HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

Edgar F. Magnin School of Graduate Studies

FROM HERO TO SUBJECT:
A JEWISH INQUIRY INTO TRAGEDY

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

MASTER OF ARTS IN JUDAIC STUDIES

by

ROBIN PODOLSKY

APRIL, 2006

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
Edgar F. Magnin School of Graduate Studies

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Thesis approved by

Rachel Adler

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Committee Chair, Graduate School Committee	Date
Rachel Adler	4/21/06
Advisor, Graduate School	Date
Sharon Gillerman	4/21/06
Director, Graduate School	Date

Carol Safer

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FINAL DRAFT

APPROVAL OF THESIS CONTENT AND FORMAT

The thesis of From Hero To Subject: A Jewish Inquiry Into Tragedy
Title

its content and all other elements including the official format is hereby approved.

APPROVED AS TO CONTENT:

Chairman, Graduate School Committee	Date
Rachel Adler Advisor, Graduate School Faculty	4/21/06 Date
Sharon Gillerman Director, Graduate School	4/21/06 Date

APPROVED AS TO FORMAT:

Director, Graduate School	Date

Is it be possible to derive a morally substantial concept of tragedy—a view that acknowledges the vulnerability of finite beings to calamity, ruin, suffering and, without exception, death; while also acknowledging the moral responsibility of the subject to alleviate as much of the other's suffering as she can—from assuming a created universe, a Creator and the provision of meaning, from outside the subject, through revelation? Or is the very idea of tragedy, a concept that emerged from heroic and classic Greece, incompatible with Judaism, or any morally accountable philosophy of the Other?

Our inquiry will take us through Aristotle's definition of tragedy; texts from the Tanakh, texts from and about the Talmud; the writing of Maimonedes; and the thought of Hermann Cohen; Franz Rosenzweig; Emmanuel Levinas, Cathèrine Chalier, and other thinkers. We will look at the development of the potentially tragic individual, from the agonistic hero to the postmodern subject, from the standpoint of Jewish texts.

I. Introduction

Is it be possible to derive a morally substantial concept of tragedy—a view that acknowledges the vulnerability of finite beings to calamity, ruin, suffering and, without exception, death; while also acknowledging the moral responsibility of the subject to alleviate as much of the other's suffering as she can—from assuming a created universe, a Creator and the provision of meaning, from outside the subject, through revelation? Or is the very idea of tragedy, a concept that emerged from heroic and classic Greece, incompatible with Judaism, or any morally accountable philosophy of the Other?

This question is prompted by a tendency now prevalent in popular culture to employ the designation 'tragedy' or 'tragic' as an incantation to ward off responsibility. To speak of "today's tragic events" or "the tragic events that occurred today" in passive tense is to establish a kind of elegiac distance from what is being discussed. The full incantation often begins: "What happened today was tragic, but..." A quick Google search, on April 9, 2005, using the above phrase yielded references to: non-natural asbestos poisoning: the murder of Laci Peterson; a schoolyard shooting; an impoverished Israeli family dealing with Likud budget decisions; the 9/11 attacks; the death by battering of a child placed in foster care; the shooting of civilians in Iraq; and the case of a civilian boat sunk by a naval ship. In each of these stories, one might discern, not the hand of indifferent fate (or that of a hostile God or gods) or the purely personal fall of an agonistic hero, but a web of human decisions.

The phrase, "What happened today was tragic but..." often begins an explanation of why a police department or military unit has closed its investigation into those civilian deaths; or why a pharmaceutical drug company will not take responsibility for the effects of its products; or why an insurance company will not be paying to repair flood damage. Tragedy, when used this way, means 'out of our hands.' It means that my neighbor's anguish is a spectacle, not a summons.

a. Heroic tragedy

The heroic/tragic worldview, as expressed in the Homeric epics, assumes an agonistic hero living in an indifferent, chaotic universe crowded with gods and goddesses, driven by their own self-interested concerns. This hero exemplifies martial/heroic virtues; he is considered to be a good man only in that he is good at what he does. Above all, the hero of heroic tragedy is portrayed to be authentic, beautiful and effectual[1]even if he is, ultimately defeated[2]. This hero's virtues include those that later moral philosophers and religious thinkers will regard as instrumental qualities: he is strong, cunning, commanding, loyal, physically courageous, virile and lucky. (It almost goes without saying that he is a 'he.') In a universe without revelation—without the Source that Jews rely on to provide a guide to right and wrong, what would, later, be called the existential virtues, such as integrity with regard to one's own sense of meaning,

[1] Only Ulysses can wield the king's bow; and to find his way home to his 'rightful' place, he will kill, beguile or steal from whomever he 'must.'
[2] It's become a cliché that, to defeat a 'great man,' one must find his Achilles' heel.

are almost always valued over those virtues that Judaism and later Western philosophers beginning with Kant and his followers would distinguish as moral.[3]

We may ask if this increased casual of the idea of tragedy in popular discourse, coincident with the rehabilitation of heroic masculinism and the ideas of empire and imperialism is neither a misuse of the term nor an accident—and if they both have to do with the promulgation of support for an American imperium[4]

b. Classic tragedy

Classic tragedy, as defined by Aristotle, the great philosophical theorist of tragic drama, is meant to be instructive, as well as beautiful. Aristotle discussed tragedy as a dramatic spectacle that evokes pity and terror and provokes a cathartic release. Aristotle approved of tragic drama when it successfully imitated real life events and produced 'universal' lessons—that is, lessons universal to Aristotle's assumed audience. Aristotle wrote for, and on behalf of, adult, Greek, citizen males, people whose lives were, in the view of the ancients, complex enough to partake of the tragic.[5] It was this audience that, Aristotle assumed would identify with the tragic hero, whose circumstances were similar enough to their own to elicit such a response, but different enough to crystallize, then discharge, their worst fears. The Aristotelian hero is neither very good nor very bad, but

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[3] Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*, having declared us to be living in a post-metaphysical world, calls for a return to such existential values and also to a renewed regard for the agonistic deed, preserved in story, as the source of the only immortality we might hope for.

[4] California's current governor, a man who earned his reputation on screen as an avatar of the Effectual Man who trusts, more than anything else, in his own strength epitomizes this revival of Homeric, heroic virtue, as does our current President, at least with regard to the image that the attempts to project through such rhetorical flourishes as his general call for 'terrorists' to "bring it on."

[5] Cornel West observes of the ancient playwrights that, for them, 'lower class' folk were not considered to be complex enough in character for their lives to rise to the level of the tragic and were only to be portrayed in comedic and pastoral works.

someone brought low through a mistake or an irresistible combination of circumstances that, in interaction with his character, prove fatal. In Aristotelian tragedy, human finitude and weaknesses are the sources of the hero's downfall and constitute an ontological insult.

The person, that is, the man, who escapes tragedy, in Aristotle's view is he who lives in a state of eudemonia[6]. Eudemonia is often rendered in English as 'happiness,' but might be more closely understood as a state of healthy equilibrium. The eudemonic person (whom Aristotle would have no trouble with designating as the eudemonic *man*) lives in a state of balance between contrasting extremes. He is courageous, because he is neither reckless nor cowardly; he is generous because he is neither stingy nor too impulsively giving.

Furthermore, eudemonia, for Aristotle is an end in itself, the end goal toward which one strives when working to attain elements of happiness, such as material wealth and a good education. For Aristotle, one may live in perfect equanimity in a world where others suffer.

The ultimate human purpose, for Aristotle, is a life dedicated to the exercise of reason and lived in accordance with the dictates of reason, that is, lived excellently—for which a *good span of years and a sufficient supply of material prosperity* are required. Aristotle allows that it takes heavy misfortunes to bring a good man down, but, once that happens, it will take him time to raise himself up to happiness again, if, indeed, he can. It is these heavy misfortunes, combined with mistakes, that are the stuff of Aristotelian tragic drama.

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[6] See Nichomachean Ethics, Book 1

Aristotle recognizes two sorts of virtues—intellectual virtues and those that are sometimes translated as 'moral' virtues, but which include, along with generosity, honesty and gentleness, such purely instrumental qualities as wit and courage.[7] Martha Nussbaum, a modern Aristotelian virtue ethicist allows freely that the philosopher made no distinction between what we might call 'moral virtues' and other behavioral qualities (FG 4-5), so we may as well understand Aristotle's distinction as being between intellectual and behavioral virtues; both of which must be taught and (especially the second kind) made habitual through training to be acquired.

Many Jewish thinkers, from the Rambam to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, have found a great deal in Aristotle's thinking from which Jewish readers might benefit. The Jewish emphasis on the performance of mitzvoth is in sympathy with the idea that excellence is not just a matter of 'being' good but must include doing well. There is something compassionate, *rachmaniyut*, in acknowledging that good people can really be brought low by circumstances—it's not only bad character but bad luck that makes a person miserable. We do, after all, use the same word—*rah*—for natural catastrophes and for human wrongs.

c.The Problem

[7] The late Susan Sontag, may her memory be for a blessing, got herself in some trouble after the 9/11 attacks by observing that physical courage—that required to fly a plane into a building, for instance--is a purely instrumental quality, entirely without bearing on the moral worth of the enterprise it enables. She made this observation, of course, after Kant: ""Intelligence, wit, judgment and whatever talents of the mind one might want to name are doubtless in may respects good and desirable, as are such qualities of temperament as courage, resolution, perseverance. But they can also become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature, and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good....the coolness of a villain makes him not only much more dangerous, but also immediately more abominable..."from *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*: Indianapolis, Hackett, 1981; excerpted in MGL)

However, the prophetic side of Judaism, that voice of *immoderate* love and outrage from which Reform Judaism draws much of its inspiration finds something missing in the eudemonic life. The Torah itself tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves. It tells us to pursue justice. There is a moral weakness, from the standpoint of Judaism, in regarding our neighbor's anguish as a cathartic spectacle, let alone with equanimity.

