of sinful behavior before the eternal and righteous God who will soon judge the soul of the departed. The confession in English is shorter and not quite as harsh on the soon to be dead individual, but it contains the same essential message, that God determines who will live and who will die, and then judges those who die. Those present at a death should recite the oft quoted speech of Job, "God gave and God has taken away; blessed be the name of God," (Job 1:21) and then praise God who is the "Judge of truth," that has deemed it time for the death to occur.

Following death, the liturgical passages surrounding the funeral and mourning rituals make many assertions about God. The deity has assured the immortality of the soul, rewarding the righteous with some unspecified afterlife. God is the guardian and protector of all Israel and of each soul among the people. For those who suffered greatly in death, we learn that God ordained the end of their suffering so that they might be,

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[15]Ibid., p.66

[16]Ibid., p.106 ff

"released from the prison of his/her burdensome body, [and] enter into eternal life. This is our faith."[17]

Under the most tragic of circumstances, the death of a child or a young person, there is a marked retreat from the implications of the traditional theology espoused elsewhere in the *Rabbi's Manual*. God is thanked for good occurrences, and even praised as a truthful judge at the death of one who is full of years, yet when a younger person has died, there is no invocation of God's will or plan for human existence. Instead we find language that speaks of an unconsolable loss, in no way connected to God's will. God is only invoked as a comforter of the bereaved and the source of life. Gone are the references to God weighing sin and meting out justice as the truthful judge. Gone is any reference to God's omnibenevolence, or forgiveness of sin. Why would such a retreat take place?

It would seem that those responsible for writing the book recognized that the theology they were maintaining for good times was unworkable in bad, or perhaps that a consistency of thought in applying a theology of a just God working retribution would be unacceptable to the majority of the people who had suffered a loss. Perhaps the writers and editors should have borne in mind another of Job's most quoted lines, "Should we accept the good from God and not the bad?" (Job 2:10) If one wishes to propagate a traditional theology, there are distinct consequences regarding how one deals with tragedy. If one wishes to posit that only good comes from God and never evil, one has left the normative tradition of theodicy and must therefore disavow the language of

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[17]Ibid., p.136

God's judgement. A further problem of whence evil also emerges. If evil comes from another source, why would one then petition God through prayer? The theology laid out in the *Rabbi's Manual* and in the liturgy as a whole lacks coherence. Its default mode of traditional theology falls short in the face of evil, leaving no more than a confession of ignorance as to God's workings in the world. A *full* confession of ignorance about God and a resolute refusal to ascribe definite characteristics to the deity would, in fact, be more consistent with the reality of finite beings attempting to know the infinite. Such an attitude lacks only in its paucity of easy metaphor and its embrace of the deep seated fear common to many of having to provide their own meaning for their existence.

II. The Pittsburgh Principles

The other arena in which Reform theology finds official expression is the platforms which have been occasionally adopted by a majority of the Reform rabbinate. The latest of these was the Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism which was approved in May of 1999. Building on a tradition of more than one hundred years of Reform efforts in this area, the Pittsburgh Principles represent a further distancing of Reform thought and theology from their predecessors. Most notable is the elimination of reason as a category of religious knowledge, or even any mention of the possibility that rational thought might preclude some of what the Principles affirm as the, "central tenets of Judaism."[18]

While the theological statement of the Principles begins on a safe note, affirming, "the reality and oneness of God," it simultaneously hedges the claim by mentioning that

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[18] "A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism," as available at http://www.ccarnet.org

everyone understands what is meant by God in a different way. A problem then ensues when the principles proceed to undercut the possible diversity of opinion by specifying characteristics of the God that every person has uniquely understood. The first thing about God that is affirmed is that the Jewish people is collectively bound to God by an ancient, eternal covenant, a contractual situation which apparently may not be breeched. God's presence is also regularly encountered by Reform Jews,

> in moments of awe and wonder, in acts of justice and compassion, in loving relationships, and in the experiences of everyday life.[19]

With such a description labeled as a "principle of Reform Judaism," we cannot but wonder if there is then room in Reform for those who do not share such experiences, or who find these same phenomena to be more easily categorized as something other than encounters with God. We find as another principle that Reform Jews continue to have faith that humanity and God will eventually triumph in realizing God's plan, despite the horrors of the Holocaust and the overall barbarism of the last century. This is one of the ways that, "God gives meaning and purpose to our lives." No evil, however great, may serve to cause a reassessment of theology. And if this results in a life of perplexity, wondering why God allows or causes evil, the faithful can rest assured. Another way God gives meaning to our lives is to grant us some form of immortality of the soul.

