Ba-derekh: On the Way— A Presentation of Process Theology

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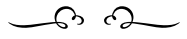


Introduction

Process Theology—a constellation of ideas sharing the common assertion that the world and God are in continuous, dynamic change, of related interaction and becoming—can be unsettling at first glance. We take for granted what it means to be conventionally religious, and those traditionalist assumptions make it difficult to open ourselves to an engaging and explanatory way to conceive and connect to an embracing faithfulness. Much of what Process Thought will offer as an alternative may sound shocking, perhaps even irreligious, if this is a first encounter with Process Thought. I want to provide an image that makes it possible, at least, to work through the shock and discomfort to some degree. It is still possible to reject this dynamic/relational approach, and that is your privilege; but the opening image may help create the possibility of a new understanding.

I live in west Los Angeles in a home that was built in the 1950s. Our dining room has wood paneling along its four walls. When we first bought the house a decade ago, the room was painted a sickly green, presumably in the late 70s during the high watermark of the aesthetics of the Brady Bunch and Partridge Family. The actual wood grain and tone were covered, though I think that in that era people thought such a look was cutting edge. With that greenish coat of paint, the walls looked fake and cheap. When we finally got around to repainting the upstairs of the house, we asked our painter if he could just paint the phony paneling a simple white because the green was hideous. He pondered for a moment, then took his thumbnail and

scratched on the panel. The paint peeled away, and he said, "You know, I think that under this green there is actual wood." His team spent three days sandblasting and then varnishing. At the end of the week our dining room was transformed! The wood is so rich and the patterns in the grain are magnificent. It is now my favorite room in the house. I had thought, erroneously, that it was the wood itself that was that sickly green, when in fact, that trashy look was just the coating that someone had painted over it.

Modern Western people often approach religion as I did the paneling: they assume that the only way to be religious is to accept the sickly green overlay of Greek philosophy. They take neo-Platonized Aristotelian scholastic presuppositions and filter religion through those ideas. Then, because they have insurmountable problems with those assertions, they assume that the quandary involves religion itself, or the Bible, or the Talmud, or observance, or God. What Process Thinking offers is the opportunity to sandblast the philosophical overlay of ancient Greece and medieval Europe off the rich, burnished grain of Bible, Rabbinics, and Kabbalah so that we can savor the actual patterns in the living wood of religion, the *eitz ḥayim*,[1] and appreciate Judaism for what it was intended to be and truly is.

Problems with the Omni's

Because we are habituated to the pale green overlay, we assume that drab impression is what religion necessarily entails: specifically, the kind of theology that most Christian theologians call "classical," by which they mean Augustine, Aquinas, and the broad spectrum of medieval philosophy—which presupposes that God must be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.[2] Based on this presumption, God has—and must have—all the power (that is what omnipotent means).[3] God has—and must have—all knowledge, knowing everything that is, was, and will be. God is omnibenevolent—pure good. The challenge for many contemporaries is that certain intolerable consequences result from these three axioms.

For God to be omnipotent implies that no power exists that is not God's, which means, first of all, that any occurrence is God's responsibility. Sometimes we like what happens, sometimes we do not; regardless, all that happens comes from God. So God gets the credit for anything good in life; for anything bad in life, God gets the blame. There is no escape from that inexorable

logic, which engenders many people's vehement rejection of religion. A God who could have stopped "X" but did not is a God with whom most of us want nothing to do. Everyone, at some point in life, suffers terrible trauma. At the moments that monotheists most need God and a sense of God's love, they are coerced by their Greek-overlay theology into conceding that God must have had a legitimate reason to cause (or at least to not prevent) the trauma from occurring. The fault, by default, must be their own. That relentless conclusion leads them to do what far too many Western people have done across the millennia, which is to abandon their moral compass and generally reliable sense of right and wrong in order to blame themselves or their loved ones when bad things happen.[4] The inescapable consequence of this theological straitjacket is that not only does something horrible happen, but beyond their suffering, the victims also feel delinquent, abandoned, or punished.

But there is yet another way in which the concept of omnipotence creates an insurmountable challenge. Power is always relational. One has power only to the extent that one has more of it than someone else does. To the extent that one has *all* the power, one actually has no power whatsoever, because power only works when there are two parties engaged in a power dynamic, one the object of the power of the other. Without that relationship, there is no possibility of demonstrating or utilizing power at all. Absolute power is self-erasing.[5] The philosophical presumption that God is omnipotent has been reinforced by the fact that many translations of the Bible refer to God as the "Almighty," which derives from a mistranslation of El Shaddai.[6] The Torah has terms for great power and unsearchable strength,[7] but it has neither concept nor term for omnipotence. The prophets have no such term, nor does the Talmud. There is no classical Hebrew or Aramaic term for being able to do absolutely anything. In fact, that medieval philosophical concept leads to clever theological tricks. For example, a person is more powerful than God because it is possible for a person to construct a weight so heavy that she cannot lift it, and if God is all-powerful, then God too should be able to create a weight so powerful that God cannot lift it. But if God cannot lift it (or if God cannot make such a weight), then God is not all-powerful. That kind of conundrum of language highlights the fact that this particular concept of omnipotence is fatally flawed. The Bible and the Rabbis portray God as vastly, persistently powerful, yes; but not as all-powerful.

A similar conflict emerges with the claim that God is all-knowing. Omniscience assumes that God knows everything, including the future as well as the past. Nothing is hidden from an all-knowing God. But if God knows the future absolutely, then there is no room for divine or creaturely freedom. Human beings know the future probabilistically: I know that it is likely that if I write in an interesting way, you will be able to focus most of the time you are reading. That is probably true, and I have written and read enough that I can reasonably expect that what has been true in the past will most likely continue to be true in the future. But I do not know absolutely. Today something could have happened in your life to make it impossible for you to focus your attention, so that, try as you might to focus, your attention drifts. My "knowledge" of your being able to focus is probability knowledge—my perception is likely to be true. But this kind of statistical probability does not qualify as omniscience. If God knows *as a matter of certainty* that I am going to lecture at three o'clock, then where is my freedom to refrain? Is my choosing to speak an illusion? For God to be all-knowing makes real, substantive human freedom impossible. And if God knows the future absolutely, then God also knows God's future choices absolutely. Such perfect foretelling strips God of any freedom as well, a contradiction lurking within the dominant theological scheme.