The modern Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig writes that the ancient tragic hero is "closed up in himself"SR222; he stands as a monadic "block" (ibid223) visually perceptible to the audience, but not addressing himself to them. The chorus must speak for him, since he is insensible to the other and is reduced to silence. The audience is expected, at the end, to turn away from the hero, their catharsis exhausted, and by the end of his story, he has not attempted to find meaning through giving or receiving.[8]

Judaism assumes a meaningful universe created by a God of Compassion and Justice who wants our best, from us and for us, and has given us revelation as a means to know what that best is. To make such a claim does not invalidate the previous half-century of philosophical thinking. Human beings do, ourselves, assign categories and meaning to grouped phenomena within the context of the finite, sensible world. These categories and meanings vary significantly though language, time, place and social position.

Contemporary Reform Judaism relies on the understanding, developed by Continental and postmodern philosophers, that, within and between human societies, paradigms can shift wildly; creating radical breaks in understanding between the present and the past. Reform Jewish thinkers assume, for the most part, that these shifts do not dislodge the

[8] As Martha Nussbaum reminds us, heroes such as Antigone who are willing to die for their duty to the other (a true Levinasian gesture of substitution, although Nussbaum doesn't see it that way) complicate this analysis.

fundamentals of goodness. However, our necessarily limited understandings of these fundamentals do change.

What grounds our praxes of goodness and connects them to those of other Jews, past and present, is our relationship with transcendence and revelation—that is to say, with other people and with our books.

"The face of the neighbor signifies for me an unexceptionable responsibility, preceding every free consent, every pact, every contract. It escapes representation; it is the very collapse of phenomenality."OTB88 The face of the other contains the trace of a command from *outside* the phenomenal world in which humans create our own meaning. My response to this command, my forward motion toward the other in response to the summons of her potential calamity, ruin, suffering—the stuff of tragedy—is, as Emmanuel Levinas indicates, the structure of goodness. In Judaism, one finds the command crystallized in Exodus 20:14 and, again in Leviticus 19:18 and in the vision of Micah 4:3 and 6:8.

Our relationships with our holy texts do not depend on an esoteric insistence that every word in them was dictated by the Creator. These texts contain, as Martin Buber puts it, a "stammering account"(MBR,57) of encounters between humanity and the Author of the world; encounters in which the meaning of life (creation) is given practical substance (revelation). This happens through *prophetic* encounters in which God's moral demands on human beings are revealed. As communities situated in time and in the world, we bring participate in revelation with each reading of our texts, hearing new truths for the first time. Each of us then, as Levinas indicates, is personally necessary to the process of unfolding revelation.

> "The Revelation as calling to the unique within me is the significance particular to the signifying of the Revelation. It is as if the multiplicity of persons—is not this the very meaning of the personal?—were the condition for the plentitude of 'absolute truth'; as if every person, through his uniqueness, were the guarantee of the revelation of a unique aspect of truth, and some of its points would never have been revealed if some people had been absent from mankind."('Revelation in the Jewish Tradition, BTV133)

This is how the mundane human process of assigning meaning from our fallible, situated, finite perspective interacts with revelation from the outside.

This means that, for Jews, meaning is given and enacted through community and in relationship. This is not to deny the necessity for solitary reflection and prayer. However, such prayer does not only provide the individual with consolation or self-affirmation; it compels the subject to undergo stern interrogation. As Abraham Joshua Heschel observed, "Prayer is a confrontation with Him Who demands justice...God reaches us as a claim."('On Prayer' MGSA, 261) Jewish revelation commands the individual *and the community* to bear responsibility for the widow, orphan and stranger.

So, then, does "tragedy" or "the tragic" belong in Judaism? Certainly, Judaism acknowledges crushing loss, catastrophe, intractable grief. Do those things amount to "the" tragic?

2. The Tanakh

Is there tragedy, of the heroic or classic model, in the Tanakh? It would seem that the very orientation of the Hebrew Bible toward redemption, redacted, multi-vocal text that we know it be, raises doubts about whether tragedy, by definition, can be read from it. Or might we find something that we could call "the" tragic or a tragic sense?

Our consideration of these questions here will be from a Reform Jewish perspective that regards the Bible to be, simultaneously: a collection of human artifacts, the work of several authors and redactors who spanned centuries and whose writing reflects various regional and class agendas and religious understandings, along with varied cultural and educational backgrounds; in its canonical form, a unified literary work to be appreciated as such; and a doorway into revelation. As observed above, this is not a literalist perspective, but it is a perspective that assumes a relationship between the Bible and fundamental understandings of goodness that guide our conduct. (As will be discussed later, these understandings are just as firmly grounded in Rabbinical interpretation, but there would be no such interpretations without the Tanakh itself as a record of the relationship between the people Israel and the God of Justice.)

The paradigm of revelation would seem to preclude the heroic tragic model. Biblical heaven is neither empty nor indifferent, but the home of our Creator who blessed our coming into being and found it good. And yet--what about Saul, who seems to have been set up, by God, to fail? What are we to make of Isaiah 6:8-11 in which God informs the prophet that he will be sent to tell his people to shut their eyes and ears lest they repent and save themselves from destruction and exile? (The Rambam, one of Aristotle's most reliable, if problematic, friends in Judaism, will assert, in Mishneh Torah, Hilchot

Tshuvah, Chapter 6, Halachah 3 that such texts, Isaiah's prophecy in particular, should be read, not as examples of Divine perversity—hence, not as tragic--but as proof of Divine justice, because there are some people who have been so wicked that the capacity for *tshuvah* is withheld from them as a punishment.[9]

However, there are many who have found, in the Bible, examples of the sort of instructive story that Aristotle describes as tragic. J. Cheryl Exum, author of *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative* sees, in Saul, a classic tragic figure, brought down by a combination of human failings and irreversible circumstances. The Books of Lamentations and Job do not follow the classic tragic structure, that of a downward arc, a fall from height; but they do deal deeply with catastrophic loss and anguish.

William Whedby, author of *The Bible and the Comic Vision*, reminds us that, although there are what might be called tragic episodes within the Hebrew Bible, the arc of the entire story follows what, in the same Greek context from which we get tragedy, would be called the comic. The Tanakh concludes with the Book of Chronicles at the end of which Cyrus of Persia orders the Temple restored, after which, we already know from the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Torah will be read aloud to the people and accepted—a happy ending. As a unit, then, the Tanakh cannot be called tragic. As a comedy, however, it is rough and raw indeed. Whedby groups Biblical comedy with the renaissance, Rabelaisian, carnivalesque humor celebrated by Hermann Cohen's student, Mikhail Bakhtin.[10] Bakhtin distinguishes Early Modern European Rabelaisian comedy

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[9] This idea will be examined again in a later section.

[10] We will continue to see a similar disjuncture between the historical eras as they are demarcated by a Western historiographical understanding and the chronological development of Jewish thought, which has interacted, almost continuously, with the sources of Western thought but pursued a distinct course of its

from the Greek Classic comedy by its anti-elitist festival laughter, derived from the folk-tradition of the satiric carnival in which all social strata are lampooned and brought down to earth—including the revelers themselves. "...it is universal in scope...this laughter is ambivalent; it is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking and deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives."(RHW,11-12)

Bakhtin also distinguishes Rabelaisian from classic comedy in its treatment of the body. We may be accustomed to think of Renaissance attitudes toward the body only in terms of idealization. We remember the exquisite marble statues and superbly painted figures of the Old Masters, who drew, for their aesthetic models on the classic worlds of Greece and Rome. Of the official Renaissance, Bakhtin says, "As conceived by these canons, the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product....its convexities... smoothed out, its apertures closed."(RHW29) In contrast to which, we have the grotesque Rabelaisian body that eats, sweats and shits, grows a belly and muddies its feet in the earth—a body that is written being born, giving birth and dying.(RHW26) This body, made of *adamah* is, according to Whedby the body that we encounter in the Tanakh, not Aristotle's abstracted occasion of matter shaped by form. We are reminded here of Rosenzweig's observation about the ancient Hellenistic tragic hero that he "had neither an outlet to the outside nor the drive for it, 'not to see, not to hear' was his only wish, like for the marble statue of Michelangelo..."(SR,222)

Can tragedy co-exist with redemption? Richard Elliott Friedman, Biblical scholar and translator, tells us in *Who Wrote The Bible?* that the Books of Samuel, Kings and Judges, from which come those stories most often identified as tragic, emerged from

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own. Some concerns and attitudes that the West understands as Modern or Postmodern appear in ancient and Medieval Jewish texts.

the same prophetic milieu that urges us to make *tshuvah*, because God's only desire for us is that we return to the Good that revelation teaches. Further such texts, even Isaiah 6, promise that at least a remnant will indeed return. Then, for all their mighty venting of pain and horror, such texts are not, finally, text about utter ruin. Are they tragic, then?

Exum begins her analysis by forswearing any intention to "force" the Bible into Aristotle's tragic categories, which she finds inadequate for several reasons, including a lack of concern with "radical evil".(TBN2) She is interested in what she calls "the tragic," which is composed of "the dark side of existence that knows anguish and despair and that acknowledges the precarious lot of humanity in a world now and then bewildering and unaccommodating."(TBN,1) Well there's plenty of that in Tanakh, certainly.

Exum elaborates, "The tragic vision isolates the hero over against (sic) an arbitrary and capricious world...in which...the problem of evil is irreducible and unresolvable into some larger, harmonious whole."(TBN,5)

For Exum, Saul is the Bible's quintessential tragic figure. Indeed, Saul's story reflects, in unsettling ways on the issues of Divine intent and free will. From the beginning, Saul comes off as a joke played on the people by God after they insisted, much to God's and the Prophet Samuel's dismay, on being ruled by a king. When Saul is presented to the people, he is discovered "hiding among the vessels" (I. Sam. 10:22)—but he does turn out to be the tallest person in the room. Indeed, God has fulfilled the people's request for a king to rule *"tasim aleinu"*: *over* us. (So there is some comedy here as well.)