If one could abstract from these principles a connecting idea, it would seem to be the ascendance of Eugene Borowitz's theology as the official position of Reform. The vocabulary of his covenant theology permeates the God and Torah content of the

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[19]Ad loc

Pittsburgh Principles. It would seem to be that the parameters of the relationship that Borowitz has with God are now the model for all Reform Jews. This goes hand in hand with the renunciation or absence of reason and any requirements of evidence when it comes to formulating principles concerning God. The resulting principles concerning God bear the same problem as Borowitz's own theology: there is no provision for evidence that might convince one of the correctness of the God view. If relationship comprises the entire method of apprehending God, than whose relationship is to be the model? Why isn't Job's relationship with God given voice here? As we have seen earlier, Borowitz's relationship leads him to affirm much of the traditional rabbinic theodicy. No evidence that appeals to reason could ever have the power to dislodge such a faith. Even the academic study of the faith and its artifacts, long a characteristic of Reform and which is spoken of in the preamble to the Principles, cannot undermine the certainty of one who does not value reason in searching out the God that one believes in. Such study receives only a cursory mention as the opposing force to those who wish "to bring faith to sacred texts."

The force of these Principles is all the more striking when one compares them to the original Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. At that time, the leaders of Reform held that the "God-idea" derived from the Bible must be developed by Jewish teachers, "in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages."[20] Judaism was also seen then as "ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason." The Principles of 1999 seem to have turned to a diametrically opposed position

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[20]"Declaration of Principles, 1885 Pittsburgh Conference," as found at http://www.ccarnet.org

when it comes to God and religion. While the 1885 platform may now seem a bit naive in its faith in notions of inevitable progress, there was no need to toss aside the good with the bad. Even if the rational faculty has been employed to evil ends, or towards an overconfidence in humanity, it is not a necessary feature of reason to lead us astray. It is still the only tool with which one can generate anything more than an emotional response to the world and its objects. It is the sole means to generate a genuine belief in God that meets the requirements of the mind so that it is not easily displaced. An image of God based upon uncritical acceptance of tradition or on a purely emotional basis is more likely to be swept aside, as it was for Job, when the sometimes awful realities of life intrude.

We are inclined to agree with Fackenheim's assessment of the nature of religious platforms for liberal movements. The 1999 Principles bear the faults that he saw as endemic to such efforts. In order to say anything with any force at all, a liberal platform must reflect the views of a subgroup among the plurality of opinions present in the movement. While such a statement may have more strength and internal consistency, it is no longer a platform in that it does not reflect the views of the majority. The other option is to so water down any statement of value, and word it in such equivocal terms so as to make it palatable to a majority, that the platform will lose all force as a binding document. *It will no longer say anything.* This is the theological bind that Reform Judaism finds itself in. It would seem that the safest path would be to reject any future attempts at formulating essential principles or beliefs about God for a community that is bound together not only by a common history but by a shared belief that each member of the group may maintain beliefs and practices unique to the individual. It is only in this

way that the breadth of human experience and the breadth of tradition may be brought to bear in each individual as he or she wrestles with an appropriate and coherent concept of God.

Conclusion

I see how little I am.
I will not answer You.
I am putting my hand to my lips:
One time I spoke;
I will not speak again;
two times I spoke,
and I will not go on.
(Job 40:4-5)

What then is there left to say? The story of Job is compelling on many levels, forcing the sensitive soul to question the theological doctrines that usually go unchallenged. The message of Job has been disguised and displaced for many generations and in many ways. The most common method has been to focus on the pious and stoic servant of God that is found in the prologue and epilogue, to the exclusion of the vast majority of the book's words and the book's sympathies. Some commentators, in an attempt to preserve their own theologies, have sought to undo the direct meaning of the text, often inverting the intended meanings. These efforts have largely succeeded on transforming in the popular mind the character and book of Job into a paradigm of piety. This transformation of Job is a prime example of the type of choice that many will make when confronted with experiences or literature that would undermine a theology that gives them comfort. Reality will be altered to fit the preexisting mental constructs of the world and God's role in it, rather than be faced with the difficult task of changing or challenging the accepted theological wisdom.