The philosophical conviction that God is eternal, unchanging, and impassible (because to feel is to change) emerges from this welter of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. To change, after all, is to either improve (for God, becoming perfect while previously having been imperfect), or to worsen (by having started as perfect and then becoming imperfect). In this line of reasoning, God cannot abandon perfection, and God has always been perfect—hence, God must be eternally unchanging. For God to be perfect and unchanging, God has to be beyond time and outside of space. Therefore God cannot be changed by the choices we (all of creation) make, by the things we do. God was perfect before creation, perfect during creation, perfect after creation—and in that sense, separate from creation, above creation and time, independent of creation.

That static, timeless perfection is not how Jewish traditions portray the Divine, even though that is how many Jewish philosophers tell us we should understand God. Despite the impressive lineage of philosophers (and rabbis) arguing for an immutable, impassible, omnipotent, and omniscient God, the

Torah and rabbinic midrash portray a God who gets angry, who loves, who grieves, who gets frustrated and surprised, and who repents!

> When the blessed Holy One recalls God's children, who are plunged in suffering among the nations of the world, God lets fall two tears into the ocean and the sound is heard from one end of the world to the other—and that is the rumbling of the earth.[8]

As the philosopher Hans Jonas reminds us,

> Such an idea of divine becoming is surely at variance with the Greek, Platonic-Aristotelian tradition of philosophical theology that, since its incorporation into the Jewish and Christian theological tradition, has somehow usurped for itself an authority to which it is not at all entitled by authentic Jewish (and also Christian) standards.[9]

The biblical/rabbinic portrayals of an engaged, relating, interacting God are no surprise to process thinkers or to observant Jews, most of whom prioritize religious practice (including text study) above more abstract theological reflection.

The conflict is basic: a God who possesses unlimited power and knows everything yet to come could have chosen to fashion a very different world. If an omnipotent and omniscient God knowingly created a world in which babies die in their cribs, a world in which people suffer from malaria and expire in mid-life, leaving their children orphaned—then God is responsible for that (and every) evil. If God could have prevented the Holocaust, and chose not to, it is well nigh impossible to consider that God to be good. In the words of Rabbi Harold Kushner,

> A God of power extorts obedience, but cannot command love. A God who could spare the life of a dying child, who could prevent the earthquake but chooses not to, may inspire our fear and our calculated obedience, but does not deserve our love.[10]

Some Western theologians would rather deny their moral compass than change their theology. When confronted by such a moral outrage, theologians too often obfuscate behind the term "mystery." Or they assert that

God's definition of good and evil is different from our own. If a million babies murdered is not evil by God's definition, then the term "evil" has no meaning. Such an atrocity is surely evil, regardless of the perpetrator.

Rather than cling to this outmoded (and unbiblical/unrabbinic) philosophical notion of God and power, Process Thinking offers a way to recover a biblically and rabbinically resonant, dynamic articulation of God, world, and covenant, integrating that portrayal with contemporary scientific knowledge of the cosmos and of life into a speculative philosophy worthy of our engagement.

Insights of Process Thinking

Process Thinking recognizes reality as relational. That is to say, our perception of the world as apparently independent substances that bang against each other and only interact externally is a coincidence of our size and our metabolism. It is an adaptation to our own species' evolutionary needs, but it is not an objective description of the cosmos or of its inhabitants. The cosmos actually is constantly interacting, constantly social, always in process, and always dynamic. That relating should sound familiar to any Jew because our word for that dynamic relating is *b'rit,* covenant. Covenant is always interactive, always connecting, and always relational. This is just like the cosmos: at a quantum level (the very smallest level), there are no solid substances bouncing into each other; there are only probabilities, packets of energy intertwined in their own uncertainty. At the largest scale, our spacetime bubble singularity (or, possibly, the infinitely larger "sea" of eternal inflation seething expansion) reality is eternally generating new pockets of spacetime. Only on one size scale (the middle one, ours) can one speak with any coherence about stable, permanent substances. And even on our size scale it is quite clear that we are always on the way, always changing from who we were to who we will become, along with the rest of our dynamic biosphere, planet, and cosmos.[11]

We and the rest of creation are not static substances. We—and everything that exists—are events.[12] To grasp our nature scientifically, we must simultaneously embrace different levels of being, despite our propensity, when we think of ourselves, to focus on our conscious level. But our multilayered reality complicates any simple self-identity. If we think about

humans also as collections of atoms, those atoms do not know when they are part of a particular person and when they are part of the air around us, or when they are part of nearby objects. They float in and out of what we think of as "us" all the time. We are completely permeable; in fact, we do not exist on an atomic level, yet that level is no less real than the level of our conscious thought. On a molecular and even a biological level, we also interact with our environment: inhaling air, ingesting food, absorbing heat or cold, sweating, defecating, shedding hair and skin. On the atomic, molecular, biochemical, cellular, biosystemic, bodily, and even conscious levels, we are not stable substances at all. We are constantly engaging in a give-and-take with the rest of creation, all simultaneously. We are immediately connected to all that came before us, up until this very instant, and with all that exists at this very moment.[13] Each of us immediately contains in ourselves everything that has led to each of us.

Freedom is an inherent quality of the world because the cosmos and its denizens are relational, dynamic processes. The world is always becoming, always facing possibilities, and always making choices. There certainly are constraints to those choices. Past decisions create the context in which we now exist. We each know that in our own lives, choices that we made years ago shape the kinds of choices we have available now. One can choose to stay married to a spouse or not, but having chosen years ago to marry that spouse, our choices are different from what they would be if we had not made that particular choice. We always make our choices from the particular context that is the sum total of our previous choices, the sum total of the world's previous choices.