Soon enough, the anointed king cannot do anything right. Most significantly, he has a tendency to act as he chooses, making a burnt sacrifice on his own when Samuel doesn't show up on time to perform his office; failing to slaughter Amalekite livestock, keeping it instead for spoil in the face of God's command to leave nothing alive. To insert an obvious point—the story of Saul is rooted in a society that, to a large extent, lived by the heroic, martial virtues. Saul's great crime is sluggish obedience, and the text has nothing negative to say about the extremity of the slaughter ordered against the descendents of the Amalekites who had attacked Israel in the desert.

The text tells us that when God withdrew favor from Saul and chose David for the kingship, Saul was tormented by a *ruach-raah*, an evil spirit, *from God.* He turns to young David, his eventual successor and a musician, for the comfort of his song. The young man kills the Philistine champion Goliath, wins the heart of Saul's son Jonathan[11], marries Saul's daughter Michal, and, of course, eventually becomes king. Saul, still beset by the *evil* spirit that God has visited on him, descends into madness. His impetuousness is distorted into erratic violence and, for helping David, he slaughters the priests of God, along with their families, with greater thoroughness than he used against Amelek. Before his last battle, Saul breaks his own command against sorcery and consults with a witch who summons the spirit of the now-dead prophet, Samuel. Samuel tells Saul that God has turned form his because of his imperfect obedience with regard to the Amalekites and that Saul and Jonathan will die in battle with the Philistines, whom David has been

[11] Exum insists, emphatically, that the love between David and Jonathan, which noun she places in scare quotes ("love")(TBN 73) "is not eros but *male bonding*" (emphasis hers). It's not at all clear, from this reader's encounter with the text, why the young men's relationship would be better described using a 20th Century sociological construct than as emotional and erotic love; even given the possibility that repeated kissing, sharing clothing and weeping on one another's shoulders were commoner behaviors for male comrades in ancient times than they are today.

raiding regularly from within their territory. At the very end, Saul kills himself rather than submit to death at his enemy's hands. David arrives after the battle has ended and mourns the dead king and prince.

What are we to make of this story? On one hand, we do appear to have a classic tragedy. Saul, a person of average gifts is raised to a great height. In such a position, his habitual impulsiveness becomes the crime of disobedience, for which he is driven to despair and death by an angry God. His story takes place within a martial society in which men are valued for their bravery in battle and mutual loyalty. (The only *chesed* in evidence is between David and Jonathan and David and Saul. The stranger is the enemy with whom the state is at war, and there is nothing said about the value of his life, let alone his feelings.)

On the other hand, Saul does not inhabit a meaningless universe, but one in which there is only one Author of good and evil. As Exum points out, "In no other biblical story is the problem of evil so pressing and so uncompromising as in the story of Saul." TBN 40 Saul's story confronts the reader with the God of Isaiah 45:7, who rejects the judgment of mortal with the reminder, "I form light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil, I YHVH do all these." Saul is driven mad by an evil spirit sent to him by his Maker. Exum says that the story is unsettling, because, "whereas Saul is guilty, he is not really wicked." (Ibid) But the problem is more disturbing than that. How guilty is the man harried to his deeds by a spirit of God? How can the God of Justice punish someone for committing crimes incited by God's pet *ruach rah*? Unless the reader is content with the Rambam's answer (see above), we are left with a universe that is both meaningful to us—because we have been given revelation that lays out what is expected

of us—and, also, mysteriously intractable to the imposition of any sense of order we, from our position of finite knowledge, might construct.

Exum's attribution, to Saul, of agency rescues his dignity, but it also identifies him, for her, with the kind of heroic tradition that smacks of the Aristotelian elitism that, in her introduction to her book, she rejects. She finds "illuminating"(TBN11) a passage by DH Lawrence that identifies tragedy with individual struggle, in which the tragic hero "goes through with his fate though death swallows him....If this passional problem and this working out be absent, then no disaster is a tragedy...not the death of 10 million men. It is only a cartwheel going over a frog. There must be a supreme *struggle.*" And we are back to the Homeric, pagan ideal. Only the death of the authentic, great man matters, not the agonies of common folk.[12]

The moral weakness of this position is exemplified in Exum's comparison of the dying Saul with David as an old man. David, after a lifetime of ruthlessly exercising power and a series of tragic familial losses provoked, at least in part, by his own seeming

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[12] Exum demonstrates ambivalence in her treatment of Jephthah's daughter, condemned, possibly, to be sacrificed because of her father's ill-advised *neder.* Exum insists that we are only to see this woman's death as tragic if it results from something "uncanny and contingent" (11)—something to do with why it was she, not some animal, who greeted her father at the door. So is the tragedy Jephthah's and not the woman who is to be killed? Like Lawrence, Exum says that, ""Innocent suffering is usually not tragic but only pathetic."(11) (*Pathos*, in this context, seems to have more of traditional literary meaning, that which induces emotion in the reader, than the pejorative valence it has in popular usage. Why is that which elicits a caring response deemed to be "only" as compared with the tragic grandeur?) The Rabbis seem to agree that Jephthah made a wicked and stupid *neder*, but they also see his daughter's appearance at the door to be *his* punishment (Breshit Rabah 60:3, Vayikra Rabah 37:4). Jephthah's daughter achieves what Exum is willing to grant to be tragic dignity by accepting her fate bravely, and the women join her in formal, acquiescent lament. (Judges 11:36-7) This appears to be a case, like that of Saul's story, in which the process of ongoing revelation produces moral revulsion in some contemporary readers, including this one, over issues that do not seem to be of concern in the text. As Rabbi Shmuel Miller taught in a *dvar* in July of 2005, Jepthah made an illegal *neder*, and he had no business carrying it out at all. Ultimately in what she terms a "feminist reading"(65), Exum agrees that the unnamed daughter's 'tragic flaw,' if she has one, is in her failure to resist. "She speaks on behalf of the sacrificial system and patriarchal authority, absolving it of responsibility.(67) However, by classic definition, this means that her story is no tragedy, but a social drama. What we see here is not the will of heaven or a dignified stand before indifferent fate, but a squalid, unnecessary murder carried out by elitist institutions. Better the women should have defended the girl with hot water and scythes.

inability to guide his household, does not "struggle" against pain that he knows he's earned—he squares his shoulders and takes up his responsibilities as anointed the ruler of his people (2 Samuel 19:9).

Oddly, Exum indicates that David seems "small" (142) in contrast to Saul's tragic "grandeur (143). Morally, both men have been proven small. But David demonstrates more acumen and, in the end, more of a willingness to take his lumps and do what good he can for those who rely on him rather than indulge in a Lawrencian "struggle" with no particular justification other than his own will. In Jewish terms, David, by putting the community's needs over his own pain, and, perhaps, disqualifying himself as a true tragic hero, proves himself to be the better man.

In their discussion of the book of Job, we see the differences between Exum's and Whedby's points of view. Exum includes the Book of Job as part of her tragic vision, despite her acknowledgement of its comic elements.(8-14) She identifies Job's "guilt" as the sin of *hubris*, a fault that dogged the classic tragic hero, magnified, in this case by Job's defiance of the One God who has created everything. For Exum, "What makes Job tragic is not his suffering, but his struggle to *know* its cause and his refusal to accept blame."(11) But, of course, the reader knows that Job is, indeed, not to blame, that he has been singled out precisely for his previous irreproachable conduct. Exum maintains that, even though Job has done nothing to deserve his extreme "punishment," Job is guilty once he begins to question the Unfathomable. But, one might ask, does not God , at the end, delight in Job's honesty and reproach his platitudinous friends? (Job 42:7)

For this, and other reasons, Whedby ultimately dubs the Book of Job a comedy. For one thing, the book has the traditional smile-shaped comedic arc, from happiness,

through trouble, to happiness again. (BCV 227) Further, Job's friends, with their ponderous attempts at explaining Job's travails as examples of Divine justice are rendered comic, because the reader knows the backstory of which they are ignorant—and their pomposity is the stuff of comedic parody.(BCV 233-5) Job's own speeches are ironic parodies of sincere psalms of praise (Job 12:17-25).

We might also add, based on Whedby's Bakhtinian model, that Job's troubles exemplify the Rabelaisian body. Job has boils and dripping sores; he bleeds, oozes and smells. His excruciations would be quite out of place in classic drama in which a chorus leads lamentations over an aesthetically bleeding hero. Job does not suffer decorously. He kvetches.

Finally, there are God's speeches to Job, wherein, Whedby tells us, is celebrated a Bakhtinian "carnival of creation" (249) in which the mighty Leviathan is juxtaposed with the comical ostrich. The ostrich, along with the wild ass, the horse, the beasts of the steppe and the Leviathan itself exercise their capacity to laugh. (250, ibid)

In Whedby's view, God's response to Job's impassioned and deeply serious interrogation is Heavenly laughter. Here is Mystery presented as cosmic play.

Job's final response to God is, arguably, playful as well. It is wonderfully ambiguous: "Therefore, I will reject/despise and comfort myself with/repent of dust and ashes." (Job 42:6) And God demands no more of Job. Instead he rebukes Job's friends and directs Job to sacrifice on *their* behalf. It is after Job prays on behalf of his friends (Job 42:10) that God restores and increases Job's fortunes, providing the appropriate comedic happy ending. If Job will not, for his own sake, submit to God without a final touch of irony, he will address God respectfully, with ritual correctness, in caring for

other people. When he obeys the command to be generous to his neighbor, even after that neighbor has failed him, Job is healed.

Ultimately, Job needs the God of Justice, even if he never quite acquiesces to the idea that the world as we have it is entirely just—because it is only in the name of that God that he can pray for the other person. Here we have the irony of the faithful and inquiring Jew. From the very beginning of the people Israel's relationship with God, when Abraham bargained on behalf of Sodom's righteous, Jewish prophets have questioned the Creator's acts—but they only had the vocabulary to do that because of the revelation God has given! And having been given that revelation, Jews can no longer see problems of justice as individual "struggles," but as communal responsibilities.