We have endeavored to put forth into plain sight the actual content of Job, the rejecter of traditional wisdom, as a legitimate starting point both for the critique of existing theodicies and for the constructing of new ones. Job is the essential voice within

the Jewish tradition for evaluating the concept of a transcendent justice, administered by an omniscient God who takes special care of those who follow the divine mandates for behavior. The author of Job utilized an existing motif and mythological character that was present in the literature of the ancient Near East, and skillfully rendered it as a voice of question and rebellion against the accepted theology of contemporary Israel. Job's complaint was tailored to criticize the Israelite God, an omnipotent and omniscient deity that assured a fair outcome in life for both the nation of Israel as a whole and every individual among the people. This view of God's active role in assuring a just collective and personal retribution is supported by nearly the entire corpus of Biblical literature. It was a courageous and independent effort on the part of Job's author to put to parchment what must have been thought by many but said by few: God was not living up to his end of the bargain. The reality of human experience in no way aligned with the traditional picture of God. Not only was justice not forthcoming from God, but there was the possibility that God was an active enemy of selected people on earth. God did not act according to any plan that had been revealed to humanity, or according to any scheme that was intelligible to people. The empirical evidence from human experience could point to only this conclusion.

Later thinkers have wrestled with nature of evil in the world and the implications that it has for our understanding of God. Job, although an ancient source, is still a wonderful litmus test for evaluating the relevancy of their thought for contemporary Jews. As we have shown, any theological system that attempts to deal with the reality of evil in the world, both as a result of human action and as a recurring feature of impersonal forces,

must make compromises to reach a solution. These compromises typically run in one of two directions. One might cling to a concept of God that persists in traditional characterizations of a benevolent and truthfully judging deity, but only at the cost of sacrificing the primacy of observable and verifiable reality in favor of unsubstantiated and unprovable claims that lend the individual psychic comfort. Conversely, one might place verifiable reality in a favored position and accept only the claims about God that can in some way be verified to human reason. This move takes place at the cost of sacrificing the psychic comfort derived from believing in an omnipotent and omnibenevolent ruler of the world. The choice is essentially between emotional comfort, and rational consistency.

By virtue of the open ideological climate and the history of academic critique that have always been present in Reform Judaism, it would seem natural that we would be more willing than others to venture through the door that Job cast open into a new theological realm, one free of presuppositions and blind acceptance of traditional theodicies. The book of Job, while its message may run counter to much of the Bible, is still a part of our religious heritage that deserves closer examination for the sake of theological honesty within our own communities. All that could conceivably hold us back is a dedication to a tradition that has already been undermined, both by academic criticism and by historical and personal experiences of evil in the world, or a fear to let go of the childlike faith in a God that will allow no harm to come to one, or even to let one die. It is a mark of adulthood, both psychologically and religiously, to come to terms with the limits of the human condition. This means that one must confront certain painful realities that the author of Job has pointed out to all who care to learn them.

There is a profound helplessness that often pervades the human experience. We cannot know when evil will strike us, we cannot know when we will be wronged and have no recourse, and we know with absolute certainty that each of us will die. Various theologies have been constructed to deny all of these propositions, but none of them stand up to scrutiny. Their only method of endurance is to appeal to the categories that Job's friends/tormentors used: tradition, human fallibility in judgment, and the unknowable nature of God. Post-Biblical theologies, recognizing that the above categories are not always persuasive, add an afterlife to compensate for undeserved suffering. This places theology beyond the realm of intelligent discussion, as seeing an afterlife is an unprovable and unarguable proposition. Rather, we should form our beliefs and mold our principle based on what we *can* know.

We know that we cannot live our lives waiting for justice to come from above. Judaism has long stressed the need for human agency in improving the world, and this arena is no exception. If we are God's partners in the world, it has long been observed to be a deafeningly silent partnership. Neither can we responsibly say that God is functioning in us when we work towards justice in human affairs. Job is clear about this in his insistence on wanting to take God to court and prove his case against him. Job had arrived at his sense of justice independently, and even at odds with God. This is the final principle that emerges from Job: God is not the seat of transcendent values for humanity. It would seem that we are capable of arriving at them independently. Even those who would appeal to the Torah as a source of such divinely mandated values must soon admit that the Torah was written by human hands, or at the very least mediated by human

beings. This brings us back to the same point: we cannot reliably go any further than ourselves in identifying transcendent values. Rather than being a cause for despair or nihilism, this knowledge results in what Matitiahu Tsevat identifies in Job as the purest moral theory in the Bible. One does not act out of fear of reprisal or hope for reward. Human morality and the religious life result from acting out of the purer motive that what one does is right and just in itself. This is the lifting of the human soul and devotion to cause that were long the raisons d'etre for Reform Judaism as a religious movement. Just as for Kafka's K., this is a door through which we might enter, but only if we stop turning away from the theological helping hand that Job extends to us.

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