The world, then, is partially self-created and self-creating. The cosmos is a partner with God in its own becoming. We are partners with the cosmos and with God in our own becoming. We have agency; all creation has standing. The past is offered to us,[14] and God meets us in this moment, as in this moment we come to be anew. In every moment we are coming into being again and again. Think again about the level of electrons, protons, and neutrons at which you are flashing into being, flashing out of being instantly, instantly and over and over again. And, at each moment you are met in the sum total of the choices you made with the choices you now face. And you get to decide where you are going to go with that opportunity. That moment of becoming—the present—is called "concrescence," in

which everything comes into being. And after you make the choice, the selected option becomes part of God's consequent nature.[15] God holds out a choice to you that you are free to take or free to reject—and then God meets you in the next choice, with the next possibility. That means that the future is radically open:

> Why was this world created through the letter ה *(hei)?* Because the world is an *exedra* (closed on three sides, open on one): you may proceed if you wish.[16]

> Free will is granted to all. If one desires to turn to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is given. Should one desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is given.[17]

God does not, cannot know the future, because the future has not yet been decided. In choosing to create, God made a world that has the capacity to make choices, too. And therefore, ibn Ezra describes God as the One "who can probe all thoughts and see all deeds."[18] God can only know what is possible to know, past actions and current intentions; in the words of the High Holy Day liturgy, God "knows the secrets of the world"—only what is in the category of knowledge, the revealed and the hidden. The future has not yet been chosen, so it is not something one can know.

"Lover, indeed, of the people"[19]—God is the source of the creative responsive love that pervades the world. Here I want to mention a particularly useful tool. Dominant theology thinks of God in mono-polar terms: if God is simple, God cannot be complex. If God is eternal, God cannot be dynamic. If God is perfect, God cannot be in relationship but must exist either at one polar extreme or the other. A Jewish philosopher at the turn of the twentieth century, Morris Raphael Cohen, first articulated the principle of dipolarity, which we have already explored. Process thinkers apply that notion of dipolarity to God and to God's creation.[20] Interestingly, we find this insight in several Jewish sources as well:

> *Am I only a God near at hand—says the Holy One—*
> *And not a God far away?*
> *If a person enters a hiding place,*
> *Do I not see him?—says the Holy One.*
> *For I fill both heaven and earth—declares the Holy One.*[21]

> In God's greatness and the bulk of God's might, God created the whole world in pairs, each reflection resembling the other, and each corresponding to the other. For God made them in divine wisdom, to make known that every thing has its partner and its reflection, and were it not for the one, the other would not be.[22]

Dipolarity is kind of a yin-yang in which we must comprehend both polarities in order to understand the fullness of what is in front of us: "Everything that exists in the world is either of a certain essence or its opposite."[23] This dipolarity extends even to God, who is infinite in some respects, and finite in some respects. God is infinite in how God is in potential prior to creation. Having created, God enters into relationship with us, and in entering into relationship there are aspects of God that are finite.

> The word *Elohim,* the designation for God in that same first verse of Genesis, refers to a contraction. Since God is endless, the creation of the world had to involve a contraction of the light, so that God might enter the lower worlds. God remains infinite, and the worlds cannot contain God, but since God desired their creation God so self-contracted, as it were, that they could bear to contain God. It is in this aspect that God is called *Elohim*.[24]

God is separate from creation in some respects, and in some respects, part of the creation. The prophet Isaiah proclaims, "Holy, holy, holy—the Holy One of Hosts, God's presence fills all the world."[25] God is not separate. God cannot fill something that God is radically distinct from. One can only fill it by being in it; by being co-extensive with it.[26] In Pesikta De-Rav Kahana we find, "There is no place lacking the Divine Presence."[27] God is not separate from spacetime, God permeates it; God fills it, as the Talmud notes, "God's presence is in all places."[28] That means that God is eternal in some respects (God's reliability, God's being the steady source of creating, absolutely eternal) and dynamic in some respects. Recall that God's static eternality is ontology, the study of being. God's dynamism is hyathology, the study of becoming.[29] The details of God's creating—once we move away from the abstract to the concrete—are always incomplete, in process, on the way: "Whatever was created by God during the six days of creation needs further improvement."[30]

Apparently, this ability to exceed previous perfection—to be vulnerable to creation and open to change—includes the Divine as well. For example, in the very beginning of the Book of Genesis, after God fashions humanity, we are told that "the Holy One regretted having made people on earth, and God's heart was saddened."[31] What does it mean for God to regret and feel sorrow? A timeless, unchanging God cannot regret. Regret means being different than you were a moment ago. So the Torah itself asserts God's dynamism in the context of relationship. Over and over again the Torah emphasizes a God who expresses emotion, a God who is always meeting people in relationship, and changing because of that relationship. God, for Process Thinking, is manifest as the ground of novelty. God is to be found in the fact that a universe that is established through fixed, changeless laws still generates novelty all the time: new unprecedented things that did not previously exist. And, in Process Thinking, God shares the experiences of all creatures, and is experienced by all creatures:

> The essence of divinity is found in every single thing—nothing but it exists. Since it causes every thing to be, no thing can live by anything else. It enlivens them; its existence exists in each existent. Do not attribute duality to God. Let God be solely God. If you suppose that *Ein Sof* (Without Limit) emanates until a certain point, and that from that point on is outside of it, you have dualized. God forbid! Realize, rather, that *Ein Sof* exists in each existent. Do not say, "This is a stone and not God." God forbid! Rather, all existence is God, and the stone is a thing pervaded by divinity.[32]

Nothing that happens escapes God's perception and experience, and we are always in touch with the Divine. In Genesis Rabbah, we learn:

> From the first day of creation, the blessed Holy One longed to enter into partnership with the terrestrial world, to dwell with God's creatures within the terrestrial world.[33]

God is our partner, dwelling in the world; this is a statement that no dominant theologian could make, but with which the Rabbis are content. "God is the place of the world, but the world is not God's place."[34] God permeates the world. God dwells within the world.