That problem is given full expression in the Book of Lamentations. That Book gives vent to ungovernable pain. It also doesn't hesitate to assign responsibility: to the sufferers, for having been oppressors who allowed the bonds of solidarity to loosen between them and their people ("those who ate dainties are devastated in the outdoors" (Lam 4:5); to the invaders for their inexcusable atrocities ("they have degraded women in Zion...young men have been made to bear the mill" (Lam:11&13); to God for harsh judgment ("God has consumed without compassion" (Lam 2:2). But the Book of Lamentations also refuses to turn from God. It inscribes the determination of the people to understand revelation better, to rewrite it with their lives and to find meaning in good relationships with God and one another. ("We will search out our ways and examine them and return to YHVH, we will bear our hearts in our hands to God in heaven..." (Lam 3:40-41).

The suffering described in lamentations is dirty and anti-aesthetic. Those who were once beautiful have been besmirched. Hunger and pain have driven them to nasty means of survival. This is the anti-classic body, albeit outside of comedic mode. But while the survivors of Zion rail at God, they do not refuse God's meaning or God's justice. They abjure *hubris*. As extreme as they insist the punishment is, they know that they have wrongs of their own of which to repent. They will not allow God to drive them out of the relationship with this punishment.

3. Talmud

The Talmud, the foundational text of Rabbinic Judaism, was developed between the 2nd and 6th Centuries CE and is said to include material that goes at least as far back as 10 CE, from the time of the *zugim,* the pairs of adjudicators who led the Sanhedrin. (BB24&43) The Talmud, developed largely under Roman rule and in Diaspora, represents a self-grounded counter tradition that was enunciated in creative tension with, but distinct from, the Hellenistic dominant culture of its day.

To understand a key difference between Rabbinic culture and Hellenism, we draw on the oeuvre of Emmanuel Levinas, a 20th Century Jewish philosopher who characterized the Western tradition, derived from the philosophers and imperial statesmen as Totality, that worldview which seeks to absorb all knowledge—including all beings and people, objectified as knowledge—into a unified homogenized Same. "The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which

dominates Western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves."(TI,21)

The idea of Reason that the Romans inherited from the Greeks, from Plato in particular, is one in which all interlocutors might become interchangeable; because, being in possession of their senses, they will, using dispassionate reason, arrive at the same conclusions concerning the truth and, from there, the Good. While Aristotle was more interested than was his teacher in the daily life of the polity in addition to that of philosophical contemplation, he too assumed the life of reason to be the best, to be that for which the eudemonic individual would aim his efforts, and he assumed a unified answer to all problems of being. He also described the human as a just another kind of object, each person being an example of a genus (TI, 301) rather than, as Levinas has it, a unique event in being. In its philosophy and in its politics, that is to say, argues Levinas, in its engulfing imperialism, the Western tradition seeks to assimilate all that it encounters into the Same. "Western philosophy has most often been an ontology (an inquiry into being and the Real-RP); a reduction of the other to the same by the interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being."(TI, 43) And, politically, "For the philosophical tradition, the *conflicts* between the same and the other are resolved by theory whereby the other is reduced to the same—or concretely by the community of the State, where beneath anonymous power, though it be intelligible, the I rediscovers war in the tyrannic oppression it undergoes from the totality."(TI, 47)[13]

[13] Jean-Francois Lyotard, author of *The Postmodern Condition* and admiring student of Levinas, applied this analysis to anti-Semitism, specifically: "The jews" are the irremissible in the West's movement of remission and pardon. They are what cannot be domesticated in the obsession to dominate, in the compulsion to control domain, in the passion for empire, recurrent ever since Hellenistic Greece and

Counterpoised to Totality, Levinas articulates a philosophy of the Other, of relationship. Levinas' philosophy is open to anyone and has many enthusiastic non-Jewish students, but he also wrote, by and for Jews about the Jewish tradition. Emmanuel Levinas, after Rosenzweig and Buber, was in the vanguard of those 20th Century Westernized Jewish intellectuals who led movements back to Judaism. Like Rosenzweig and Buber, both of whom he counted among his influences, Levinas did not see Judaism as "merely" a personally edifying form of religious practice, not did he see 'the religious' as one of several modes of life with which the well-rounded person ought to be conversant. Like his predecessors, Levinas understood Judaism to be a holistic worldview with unique and valuable ways of 'doing' knowledge that provide a clear alternative lens to that of Totality and also provide viable approaches to living one's life. In particular, Levinas urged Western-identified Jews to return to the study of Talmud.

In contrast to the Hellenistic ideal—although it derived a great deal from its forms, methods and, to an extent, particular ideas—Rabbinic Judaism emerged as a tradition in which fervent contention about how to practice justice, based on revelation, in particular cases was highly prized. In the Talmud, the interlocutors are *not* interchangeable, their names and their sayings, including minority opinions, are preserved. The ideal Rabbi did not practice distanced contemplation of universals, but was engaged, fervently, in the moral dilemmas of messy, ordinary life. The oral Torah is studied in relationship—between teachers and students, between study partners and in community. The written Torah is not treated as a fetish to be adored from a distance. Revelation is kept alive through interpretation, which births further dialogue.

Christian Rome. ...The anti-Semitism of the Occident should not be confused with its xenophobia; rather, anti-Semitism is one of the means of the apparatus of its culture to bind and represent as much as possible--to protect against--the originary terror, actively to forget it." HatJ 22

Like the Tanakh, the Talmud displays a close acquaintance with loss, calamity and pain. Our vulnerable mortality as embodied creatures is explored within its pages in many ways. But such a multifarious group of texts could not produce a single, identifiable sense of "the" tragic. Like the Tanakh, and even more so, the entire corpus of the Talmud contains a multitude of scriptural citations, stories and opinions on the potential meanings of loss. *In toto*, "the" Talmud doesn't orient us toward tragedy in a prescriptive way, but it amplifies and deepens our response—and it keeps the readers company; in community with those who continue to plumb such questions through the lens of revelation and meaning.

a. Do you love your chastisements?

In Brachot 4a, utilizing, as a proof text, Lamentations 3:40-41, cited in the above section, an Amora, either Rava or Rav Hisda teaches that if a person experiences a *yisurin,* a chastisement, that is, some bad happening which, the teacher assumes, is heaven-sent, that person should examine their deeds to see where they've gone wrong. If no misdeed comes to mind, then, perhaps the punishment is for neglect of Torah. However, if the individual examines their deeds and study habits and finds them adequate, then they can count themselves blessed, because they are receiving the chastisements of love.

Psalm 94:12 is cited in support of the last teaching: "Happy (*ashrei*) is the man whom you discipline, God, and from your Torah teach him."

Cathèrine Chalier reminds us (WOTD, 149-50) that the person who is *ashrei* is walking; advancing toward God, along God's path. (The proof text from Lamentations

specifically urged that we "search out our ways (*darcheinu*)," and darcheinu could also mean 'our path.' Happiness, in Judaism, not a destination—nor is it a eudemonic equilibrium—it is a journey.

In this particular teaching, we are counseled to walk God's path in perfect trust. If we suffer, then we have done something to deserve it, or God is favoring us with a needed lesson. We are not to emulate Job and ask why. This teaching assumes perfect theodicy; a universe that is not only meaningful, but also just in ways that would be perfectly comprehensible to us if we only had enough information about how everything is working out.

However—after a long discussion about the chastisements of love, there is a complication. We're given, on 4b, a *maaseh*—a story. Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba sickens. Rabbi Yohanan visits him and asks, "Do you love your chastisements?" and he answers, "Not them and not their rewards." Yohanan says, "Give me your hand." He does and his friend helps him stand. Later, Yohanan himself falls ill. He and Rabbi Chaninah have the same dialogue and he assures him that he too loves neither his chastisements nor their rewards, and Chaninah also takes his hand and helps him to his feet. Rabbi Yohanan has learned that "ayn chvosh matir atzmo mi-beyt ha-asurin"—a prisoner cannot escape his prison by himself.

So, in extremity these rabbis do not embrace their sickness—nor do they, when confronted with such an attitude, behave like Job's friends and counsel acceptance and self-censure. Facing a friend's illness, they offer a hand to the suffering other who then gains the strength to stand.

Finally Rabbi Yohanan visits Rabbi Elezar whom he finds in a darkened room. The beautiful Rabbi Yohanan flashes a bit of shoulder and the room lights up. Yohanan then sees that Elezar is crying. He asks if it is the Torah that he has yet to study, or perhaps his sins. Elezar says no it is, "this beauty"—Rabbi Yohanan's—that will be worn to dust. And the two rabbis cry together. Eventually Rabbi Yohanan asks, "Do you love your chastisements?" and Rabbi Elezar says, "Not them and not their rewards." Rabbi Yohanan asks for his hand, he extends it, and Yohanan helps him to stand.

Confronted with personal loss and a friend's pain, it is not some crude theodicy, but fellowship that provides meaning. In his pain, Elezar cries for the beauty of his friend, for everyone will someday die, no matter how beautiful they are—or how good. All that remains certain is that one person can offer a hand to another. This text, in which theodicy and anti-theodicy sit side by side, demands that the readers enter the debate together; it addresses them, not as spectators but participants.

What can we learn from all this? Certainly, when sickness or other misfortune strikes, it is as good an opportunity as any to take stock of oneself and see how ready to meet death we are; to distinguish what really seems important at such a time from what turns out to be trivial; to realize what we would change about our lives if we only get a second chance. But there is no need for the morbidity of welcoming pain. Nor can we really be certain that we are receiving the chastisements of love, because all flesh is mortal and each of us will, someday die. To love is to commit to, one day, saying goodbye. But to love the other is also our only reliable consolation for mortality's ills, physical or spiritual. The cure for spiritual ills is concern for the other—to offer support

to the sick; to escape the prison of one's own sickness and pain is to be able to cry for the other in the midst of it. And to accept the mystery of finitude which all of us, no matter our merits or faults, have in common.

While there is all the material that constitutes "the" tragic here, pain, suffering, loss, there is no great man—suffering is not heroic, it is the lot of material, finite human beings. One text indicates that suffering is a result of Divine justice (not the tragic ingredient of indifferent or cruel fate), another hints that it is a human commonality (painful, but not heroic or special), but there is no dramatic spectacle here—there is human fellowship.

b. *gemilut chasadim* and a 3-*kav* shlong

Daniel Boyarin writes in *Carnal Israel* and *Unheroic Behavior: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* that the Rabbinic tradition helped to preserve Jewish identity, not only through preserving the Covenant and Mitzvot through the wrenchingly painful transition from Temple-centered Judaism to Judaism enacted through prayer, study and the performance of commandments; and by developing a tradition of Jewish thought that could hold its own in Diaspora, surrounded by Hellenistic thought and its ideological offspring; but also by enunciating a particularly Jewish attitude toward the body and virtue, an attitude that produced approaches to valor and gender distinct from the those dominant in the West which gave rise to the tragic. The Jewish man and the Jewish body, as Boyarin describes them do not fit into either the heroic or classic tragic modes. While they value beauty, as our text above demonstrates, above all, the Rabbis valued, not only *tsedek*, a sense of justice, but *chesed*, kindness, a

quality not even listed as one of Aristotle's eudemonic virtues, best expressed through *gemilut chasadim*, acts of kindness.

Judith Shklar, in *Ordinary Vices* (OV, 7) observes that philosophers rarely talk about cruelty and that Aristotle did not list it as a vice any more than he praised kindness as a virtue. The Rabbis, however, did make a positive virtue of walking *darchei noam,* the path of pleasantness, that of the Torah herself. (Yebamoth 87b) Cruelty, not only to other people, but to animals is expressly forbidden. The principle *tsaar baalei chayim,* (Berakhot 40a) mandates that slaughter take place with all due care not to make animals suffer. The principle of *kavod ha-briot* (Shabbat (81-ab) demands that human dignity be preserved—even when it conflicts with Shabbat restrictions. The *achzari,* the cruel person is rebuked.

Says Boyarin, "...the image of the ideal male as nonaggressive, not strong, not physically active, is a positive product of the self-fashioning of Rabbinic masculinity in a certain, very central product of the culture, the Babylonian Talmud. Far from being a desperate grab for some kind of self-esteem in a powerless situation, this development, as I see it, is the product of a kind of knowledge perhaps available only to the (relatively) powerless."(UC, 81)

In other words, the Rabbis did not write for and about a class elite, but a self-selected elite of scholars and pious men (sic). They were not writing 'in reaction' to political disempowerment, but from the wellspring of revelation that taught them just how vital a life outside of the political and class elite can be. Furthermore, the Rabbis, from their own lives and the lives of those who came to them for advice, had the kind of general acquaintance with life's daily pains that did not encourage them to dramatize

such events as Tragedies. They knew that their community depended on being able to count on one another to offer, not only tears, but also a hand up when things got difficult. The Rabbis did not write epic drama about the Temple's fall; they developed a cycle of prayer and observance that allowed Jewish life to continue.

Rabbi Yohanan is famous, not only for his beauty, but for the Bakhtinian excesses of his flesh. As to his beauty, it is compared, (Baba Metsia 84) to "a brand new silver cup and fill it with the red seeds of the pomegranate and place around its rim a garland of red roses and let him place it at the place where the sun meets the shade..."

We also learn that, "Rabbi Ishmael, the son of Yose's member was like a wineskin of 9 *kav*...Rav Pappa said that 'Rabbi Yohanan's member was like a wineskin of 3 *kav*... " These gentle beautiful men were not above exchanging information about the sizes of their units and recording the discussions in the same texts as those in which we find their most sublime thoughts. We learn, further, that these Rabbis were wonderfully, grotesquely fat. Like Rabelais' protagonists, they sweat buckets and stink when they are ill. They are rooted in the *adama* like anyone at all. This anti-heroic, anti-classic bodily model, combined with an intellectual tradition that prized contention about the particular and a moral tradition that valued *chesed* over force fueled a counter-tradition that survived the Roman era, flourishing through bad times and good, and that lives today.

Finally, one may appreciate the Talmud for what we might call its psychological sophistication and compassion. The Rabbis are conveyed in all their complexity, oddities and frailties. Rabbi Marc-Alain Ouaknin, heavily influenced by Levinas writes in *The Burnt Book*, "

> ...the Talmudic Masters are heirs of the prophetic revolution that took place at the time of Jeremiah (which Friedman associates with Kings and Judges from which we read-RP); the change of attitude which occurred in the sixth century B.C.E. and which consisted in a shift from the collective to the singular. Whereas the 'classical prophets had, above all, insisted on the salvation of the people, as such...with Jeremiah there was a deepening of the personal...'[14] This deepening was not the invention of selfishness but the understanding of man as a separate and unique being. This separation was not the negation of society founded on relationships. On the contrary, it was its very possibility. In this philosophical context, text of the Law was to play a double role; on the one hand, it was to make social existence and intersubjective relationships possible and, on the other had, to prepare for the mergence of the individual as a specific being on the basis of interpretation."

And with the introduction of interiority as a subject for consideration, our acquaintance with the Modern Jewish thinkers can begin.

4. The Rambam

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon or Maimonides(1135-1204), a towering figure in Jewish philosophy found himself heavily influenced by Aristotle but accountable to Judaism. Like many Jewish intellectuals, he found himself compelled to establish a

[14] Here Ouaknin quotes from Armand Abècassis, :Le Midreash entre le mythos et le logos," Les Ètudes philosophiques, no @ (1984): 198

connection between Revelation to Reason; to demonstrate that one could participate in the best thinking of one's day and still be a faithful Jew. The Muslim world in which the Rambam lived was engaged in a rediscovery of Greek thought, and Muslim and Jewish thinkers were engaged in a project to simultaneously defend their faith from skepticism and rejuvenate it with the tonic of fresh ideas. Maimonides was determined to establish revelation as episteme so solidly as to stem any departure of intellectuals from Judaism and, also, to map out a living praxis of Judaism for the emerging literate Jewish middle classes.

By the time that Rambam lived and worked, the personalization of the Jewish individual referenced by Ouaknin above was qualitatively enlarged. Bachya Ibn Pekuda had already distinguished duties of the heart (*hovot ha-lev*) from duties of the limbs (*hovot ha-evarim*). The duties of the limbs included the positive and negative mitzvoth. With the duties of the heart, Bachya distinguished interiority as a religious dimension, advocating a meditative, pietistic approach to Judaism. While the Rambam was not so extreme as Bachya (his Aristotelian leanings toward moderation pushed him in the direction of involvement with the community's daily life) he did consider it a positive duty for each Jew to develop as close a personal connection to God as possible. Well before the European Renaissance, intellectuals of the Muslim world were embarked on the modern project of self-development.

In some aspects of his theology, the Rambam borrowed freely from Aristotle. The Rambam identified God with the philosopher's First Cause of all things. Not only is God First, for the Rambam, God is also unique and perfect, utterly self-sufficient and, also unknowable by the finite beings of creation. God, for Maimonides has no body, no

desires, no emotions, no limitations. God's knowledge works so differently from that of human beings, being infinite, in all directions of time and space and inseparable from the unified being of God, that we could never comprehend it. This God is the author of a world in everything has a purpose, a *telos.*

Because God's knowledge is infinite, Rambam explains in Hilchot Tshuvah, chapter 5, Halachah 5, Divine knowledge of all that has and will occur is instantaneous for God, but does not obviate human free will, hence human moral agency and responsibility.

Therefore, one element of classic tragedy is missing from the Rambam's universe. God does not play with us or seek to drive us mad. God may punish us severely for sins already committed, as Saul was punished, by taking away our capacity for *tshuvah.* However, we may pray for the capacity to change.

Maimonides accounts for the apparent contradiction between God's knowledge of all things, past, present and future and human free will to do good or bad with his idea that Divine and human knowledge are different, as indicated above. How God knows is different from how we know, and we are free to choose our conduct. Rambam opts for a perfect theodicy according to which, that which is not requited in this world is answered for in the next. He demonstrates little of the Rabbis' ambiguity on the subject. Having discovered the modern self, he proclaims it entirely responsible for its fate, external conditions not withstanding.[15]

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[15] Worth noting is the extent to which the Rambam, often identified today with Natural Law theory (because of his Aristotelian leanings and his influence on Thomas Aquinas, a father of Catholic Natural Law thinking) takes pains to make clear that no "natural" predisposition could serve as an excuse for neglecting positive mitzvoth or committing negative ones. In chapter 8 of Shemonah Perakim, the Rambam writes, "It is impossible for man to be born endowed by nature from his very birth either by virtue or vice...It is possible, however, that through natural causes he may from birth be so constituted as to have a predilection for a particular virtue or vice...I have entered into this subject so thou mayest not believe the

The Rambam structures his positive advice about those virtues of character in which people ought to be trained along eudemonic lines. He identifies his *maalot*, his virtues as either intellectual (*maalei ha-sechelyiot)* or aspects of goodness (*maalei ha-midot*). Joseph Gorfinkle translates the latter as "moral virtues,"[16] however, like Aristotle, Maimonides includes courage (*gevurah*) in that list along with qualities such as humility (*aniah*), which is not the opposite of courage, apparently. Like Aristotle, again, Rambam says that we can recognize the virtues by their middle position between extremes—courage not being foolhardiness or cowardice; humility being neither obsequiousness nor pride.