Not by Might, Nor by Power, But by My Breath[35]

One key shift then, for Process Thinking, is that God does not exercise coercive power; rather, God exercises persuasive power. Western people conceive of belief in God, and many—both believers and atheists—concur in affirming a bully in the sky who compels behavior or results from unwilling, passive agents, or who restrains behavior and precludes outcomes that sinning creatures would otherwise pursue. Process Thinking dissents, reminding us that God does not work through coercion; God works through persuasion and invitation, through persistently inviting us to make the best possible choice, and then leaving us free to make the wrong choice. But then, the instant we have made our choice, God persistently lures us toward the making of the best possible subsequent choice.

God does not break the rules to force a desired outcome, working instead with and through us, with and through natural law. Here is that timely assurance from Midrash Tanḥuma:

> All might, praise, greatness, and power belong to the Sovereign of sovereigns. Yet God loves law. It is the custom of the world that a powerful tyrant does not desire to do things lawfully. Rather, he bypasses law and order by coercing, stealing, transgressing the will of the Creator, favoring his friends and relatives while treating his antagonists unjustly. But the blessed Holy One, the Majesty of majesties, loves law, and does nothing unless it is with law. This is the meaning of "Mighty is the Majesty who loves law."[36]

The ancient Rabbis decontextualize this verse and construe it to teach that when one talks about God's might, one celebrates God's willingness to live within natural law. God does not "break" the laws of physics, the laws of chemistry, the laws of biology, or the laws of morality. In that wondrous way, God's power is not simply an amplification of human power; it is qualitatively superior and unique.[37] God works within the constraints of law. The way God works on us, in us, through us is called the "lure"—what Whitehead calls the "initial aim"[38] and Jonas calls "the mutely insistent appeal of his unfulfilled goal."[39] That is to say, at this very moment (and at every moment) God meets each of us, and all of creation, offering us the best possible next step. We have the opportunity (and the freedom) to decide whether

to take that best possible next step, or not. That next step, best of all possible, the initial aim, becomes for us, our subjective aim, what we choose to do.

We know what the initial aim is; we know it intuitively because we prehend it (Whitehead's term for immediate, internal intuition). We do not have to be told; we are each connected to all, and to the creative-responsive love that God offers. So we intuit the lure from the inside. Sometimes we choose not to make the right choice, or to not do the right thing because of the other powers that impinge upon us: our physicality, drives, selfishness, desires, or laziness. A wide diversity of excuses accounts for our subjective aim perverting God's initial aim, which leaves God in covenant, hence vulnerable:

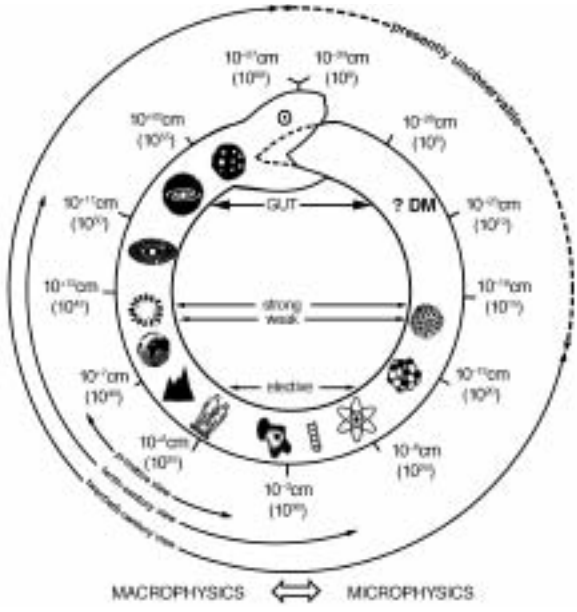
> When Israel performs the will of the Holy One, they add strength to the heavenly power. When, however, Israel does not perform the will of the Holy One, they weaken (if it is possible to say so) the great power of the One who is above.[40]

Here again we meet a dynamic, relating God who suffers, a God who becomes vulnerable in having created us. This is not an all-powerful, impassible, eternal God, but a God so connected through relationship that the best way to describe this temporal, passionate covenant partner is in the language of love and law. Indeed, lawfulness is itself understood to be a manifestation of love. The prophet Hosea understands this, when he speaks on God's behalf to Israel:

> I will espouse you forever:
> I will espouse you with righteousness and justice,
> And with goodness and mercy,
> And I will espouse you with faithfulness.
> Then you shall know the Holy One.[41]

The Rabbis recognize this passage as the very heart of the relationship binding the Jew and God, inserting it into the morning liturgy to be recited as the Jew wraps the bands of tefillin on the hand in preparation for the morning prayers. To be in covenant with God is akin to marriage: "See, God's love for you is like the love of a man and a woman."[42]

To love someone is to become vulnerable to his or her choices. It is to suffer another's pain, and to exalt in the lover's triumph. It is to want to be steadily a partner and helper, and to sometimes be hurt by the partner's rejec-



tion or bad choices. In such a way, God suffers and rejoices in the world, and with the world: "In all their troubles God was troubled."[43] In Psalm 91, we are told, "I will be with him in his suffering."[44] In M. Sanhedrin, Rabbi Meir says, "When a person is sorely troubled, what does the Shekhinah say? She says, 'My head is ill; my arm is ill; I am not at ease.'"[45] Our suffering pains God. God is diminished by our not rising to the best choice. The God of Israel is not merely an unchanging, external perfection (although there is an aspect of God that is unchanging and eternal); we encounter the Divine in the dynamism of *b'rit,* relationship. During the rituals of Hoshanot, observant Jews march around the sanctuary; one of the hymns recited declares, "As You saved together, God and people, so save us." There is a dynamic interconnection between God, humanity, and all creation. That interconnection changes how we understand life's big questions.