It seems that, here, we have a kind of mitigated eudemonia. The Rambam doesn't want people to just be good at what they do. It is not enough, for him, that people exercise reason. Or rather, he believes that a genuine exercise of reason will lead people toward a life of fulfilling mitzvoth and devoting one's contemplative and meditative energies toward a greater apprehension of, and closeness with, God. Courage, honesty, and the other virtues are meant to serve those ends.

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absurd ideas of astrologers who falsely assert that the constellation at the time of ones birth determines whether one is to be virtuous or vicious...man's conduct is entirely in his own hands...he may be by nature so constituted as to find it easy or hard as the case may be to do a certain thing; but that he must necessarily do or refrain from doing a certain thing is absolutely untrue." The Rambam goes on to remind us that, if such were not the case, than God's justice would not, in fact, be just, since there is no point to punish or reward involuntary behavior for which one is not responsible. And the Rambam returns to Lamentations 3:39 "let us search..." as a reminder to investigate our own *individual* and communal responsibility. The Rambam further reminds us that we are Godlike in one respect—we are not compelled by nature when it comes to our conduct, because "the *adam* has become like one of us to know good and evil." (Gen 3:22) Just as God is not compelled by nature, neither are the human beings created in God's image. Levinas will take up this idea of unnatural revelation: "As a prophetic moment of human reason where every man—and all of man—end up refinding one another, Judaism would not mean simply a nationality, a species in a type and a contingency of History. Judaism, rather is a rupture of the natural and the historical...and thus a Revelation..."(BTV, 4) (This may offer some programmatic guidance to queer and feminist Jews to base arguments in favor of their inclusion not on what is natural but on what is just.)

[16] As Aristotle's eudemonic virtues are often translated, although, as stated earlier, they include instrumental qualities.

The Rambam understood that Jewish life is communal and, of course, that the performance of mitzvoth could only be realized in community. But he advocated that even in the context of daily life, even in relationships with one's spouse, a part of one's consciousness should be seeking contact with God, going so far as to suggest that one ought to be preoccupied with God in the way that one dwells on a beloved person. (Hilchot Tshuvah, chapter 10, halachah 3).

This is not a moderate suggestion. The Rambam advocated a kind of split consciousness—moderate and self-contained in the course of mundane life and passionate in one's internal colloquy with God. In his advocacy for a seamless theodicy[17] and pious inner life, Maimonides departs from the eudemonic and morally agnostic framework that made Aristotle's view of tragedy possible.

5. Modern Jewish Thought

. Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), a neo-Kantian and a faithful Jew, who was perhaps the first modern Jewish thinker to articulate an explicitly anti-eudemonic point of view would also insist that whatever tragedy we recognize be viewed, not only as the drama of an individual but as an insupportable wound in the social conditions for which communities are responsible.[18]

[17] To a point where a post-Holocaust reader could no longer follow, since large-scale disasters must be blamed on group sins---the general ecological and sociological common sense interpretations not withstanding.

[18] This emphasis on the social aspect of Cohen's legacy in this context was brought to my attention in an article by Robert Gibbs, "Unjustifiable Suffering," published in the anthology *Suffering Religion.* edited by Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson, Routledge, 2002.

"The distinction between good and bad comes to nothing if it coincides with the distinction of well-being and ill. If this were the case, then the concept of man with regard to the creation of the concept of man-as-fellowman would be defeated. The concept of the fellowman cannot come to my consciousness if his well-being and woe are indifferent to me...this is even more so if the indifference stands firm with regard to moral behavior also....The behavior of man to God, which may be a mystery, can, however, in some way be controlled by the behavior of man to man. The distinction of good and bad originates in this behavior...It is therefore not any concern for *eudemonism* (emphasis Cohen's) that caused the prophets to enter into the question of the correspondence that exists between the moral and the physical...but rather the fact that the fundamental question about god and man, about religion and morality is at stake in the relationship."(RR133-4)

And later in the same argument:

"The great achievement of the prophetic teaching and that which also shows its inner connection with true morality, consists in this: prophetic thought does not indulge in speculations about the meaning of life in the presence of the riddle of death; it puts aside the question of death and therefore also of *afterlife*, despite the fact that their moral significance is not hidden from it. Nonetheless, prophetic thought puts aside these questions of life and afterlife in the face of the life whose meaning is in

question because of the evil which is represented by poverty. Poverty becomes the main representative of human misfortune."(RR134)

For Cohen, the ontological insult of death is not the great question presented by finitude—not the moral question anyway. By distinguishing moral virtues, he puts interhuman obligation to the forefront. The prophetic voice, as Cohen hears, it is most urgently directed to human beings in the name of other human beings—our cries to God are between ourselves and God alone. But the suffering of the widow, orphan and stranger are outrages with which we must reproach ourselves and one another.

The equilibrium of eudemonia, the well-being of the moderate man is morally bankrupt for Cohen. He suggests that well-being in the face of the other's suffering is obtuse; a rejection of the truth of revelation: that we have the same Creator and that each of the others is the neighbor whom we're commanded to love as ourselves. (RR,119)

In rejecting the great existential question, Why were we born only to die, as secondary to that of How am I needed now, Cohen rejects the existential, heroic virtues, along with the eudemonic virtues in favor of the moral and the religious—which for him may not be merely private, but must extend into the social. Cohen has moved far away from "the" tragic toward a concern with my neighbor's ordinary, prosaic agony that demands, not cathartic pity, but concrete help.

Franz Rosenzweig who identified the classic tragic hero as self-contained and silent (see above) characterizes the "modern tragic hero" as

"precisely no longer a hero in the old sense, he no longer comes to meet the spectator 'frozen as in antiquity': rather, he is thrown into the

> world...he is thoroughly alive with impressions and desires and he does not hide his terror before the open grave...it is this hero whom the spectator sees awaken to full life in the dialogue...The spectator...must regard the hero as living whom he sees willing and taking action;...but it is not the hero's feeling of Self that is awakened in him and not, consequently, fear and pity...the man on stage compels the man in the audience to enter into feelings of partnership..."(ST,225)

Furthermore, for Rosenzweig, the modern tragic hero is an individual not "always the same Self buried in himself in his defiance."(ibid) He characterizes ancient tragedy as "tragedy of action" and modern tragedy as "tragedy of character," Hamlet, of course, being a paradigmatic example. Yet, Rosenzweig continues, the perfect modern tragedy had yet to be written. This tragedy would be pared down to Absolute man opposite the Absolute—a saint who, he says is "the exact counterpart of the ancient hero...open to the highest things...in contrast to the hero who is always enclosed in the same darkness of the Self."(SR227)

And what are these highest things? Rosenzweig tells us that, "The answer is not difficult if we remember that this force must complete the surrender required in the commandment of love for God. This can be nothing other than the love for the neighbor. Since God commands love toward man, love is immediately led back to love toward God, because love cannot be commanded except by the lover himself...so love for the neighbor can be commanded and it must be commanded."(SR,230)

It is only this love that can interrupt the drama of will enacted by the modern tragic hero, the drama of character, which character Rosenzweig calls a daimon. Remember, to be eudemonic is to be possessed by a happy daimon, to be well in one's soul. "Man, who is one day possessed by his daimon has received a 'direction' for his entire life. His will is now determined to go in this direction that orients him, once and for all...unless there takes place that one event that could again interrupt this once and for all....the divine love..."(SR229)

So, just as with Cohen, it is love for the other person as a necessary expression of love for God that interrupts eudemonia and, also, the tragic drama. The modern heroic self, with its character conflicts and many voices, having established itself with great, willful effort, can be undone—and, in being undone, find its meaning and necessity.

In his article, "Unjustifiable Suffering," Robert Gibbs juxtaposes texts from Cohen, Rosenzweig and Levinas in order to aim at a religious orientation toward suffering. All three of these thinkers view suffering, not as a spectacle, but as a summons to all lovers of God. Before moving on to Levinas and contemporary philosophers on whom he is a major influence, it seems appropriate to consider two modern thinkers who are still with us. Neither philosopher would consider herself postmodern; both place themselves in the liberal, humanist tradition. Before we move on to see what Levinas and his students have to teach us about the postmodern subject, we will look at two modern thinkers concerned with problems of the Self.

It is impossible to complete a consideration of tragedy, eudemonia and ethics without accounting to Martha Nussbaum, author of *The Fragility of Goodness.* Nussbaum presents a challenge to the view that a classic Aristotelian, eudemonic

approach to the good is, necessarily, indifferent to social justice. She argues that tragedy teaches more than efficacious conduct that preserves individual well-being; it can also provoke anger at injustice. She argues that all this is possible without distinguishing, as Kant did and Hermann Cohen after him, moral virtues as a particular category.

There is a problem to consider. *The Fragility of Goodness* is not Nussbaum's newest work, and that is always an issue with living philosophers. However, in her revised edition, published in 2001, she makes it clear that she stands by her argument, although her thinking is augmented a bit with Stoic influences.[19]

While she discussed the results of the Stoic infusion—a greater interest in the role of the emotions in well-being, not necessarily to the point of embracing Stoic detachment in general but from an appreciation of the need to avoid relying on the approval of others, Nussbaum does not seem to have changed her stand with regard to religion. She has included various new references to a so-called "Judeo-Christian" outlook(FG, 426), which from a Jewish standpoint is an unacceptable conflation when dealing with the meat of religious issues. For example, in her introduction to the new edition (FG, xxxii), Nussbaum writes, "We should not confuse Greek religion with Judaeo-Christian religion, where it is generally true that the actions of God are to be received as the mysterious doings of a basically moral order. Job is right to renounce his attempt to accuse God of wrongdoing and to accept the inscrutable mysteriousness of His actions. In the Greek world by contrast, the morality of the gods' actions is regularly impugned..." Looking at

[19] Stoic influences may help to democratize Nussbaum's eudemonic model, but the history of Stoic thought with regard to social justice is problematic. For an example, we might look to contemporary 12-Step programs. The program of AA shows Epictetian influences ("All you can control is your attitude. You are powerless over people, places and things..." The great strength of such programs lies in their ability to shepherd people through programs of personal development and to create supportive communities. However, many such groups are rife with anti-political bias in the name of relinquishing control over outside forces.

our earlier analysis of Job, there is some fairness to this description. Job's world does turn out to be both meaningful and mysterious. However, a close reading of the text troubles any certainty that Job has renounced his claim against God. He puts that claim to the side in order to pray for another. That is not the same as submitting in perfect meekness. Later in her argument, Nussbaum remarks that contemporary playwrights would still hesitate to portray Jesus to be as "callously obtuse"(xxxv, ibid) as the Greek tragic poets portrayed their Gods. One thinks, immediately, of such trusting odes as Psalm 44, "It's come to our ears from our fathers, they've told us of the deeds you once did in the old days...but you have rejected and disgraced us and do not go out with our hosts, You make us give way before enemies...you give us like sheep to be eaten...but we have not forgotten you or broken our covenant...It is for you that we are slaughtered all day long...Wake up! Why do you sleep, my Lord?"

Nevertheless, Nussbaum offers a key insight into the concerns that drive this inquiry. Aristotle was right about the role of luck and vulnerability in human affairs. Whatever we understand the good to be, we can be afflicted, or most of can, to a degree that will break, or at least wound, our connection to it. From the beginning, the realities of birth will influence what choices are open to us. Aristotle made that observation with equanimity. Nussbaum does not do so, nor does she share Aristotle's complacency about class and gender hierarchy. Nussbaum suggests that tragic portrayals of people brought low by a combination of personality and circumstance ought to arouse anger in us and inspire us to act. She reminds us that for every Oedipus, we are given an Antigone. It may be that Aristotle's own description of the tragic drama of his day was more prescriptive than exhaustive.

What Nussbaum gets from her version of a eudemonic life is the understanding that what human beings most value is always precarious; a sense of appreciation for relationships in light of that vulnerability and a sense of justice. She expresses a suspicion of the moral/non-moral dichotomy, because she suspects that it conceals a Kantian certainty that there is always a clear decision, always a superior good to choose, when, actually, "in everyday life, we find, instead, a complex spectrum of cases, interrelated and overlapping in ways not captured by any dichotomous taxonomy."(FG, 29) There is something to appreciate in Nussbaum's refusal to be moral*istic* or high-handed in her prescriptions for others. However, she also does not commit—as Levinas will--to a rigorous double standard for herself.

Nussbaum's understanding of Greek tragedy is similar to Rosenzweig's view of the modern. She identifies herself as a Modernist liberal with her statement that, "The problems of human life with which this book deals have not altered very much over the centuries..."(FG, 15)

That should not disqualify her from instructing us, even if we cannot accept her view of Judaism. If postmodern readers can draw inspiration from sources as diverse as the Tanakh, an Early Modern like the Rambam and, also, the Talmudic Rabbis (although it might be argued that postmodern readers will respond to their discursive strategies far easier than to those of our Modern forebears), we may remember Frederick Jameson's remark that postmodernism, in relying on Modernism for its own definition, *reiinscribes* that tendency, as we like to say. Further, we can learn from Nussbaum, as we can from Rabbi Joseph Soleveitchik, another Aristotelian who divides the human into Adam 1, the effectual eudemonic doer and Adam 2, the tender religious supplicant of God. As

American Jews who live, not only by our indeclinable brit, but by the voluntary, eudemonic contract of our Constitution, we are almost always living in 'two directions.'

From the other side of the liberal landscape, comes Judith Shklar with a pointed critique of the dangers in refusing to demarcate moral virtues. "Philosophers rarely talk about cruelty...Classical tragedy is unthinkable without physical cruelty, and comedy depends on moral cruelty, but one looks in vain for a Platonic dialogue on cruelty. Aristotle discusses only pathological bestiality, not cruelty. Cruelty is not one of the seven deadly sins, of which pride is by far the worst."(OV,7)

From a Jewish standpoint, one of Shklar's main assertions is more than a bit problematic. She tells us that to put cruelty first, of all the detestable vices, "does place one irrevocably outside the sphere of revealed religion.."(OV,9) because cruelty is "a wrong done entirely to another creature...not because it signifies a denial of God or any other higher norm..."(ibid, 8-9) Cohen and Rosenzweig's arguments, as will Levinas, explain why these assertions are contestable from a Jewish point of view.[20] To deny the Other is, precisely, to deny Creation and Revelation.

However, we might take solace in that Shklar aims acute questions at the eudaimonic/heroic virtue of valor, because, "We must note...how often valor appears to make people indifferent to others, for its aim is self-perfection."(OV, 16) However, she later appears to contradict herself when she says that wartime atrocities against civilians outrage us, and "it is not only pity or a sense of justice that moves us. The sheer absence of courage also makes a cruel act naked...A brave soldier is simply a less repulsive character than a cowardly one."(25) This statement is odd when held against Sontag and

[20] It is interesting and disturbing that Shklar, like Nussbaum, is a liberal Jew who appears not to base her understanding of Judaism on either modern Jewish thought or the sort of key Rabbinic texts that advocate adherence to *darchei noam.*

Kant's reminder that a brave bully is likely to do more harm than a timid one. To prove her point, Shklar reminds us of how devastating Euripides' tragic portraits of military bullies could be. (Supporting Nussbaum's point about the complexity of classic tragedy.) From *The Trojan Women*, she quotes Hecuba's speech as she cradles a child who was thrown off a wall, "Now when this city is fallen and the Phrygians slain, this baby terrified you? I despise the fear which is pure terror in a mind unreasoning."(OV31) However, this doesn't answer the question: what if the atrocity was committed coldly, as a matter of policy? What if the baby was a figure around whom opposition could rally?

Shklar's own moral apparatus demands that we say no one has the right to commit atrocities against anyone, frightened or not. Shklar commits herself to the practice of 'skeptical politics,' based on the awareness that tormentor and victim can change places more than once in the course of a conflict. Loyalty to a cause cannot be the reason to make torture, or other atrocities, acceptable in one instance and not the other, if one adopts the practice of 'putting cruelty first' as the unacceptable vice.

While Shklar gives short shrift to the heroic virtues and complicates the eudemonic ones, she is also suspicious of the prophetic voice and its anger. She confesses her liberal dilemma. Putting cruelty first—seeing it wherever it arises—risks misanthropy. She warns the reader early that she is taking us on a "ramble through a moral minefield."(OV6) It may be that we could combine Shklar's vision with those of our earlier texts. A refusal to admire cruelty and an insistence on understanding justice in the particular case characterized the Rabbis, and they, for the most part, found themselves able to continue living and working with people.

6. Postmodern Jewish Thought

All our modern thinkers, from the Rambam to Judith Shklar have one thing in common, a belief in the autonomous, modern self. As we learned from Rosenzweig, this is no longer the walled-off, monadic heroic self, but a self open to discourse with the other, a self who can be moved. We learned from the Rambam, and the others that this self has moral agency, hence moral responsibility. S/he is not fortune's plaything (although s/he can be broken by contingencies), but a moral (or ethical/eudemonic) being who acts.

a. From self to subject

For the last 50 years or so, as the West began to collect itself after the Shoah, major trends in Western philosophy, mostly centered around the Continental school have begun to challenge the modern idea of the self in favor of the subject. The postmodern individual subject has been shorn of the illusion that she is self-generated or transparent. The subject is brought into being through matrices of discourses that precede her, give her language and categories and, yet will never be quite the same as they would have been without the participation of her voice. As Eugene Borowitz observes, (CMJT, 284) our very thoughts are shaped by the possibilities that our inherited languages offer—and those possibilities are not the same, not 'universal' to the linguistic maps provided by other cultures.

The previous century disclosed where the Western hunger to impose universals could take us. Deconstructionism evolved as a corrective to the fascist triumph of

Absolutes. People have become less trusting of enforced sameness, more forgiving of difference. The ideals of pluralism and diversity—propelled in this country by the shining moral leadership of the African-American civil rights movement—have begun to supercede that of universality.[21]

The modern self was pretty much in charge. Unless constrained by others, s/he made decision and exercised will. The postmodern subject is subject-*to*: to the stories into which other people will weave her words and deeds; to the cultural landscapes that shape her; to her own unconscious, contradictory drives. She is not transparent even to herself and not entirely self-propelled.

It may be that Judaism has prepared us for subjecthood pretty well. (It may also be a fact of Western intellectual history that the giants of Deconstructionism—Levinas, Lyotard, Jacques Derrida—were all Jews with various degrees of training in Jewish hermeneutics.) Levinas teaches:

> "When exegesis goes beyond the letter, it is also going beyond the psychological intention of the writer. A pluralism is thus accepted for the interpretation of the same verse, the same biblical character, the same 'history-making event,' in the acknowledgement of the various levels, or various depths, of meaning. In this polysemy of meaning the word is like 'the hammer striking the rock and causing countless sparks to fly.'[22] The

[21] To wit: Hermann Cohen, teacher of Franz Rosenzweig who would influence Levinas and a key thinker in this chain of ideas we're weaving assumed that, not only universality, but Totality represented a unified field theory of justice and goodness for everyone.
[22] A reference to Taanit 7a.

> various epochs and the various personalities of the exegetes are the very modality in which the polysemy exists."(BTV, 171

Yet, the Jewish subject has one thing in common with the modern Jewish self—absolute moral responsibility. The subject has unique significance, but not as the master of her fate. Hers is the uniqueness of the summoned.