It Is Beyond My Knowledge:[46] Apprehending Without Certainty

One of the advances of Process Thinking is encouragement to take pluralism seriously, to approach knowledge in a spirit of humility, relationality, and dynamism. Dominant theologies of creation present a single telling of

creation, or afterlife, imposing a certainty and an objectivity that empirical knowledge does not mandate. At least from the medieval period into the present, scholars have remained aware that there is no way to step outside of the cosmos to verify or falsify many of our theoretical explanations, no way to prove a definitive single encompassing account for the beginning. As Saadia Gaon notes,

> The problem dealt with . . . is one on which we have no data from actual observation or from sense perception, but conclusions which can be derived only from postulates of pure reason. We mean the problem of the origin of the world. It cannot be grasped by the senses, and one can only endeavor to comprehend it by thought.[47]

While it is certainly true that contemporary scientists have "seen" a great deal more than the pre-modern natural philosophers (background cosmic radiation, galaxies and nebulae extending to the visible cosmic horizon, etc.), it also remains true that we cannot explore and test various spacetime bubbles; we cannot step outside of our own cosmos to compare and contrast with others.

Furthermore, we are limited to an intuitive sense that pertains to our range of size and our durations of time.[48] For size ranges vastly larger than our own (planets, galaxies, spacetime) or vastly smaller (molecules, atoms, atomic particles, quanta), human intuition and logic are not reliable, not having evolved to cope with such enormity or smallness. Nor do our common sense perceptions function intuitively with the briefest quantum time intervals or with the expansive duration of cosmic events. In such durations and sizes, the only effective system of human relation and expression (constrained by our scientific knowledge) is the Five M's: **M**ath, **M**etaphor, **M**usic, **M**editation, and **M**yth. Each provides a syntax and narrative to link our consciousness and existence to those realms of reality vastly larger or smaller than our own size range, or vastly shorter or longer than the time frames we are evolved to recognize and intuit.

When contemplating the possible origins of this universe, consequently, we are thrown back to a similar position as the medievals—mustering all available evidence and then generating plausible tellings based on our own presuppositions and use of human reasoning.

Creation Renewed Every Day

Instead of thinking of creation as *ex nihilo,* as if there were nothing existing previous to Creation and then, in an instant, everything suddenly existed, Process Thinking takes a more developmental view. I think it fair to say that most Process thinkers, beginning with Whitehead (and myself included), understand God as the organizing force of an eternally existing reality. Such a view surprises those who restrict their view of creation to the first and third verses in the Book of Genesis, ignoring the second verse and creation images from elsewhere in the Bible,[49] Midrash, and Kabbalah. The dominant view filters the Genesis telling through a pre-existent ideology of an omnipotent, eternal, impassive Deity, forcing readers to constrain the text within the procrustean confines of an effortless, spontaneous moment that created everything that exists today. Such an approach conflicts with fundamental scientific evidence, such as: the age of the planet, the cosmic materials out of which life is constructed, the fact that living things have developed from previous living things, and the several mass extinctions that have punctuated life on earth prior to the appearance of today's species, to mention only a few. Equally significant, such a theological imposition (more green paint!) depends on ignoring the second verse of Genesis: "the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water."[50] So much for taking the Bible literally!

A contextual reading of the opening verses of Genesis yields the recognition that the unformed and void darkness *(tohu va-vohu)* existed when God began creating. That bubbling, irrepressible depth remains the source of self-creativity, potentialities, and resistance to all imposed power.[51] God's creating is not necessarily one of instantiating *ex nihilo* from without, but rather a process of mobilizing continuous self-creativity from within:

> An epiphany enables you to sense creation not as something completed, but as constantly becoming, evolving, ascending. This transports you from a place where there is nothing new to a place where there is nothing old, where everything renews itself, where heaven and earth rejoice as at the moment of creation.[52]

Because, of course, every moment *is* the moment of creation! This richer view of continuous creation, it turns out, is also reflected in Jewish sources,

beginning with the beginning itself. The Book of Genesis begins with the word *b'reishit,* which the New Jewish Publication Society version correctly translates as "When God began to create heaven and earth—,"[53] with God's spirit fluttering over preexistent *tohu va-vohu.* Chaos is already there, God fluttering over its surface, and then God begins to speak it into increasing order and diversity. By the end of the first chapter of Genesis, God has spoken creation into a symphony of diverse becoming.

At each stage of the blossoming process of creating, God turns to creation itself and issues an invitation, a lure: Let there be [whatever], and let it flourish according to its own laws, *l'mineihu*.[54] God invites creation to be a co-partner in the process of creating. It is not that God, once and for all, speaks everything that currently lives into existence from the outside. God coaxes, summons, and invites the sun and stars and planetary objects into becoming, then the earth to distinguish oceans and dry land, then to generate plants, which cascade into increasing diversity of grasses, shrubs, trees, and vegetation; God invites the earth to spring up as animal life, and then asks each species to continue its own internal growth by its own inner logic—*l'mineihu*, after its own kind.[55] It is worth noting that God sees creation as a process with developmental stages, each with its own integrity and each worthy of celebration. At the end of each day, "God saw that it was good."[56] At the creation of humanity and the beginning of the Sabbath, God "found it very good."[57] As Robert Gnuse notes,

> The statement that God found the creative act of each specific day to be good is highly important, for it means that at each stage of the creative endeavor God stopped and took account of what was unfolding. Perhaps the text even speaks of divine pleasure exhibited at the end of each individual creative act. If we focus on this language in Genesis 1, we may see the cosmic creation as a dynamic, evolutionary process.[58]

We are told in tractate Ḥagigah[59] that God "renews every day the work of creation." That is not a single intervention with a clear temporal beginning and a sharp conclusion after which it is complete; the Talmud is suggesting that God is constantly creating, indeed permeates the process of creating. The Zohar takes this idea even further. It quotes from the Book of

Proverbs, "By understanding God continually established the heavens."[60] The Zohar asks: What does the phrase "continually established" mean?