> "Before the neighbor, I am summoned and do not just appear; from the first I am answering to an assignation. Already the stony core of my substance is dislodged. But the responsibility to which I am exposed in such a passivity does not apprehend me as an interchangeable thing, for here no one can be substituted for me; in calling upon me as someone accused who cannot reject the accusation, it obliges me as someone irreplaceable and unique, someone chosen."('God and Philosophy' CPP,167)

A morally honest Jewish subject would find, in finitude, its own consolation. Such a view looks, for meaning, to relationships, between people and between people and God. Finite beings can be in relationship with one another; we can receive revelation from the other; we can be surprised. Further, our very capacity for enjoyment and pain, our own fleshly vulnerability gives meaning to our response to the other. Our own capacity for hunger and thirst make her destitution real. Our giving allows us to risk a real lack. "Their relationship (that of material beings-RP) with a mouth is not an

adventure of knowledge or of action. Subjectivity of flesh and blood in matter—the signifyingness of sensibility, the one-for-the-other itself—is the preoriginal signifyingness that gives sense, because it gives....Being torn from oneself in giving to the other the bread from one's mouth is being able to give up one's soul for the other."(OTB78-9) Each of us is called to respond to other's pain, not with cathartic empathy, but with mercy, even to the point of substitution.

Stripped of the illusion of control over outcomes, the subject is still responsible for whether and how she responds to the Other's call. *This,* Levinas teaches, *is the tragedy of tragedy.* That we are *not able*, compared with our intentions. To be human, to be awake is to live in a state of *mauvaise conscience.*

b. 4. What about happiness?

So far, we have talked about willingness to suffer for the other, but not to pursue suffering for its own sake. As Gibbs reminds us, Levinas cautions against using even our suffering for the sake of the other as material for some aesthetically satisfying sermon or work of art.(SR,26) Such suffering is necessary, precisely, for the other's sake—not for my 'growth as a person.'

However, this understanding of suffering does offer freedom, to the mature subject, from the, inevitably frustrating, pursuit of happiness as a settled condition. Calamity and pain are, indeed, part of human life, as are love, solidarity, friendship and *jouissance*. Perhaps this kind of postmodern Jewish subjectivity, combined with a durable sense of meaning—derived from one's constant summons to respond to the other and from revelation—a sense of meaning that does not depend on favorable

circumstances, can relieve the mature subject of any sense of failure or injustice attached to her inability to always be happy.

Such a view as advocated here finds no shame in the happiness that accompanies the positive virtues of solidarity, friendship and love—emotional and concrete expressions of one's bond with the other. If I desire the well-being of the other, the neighbor, the beloved; then well-being must be a good thing. Since I am the other's other, they will be pleased with my well-being too. Judaism is stern about forbidding self-neglect. For one thing, to neglect oneself is to stimulate the duties of one's neighbor's; the community, as Cohen insists and the Talmud instructs, is obliged to take care of the unfortunate—to neglect oneself on purpose is to drain communal resources and the resources of the one's nearest to oneself.

While one's obligation to the neighbor can, in extremity, go so far as actual substitution—taking the bread from one's own mouth to feed the other becomes a real option in times of starvation—Jewish subjectivity does not call forth any positive desire for self-immolation. Often, we have to sacrifice for the other. There is no virtue in looking to *be* a sacrifice.

A Jewish view of the subject's obligations call for her to strive—always falling short and always reaching higher--be more Godlike. To be Godlike is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and bury the dead. "'To walk in all His ways (Deuteronomy 11:22) These are the ways of the Holy One: 'gracious and compassionate, patient, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, assuring love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin and granting pardon…'(Exodus 34:6) This means that, just as God

is gracious and compassionate, you too must be gracious and compassionate."(Sifre Deuteronomy, Ekev)

Returning to Cohen's point about the relief of poverty being the impetus for social life, Judaism, postmodern or otherwise, does not romanticize suffering, since it seeks to relieve it. "..suffering has revealed itself...to be the essence of the human...not the body that suffers and hungers, but the human problem and cultural consciousness is ripped out of its whole equilibrium. This suffering goes beyond all the suffering of tragedy...no longer a metaphysics of pessimism...the human itself begins with this social love...)(34) Suffering founds the human, not by eliciting passive acceptance, but as a provocation of active, compassionate resistance.

c. Bread and Roses?

In 1990, I wrote an article called, "Desire, Sacrifice and Other Slippery Territory," published in Radical America, Volume 25 #1. The piece voiced opposition to the self-policing aspects of working class culture that valorize sacrifice for its own sake and turn suffering into a marker of identity, because such attitudes perpetuate poverty through submission. It seemed appropriate to revisit some of the questions and ideas raised then, before my commitment to Judaism.

I wrote:

> "What's harder to understand, on the surface, is the response that (Jesse) Helms is engendering in small but energetic swatches of working-class communities. How could a movement against desire motivate people for whom sex is one of the few affordable pleasures left?

...what...drags people miles from their homes to mount demonstrations telling other people what they can take pictures of or put in their mouths?...

It starts, innocently enough as an attempt to make the best of things; it's rooted in self-respect and responsibility. One may not have chosen to work as a secretary or mail carrier instead of finishing college but it had to be done. Maybe it's not fair that women are still largely responsible for the raising of children and for the physical and emotional housekeeping attending any relationship that they form, but that's the way it is, and what can you do? Let the kids run wild in the street? Let your aging parents go hungry because you'd rather be in Tahiti than in some foundry sweating your guts out?

I've seen people measure their moral muscle by how many dreams they can defer.

"If all your friends pat you on the back for digging into a job you don't like so that your family can survive or for staying with your husband whether or not you still love him so that your children will have a father, you feel like a good person. But what if your kid can paid more for painting a provocatively titled monochrome than you can get for working a month of overtime or your daughter pairs off with a girl and decides not to have babies because she doesn't feel like it?...

Queers are hated because people believe we're getting away with something, that we're not taking up our share of the misery that makes the

> world go' round. ..Most lesbians and gays work the same 8-10 hour days as everybody else. What is true is that we've chosen, in our partners, to place personal happiness and sexual pleasure over social stability and to endure (or resist) whatever misery might be inflicted on us as a result."

The phrase I came up with, then, for that self-policing working class mentality was, "the reification of sacrifice." What does a morally accountable postmodern Judaism say to Podolsky's questions now?

To begin with, this is what tragedy has come to. It's everybody's silent problem, no longer territory of the 'complex' elite citizen male. And, as a neighbor, I am called beyond pity and terror, to make it better.

Does this mean one *ought* to walk out on children and aging parents when they're no fun anymore? No. It means that communities need to, with all sensitivity, make it their business to be sure that no one is too far over their head with such responsibilities to call for help. Does it always mean that each of us should take half of our morning's French toast to the lady who lives at the bus stop across the street? Not necessarily. But it means that the contribution to Sova is not adjustable income.

But does it mean that people who don't wish to be parents are obliged to reproduce themselves as Jews? Does it mean that people whose parents would agonize over it should forego the partner of their choice?

Perhaps it means that these are not decisions to be made in isolation anymore.

It is indeed the case, as was observed at the beginning of this inquiry, that Reform Judaism has been forced—because of our historically situation Modern and Postmodern

heritage—to acknowledge that we have profound moral impulses different from those of the rabbis and that some of these impulses collect around a particular insight—an expanded sense of *cavod ha-briot*, human dignity.

Specifically, it is not license, but fierce moralism that makes us insist on the subject's ownership of her own person, to be superceded only by that of her Creator. This is why the particular areas of marriage, rape, procreation and slavery elicit a qualitatively different response from us than they did from the Rabbis who were much more conflicted.[23] The Rabbis knew that each ensouled human being had rights directly from our Author—and they also had social institutions to maintain.

However, this does not mean the adoption of libertarian social values. I would, indeed, regard it to be a mistake for anyone to inflict an unwilling parent on a child or to turn away from their love because of social pressure—but thee are ways to make such decisions that honor the feelings and values of everyone involved.

Bread and roses is still an appropriate value. It is time that we reclaimed personal happiness and aesthetic pleasure as working class values—along with the knowledge that our happiness will always be shadowed by the Other's potential destitution.

Combining Cohen's and Levinas' imperatives, each of us is obliged to work, harder than is comfortable, for a world in which we each have enough to eat, and warm shelter, time to hear ourselves think and that portion of beauty which our souls need as much as they need bread.

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[23] This is why, for instance, it was relatively easy for the Reform movement to begin to bless same-gender unions and for congregations to adopt most of the wedding ritual to do it: for generations now, Reform marriage has not been, at all, a transfer of chattel from a father to a husband, but a *brit* between Jews of equal status. *Kiddushin* in effect is about drawing a line of holy separation around the couple.

What we seem to be left with is Catherine Chalier's "troubled happiness," a condition that is neither a destination nor an equilibrium, but something provisional and incomplete, a moment of respite that never relieves the subject's obligation to the other. This troubled happiness never obliterates the subject's knowledge, not of "the" tragic, but of her neighbor's tragedy with its insistent summons.

7. Conclusion

We've journeyed from the beautiful, effectual and special Homeric hero; to the self-enclosed silent hero of classic tragedy; to the modern tragedy of character and—finally—to the postmodern subject whose tragedy is that of everyone else.

That does not mean that our lives are all the same. Throughout this journey, we've been accompanied by the Human and the Particular—the sick, the brutalized, the burned and the burned out. Each gibbering agony and quite desolation is its very own non-generic pain. Not pretty, not aesthetically captured in marble, but grotesque, extreme, connected to *adamah*. Maybe beautiful, but not a beauty to be borne—not edifying, not improving, not acceptable.

Designations of 'tragedy' that serve to aestheticize the suffering of the other call for our resistance. The valorization of heroic/martial virtues in popular culture when those virtues are not harnessed in service of justice calls for our resistance also. When we look through the eyes of a Jewish subject, the marble form of the hero is not so beautiful as that of the Rabbi with a belly and a bellyache who can still cry for a friend.

What saves the Jewish subject who refuses to love her chastisements is, still, that extended hand.

"The human is the return to the interiority of non-intentional consciousness, to *mauvaise conscience*, to its capacity to fear injustice more than death, to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice, and to prefer that which justifies being over that which assures it." From Existence to Ethics, *Levinas Reader*, pg85

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