> God goes on arranging the *sefirot* every day, and never stops. They were not arranged at one particular time, but God arranges them daily because of the great love and the pleasure that the blessed Holy One feels for them and for their preciousness in God's sight.[61]

Creation, then, is the process of God luring emergent being into order, abundance, diversity, and goodness. Creation is God's inviting creation into the process of becoming. That means there can be no break with natural law at any point in the process. God works with and through material reality. The universe is not merely passive stuff that God molds into shape; it is a co-creating universe.

> God created the world in a state of beginning. The universe is always in an uncompleted state, in the form of its beginning. It is not like a vessel which the master works to finish; it requires continuous labor and renewal by creative forces. Should these cease for only a second, the universe would return to primeval chaos.[62]

God permeates that *tohu va-vohu* stuff and expresses through it the ability to live:

> The activating force of the Creator must continuously be present within the created object, to give it life and continued existence. . . . And even as regards this physical earth and its inorganic components, their life-force and continued existence is the "word of God" . . . There is a kind of soul and spiritual life-force even in inorganic matter such as stones and dust and water.[63]

There are two contemporary scientific ways to contextualize the process of continuing creation we have described, each accepted at present by large segments of the scientific community. Each provides plausible accounts of the data we have at present, and each leaves certain large assumptions

unproven and unprovable in theory. The two plausible options correspond in broad outline to the two medieval cosmic options—an eternal creation and a creation of space and time as part of the creative act:

- **Eternal inflation** asserts that our spacetime bubble is located in a cosmic "sea" of infinite, eternal inflation. This "sea" is sometimes referred to as the superuniverse, or the multiverse, or the meta-universe.[64] Within the eternal inflation, only quantum rules govern, although on rare occasions due to long-shot quantum odds, exceptional spacetime bubbles emerge into being within which expansion does not pertain. Within each bubble there is a coherent spacetime, and we live in one such bubble. So what we think of as the Big Bang and all of existence, in this understanding, is really one spacetime bubble in an infinite sea of eternal inflation that erupts into other new spacetime bubbles. In this eternal realm, neither space nor time have meaning—time because it has no direction, and space because it is the same in every direction and in every place. Of course, this eternal inflation, existing beyond spacetime, is unverifiable and immeasurable in principle. It lies beyond human cognition or description, in a realm of myth, math, and metaphor (where, it turns out, all human conceptualization and meaning-making occurs).
- **Big Bang theory** starts with the instant in which spacetime exploded into existence, that primal singularity some 14 billion years ago that created the vast cosmos in which we live and move and have our being. The Big Bang itself is held to be inexplicable; the laws of physics fail as we move back in time toward the singular moment itself. Within that singularity, we can only marvel at the remarkable fine-tuning of the major forces of the cosmos, a slight variation of any of which would have made life impossible.[65]

These two understandings of creation—of an infinite, eternal, inflationary multiverse or of a singular Big Bang—may be disturbing to people who have read the Bible exclusively through dominant theological lenses, but Jewish traditional voices provide the resources to accommodate both. So let me offer a passage in Ecclesiastes Rabbah, which quotes from Ecclesiastes, "As God has made everything beautiful in its time:"[66]

> Rabbi Tanḥuma said, "In its due time was when the universe was created. It was not proper to be created before then; it was created at the right moment."

Assuming there is one universe, it was created at the right moment. If you prefer to think of the cosmos as co-extensive with our spacetime bubble (and there are plenty of scientists who do), Rabbi Tanḥuma and many other sages share your view. There is no way for us to stand outside of our spacetime bubble to test whether there are other spacetime bubbles—let alone an infinite and eternal expansion. Those people who posit multiverses are driven by logic and existential preferences, not by experience. They may be right, but we will never know with certainty.

But that same *midrash* goes on to say:

> Rabbi Abbahu said: "From this we learn that the blessed Holy One kept on constructing worlds and destroying them, until God constructed the present one and said, 'This one pleases Me, the others did not.'"[67]

In the second part of the same *midrash* is the idea of an infinite number of universes, of which ours is only one. Apparently ours is not the first generation to speculate on the possibility of previous, perhaps infinite, universes. Apparently these rabbinic sages were comfortable understanding God the Creator as having created not only once, but as the God who is always creating.

About these two choices—an eternal inflation with repeated spacetimes or a singular spacetime that encompasses all—individual scientists have strong preferences, but science as a whole does not definitively weigh in. We are left with two conceivable possibilities, each scientifically plausible and each religiously compatible with the understanding of creation as an ongoing process presented by biblical and rabbinic sources. We are (still? once more?) in the position that Maimonides explicated in his magisterial *Guide of the Perplexed:*

> It was to our mind established as true that, regarding the question whether the heavens are generated or eternal, neither of the two contrary opinions could be demonstrated.[68]

God may be the One who creates everything out of nothing, or the One who creates order out of eternity and infinity. Process saves us from having to weigh in beyond what we can know. We can indulge a little dipolarity here, rather than asserting a false certainty beyond what knowledge can

assert; rather than creating a false dichotomy between the two plausibilities, we can embrace both understandings as useful metaphors to orient and motivate ourselves within the cosmos. In either telling, God continually lures this dynamic creation, working in/with/through all that exists to generate greater order, expressiveness, diversity, and abundance.

What of the Night?[69] Evil and Suffering

If God is not the coercive despot who created all as it is, if God is found in the steady relational love that invites creation into diverse becoming, then evil is that aspect of reality not yet touched by God's lure or that part of creation that ignores God's lure.

Another way to address suffering and evil is to acknowledge that much of what we term evil or suffering is a matter of perspective. Maimonides, speaking out of the naturalism that Aristotelian thought makes possible, articulates it best. He points out how often what we term evil is simply our perspective on a particular event:

> The ignoramus and those like him among the multitude consider that which exists only with reference to the human individual. Every ignoramus imagines that all that exists exists with a view to his individual sake; it is as if there were nothing that exists except him. And if something happens to him that is contrary to what he wishes, he makes the trenchant judgment that all that exists is an evil.[70]

Much of what we understand to be evil is the very source of dynamism and life. The fact that our planet is churning, so that the rocks do not settle in order of heaviness, but the heavy ones keep getting kicked up to the surface—that is why there is life on the surface. Were it not for the tectonic activity of the core, there would be no life on the surface of this planet. Events that are disasters for some are sources of emerging novelty and development for others. So the process of evolution is driven precisely by a tension between limits, on the one hand, and possibilities, on the other. Maybe that is why Isaiah says that God is the One who "makes peace and creates evil."[71] God has to be *borei ra,* the Creator of evil, because out of what is experienced as evil comes life itself. We cannot have one without the other.

The cosmos itself does not follow God's script, as though predetermined. Every level of the cosmos follows its own inner *ḥokhmah,* its own inner dynamic, and therefore is in the process of becoming, as are we. As Maimonides goes on to explain, most human suffering is not a divine punishment or test, but is the result of three broad realities of life. The first reality is that it is the nature of material reality to come into being, to grow and flourish for a time, and to then fall apart prior to going out of existence:

> The first type of evil is that which befalls people because of the nature of coming-to-be and passing-away. I mean to say because of our being endowed with matter. Because of this, infirmities and paralytic afflictions befall some individuals either in consequence of their original natural disposition, or they supervene because of changes occurring in the elements, such as corruption of the air or a fire from heaven and a landslide.[72]

This realm of suffering is the logical manifestation of dynamism and change. The only alternative, a world of static eternity, is one that few of us would choose—even if it means embracing an alternative that also brings suffering and death. And, more importantly, we do not have that choice—which is Maimonides' point. Dynamism, hence suffering and death, is built into the very nature and logic of materiality.

It is also possible to understand large swaths of suffering and evil as the result of our freedom, the freedom of the entire cosmos. And sometimes we individuals, or humanity at large, make bad choices, and sometimes the rest of the cosmos makes disastrous choices. This accounts for the next category that we perceive as evil and experience as suffering: "The evils of the second kind are those that people inflict upon one another, such as tyrannical domination of some of them over others."[73] This second category of suffering is the result of human freedom and our ability to impose bad choices on innocent others. This requires no additional supernatural intervention, but is the immediate consequence of our freedom and our relatedness.

The third and final category of evil and suffering is related to the second: our freedom to make poor choices also means that we inflict harm on ourselves when we do not muster the strength and vision to heed the divine lure:

> The evils of the third kind are those that are inflicted upon any individual among us by his own action . . . This kind is consequent upon all vices, I mean concupiscence for eating, drinking, and copulation, and doing these things with excess in regard to quantity or irregularity or when the quality of the foodstuffs is bad. For this is the cause of all corporeal and psychical diseases and ailments.[74]

The dynamic, ephemeral nature of becoming, the competing lures that tempt us and distract us from God's lure, our ability to impose ourselves on others and our ability to mislead ourselves—these remain sources of suffering and evil. Process Thinking allows us to recognize their sources as proximate, within nature, and not as the judgment or punishment of the Divine. In turn, this realization allows us to continue to perceive God as our ally and strength in times of tribulation, to be able to reorient ourselves to focus receptively on implementing the divine lure before us, to freely choose to affirm those relations (and make those choices) that bring us strength, joy, and health.

In the dominant theology, an omnipotent, omniscient God becomes the source of our suffering, either actively, by commission, or passively, by refraining from intervention. In either case, it is easy to feel abandoned, betrayed, or persecuted by such a coercive power. In such a theology, evil is a conceptual conundrum to be rationalized through better reasoning. Process Thinking opens our eyes to a biblical-rabbinic-kabbalistic view of God as relational and loving. "I am with you, declares the Holy One,"[75] working in/with/through us to bring order to the chaos in our lives and societies, giving us the strength and insight to know how to struggle for health, connection, and justice.

Understanding God as the pervasive creativity and novelty that permeates all-becoming invites us to stop *thinking* about the status of evil, and to focus instead on how we fight for justice and compassion: "*You shall love the Holy One your God*—This implies that one should make God beloved by one's deeds."[76] Evil and suffering are not intriguing theological puzzles; they are existential goads calling us to repair the world. This shift, from intellectual justification to action, has ancient precedent. The Rabbis perceive God as choosing righteous behavior rather than correct belief: "Would that they had rather forsaken Me but maintained My Torah, for the great light emanating from the Torah would have led them back to Me."[77]

If we are part of creation, if we also have the ability to align ourselves to the divine lure, then evil is a summons for us to implement justice, which is resolute love. What choices must we make now to obviate evil tomorrow? That question beckons as a revelation: What is it that God asks of us?

A Still, Small Voice:[78] Revelation

Process enhances our ability to participate in revelation. Our museums retain medieval illustrations of Moses receiving the Torah. The artists portray an arm descending from the sky holding a book, while Moses stands on the top of the mountain, reaching up—straining to grab the book that is handed to him! That illustration is, I think, an accurate pictorial presentation of the dominant view of revelation as shaped by Greek philosophy—eternal God, static immaculate Torah, passive (although worthy) recipient. But if you can entertain a notion of God and cosmos as becoming, of the universe as relationship in process, then it is easy to recognize revelation as also ongoing, relational, dynamic, and continuous. That should not be a surprise to Jews who are familiar with the Bible, Rabbinics, and Kabbalah, because we find that same openness in our own tradition, as well. Jewish tradition speaks of *matan torah,* the giving of Torah, and also of *kabbalat torah,* the receiving of Torah—both active aspects of a dynamic relationship. Far from being relegated to the distant past, to a single day and a particular mountain, Sinai and revelation name a quality of relation that is always and everywhere available: "*On this day they came to the wilderness of Sinai* (Exodus 19:1)—Every day that you study Torah, say: 'It is as if I received it this very day from Sinai.'"[79] Not only does this continuous revelation apply to the study of Torah (the book), but any fruitful teaching by any sage enjoys the status of Torah: "Everything that a diligent student will teach in the distant future has already been proclaimed on Mount Sinai."[80]

This open-ended Torah harvests a living, growing process, a pulsing relationship of love. No mere abstraction or desiccated set of rules, Torah takes concrete form in the specific people through whom it emerges into the light of day. God's presence is manifest in their specific language, idiom, bodies, and culture. Moving backward through time, we can trace this insight back across the ages:

- "The word of God can be uttered only by human mouths."[81]
- "Likewise with all the prophets and those possessed of the Holy Spirit: the supernal voice and speech vested itself in their actual voice and speech."[82]
- "The Shekhinah speaks from the throat of Moses."[83]
- "It is clear that [while God's precepts are given] through words uttered in Torah, they are also given through words uttered by elders and sages."[84]

As the Torah becomes real through the active participation of its human co-creators, the apparent conflict between the Documentary Hypothesis—the process through which God and the scribes, prophets, and sages of Israel produced the Torah we now possess—and the veneration of Torah as the manifestation of the Divine in words finds resolution. Since the Torah represents the response of the Jews to a heightened experience of God—an openness to the divine lure—it is patently impossible and fruitless to argue about whether the Torah is divine or human. In good dipolar fashion, it is inseparably both. God "speaks" with/in/through *us*.

Recognizing Torah as a divine/human partnership means that the authority of the Torah is no longer misperceived as coercive. Like God, Torah's authority is persuasive: an invitation to wisdom, rather than an intimidation through fear. Jewish tradition labels that fear of consequences the inferior *yirah*. But the superior *yirah* is marvel or wonder. It reflects reverent awe at the staggering grandeur of cosmos, consciousness, and life! Such *yirah* responds willingly to persuasive, not coercive, power. This inviting lure is found in the Book of Deuteronomy, when we are instructed to keep the mitzvot and observe them, "for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of nations, who when they hear of these statutes will say, 'surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people.'"[85] As we recognize the shift in the authority of Torah from corrosive coercion imposed to bubble-up wisdom offered, the Torah becomes compelling because it is wise, because it is beautiful, because it augments life. Obedience is no longer the desperate attempt to avoid punishment, but the free embrace of life-sustaining wisdom.

In fact, the Rabbis make the same point in a wonderful, ancient midrash. Recall how when the Jews are gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, the Torah describes them as standing as *betaḥtit ha-har,* "under the mountain" (Exodus 19:17). The Rabbis understand that curious phrase to mean that

God "covered them with the mountain as a vat. God said to them, 'If you accept the Torah, fine. But if not, your burial will be here.'"[86]

But you cannot obligate someone into agreement through coercion, even if you are God! So if Sinai is a coercive imposition, then the Jews are technically free of the obligations of the covenant. Astonishingly, the answer the Gemara records is that *we are not obligated by Sinai!* We are obligated to the Torah because of an event during the lifetimes of Mordecai and Esther. When they wrote and disseminated the teachings of the tradition, the Book of Esther records of the Jews, *kiymu v'kiblu,* "they established and they accepted it."[87] As the Talmud notes, "They established that which they already had accepted."[88] It is only because they freely accepted the Torah, because they responded to the divine lure freely offered and freely accepted, that the covenant linking God and the Jewish people was affirmed. God's initial aim—to propose a way of living that the nations will recognize as wise—flowed into the subjective aim of the Jews' response, "We will observe and we will hear."[89] That relationship precludes coercion. Covenant thrives in invitation, a mutual yearning.

Such covenantal love also, of course, elevates the place of ethics, and it means that morality becomes the capstone of religious Jewish life. But this has been true from the beginning. Think of the Torah as a mountain: Genesis and Deuteronomy, the base; Exodus and Numbers, the second level; and Leviticus, the peak. And the religious core of Leviticus, the source that organized and gave the book is final form, is the Holiness Code, which takes its name from Parashat Kedoshim. Kedoshim details how to participate in holy community. The peak of Sinai, it turns out, is ethics, as the prophets themselves also emphasize. In Jewish religious understanding, ritual matters because it generates ethical seriousness; it creates a pedagogy of goodness and an agenda of grateful inclusion.[90] Our beliefs enter life through our deeds: "What short text is there upon which all the essential principles of the Torah depend? 'In all your ways, acknowledge God (Proverbs 3:6).'"[91]

Chosenness: Servant, Lover, Firstborn

In the dominant theology with its either/or dichotomies, either the Jews are chosen, hence superior, or all peoples are equal and none are chosen. If God is the active choosing partner, then Israel must be the passive recipient

of God's choice. But dipolarity allows us to transcend these binary dichotomies. Israel is an active partner in the process of chosenness: "We do not know whether the blessed Holy One chose Jacob or whether Jacob chose the blessed Holy One."[92] Another *midrash* reiterates the reciprocity: "As soon as the blessed Holy One saw Israel's resolution, saw that they wished to accept the Torah with love and affection, with fear and reverence, with awe and trembling, God said: 'I am the Holy One your God.'"[93]

Jews choose/are chosen to live Torah in the world, both to build communities of justice and inclusion and to model that it is possible to embody such a life. But other peoples choose/are chosen, too, in other ways. The Torah reminds us, "It was not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the Lord set His heart on you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples."[94] To this cautionary note, the Rabbis add:

> Not because you are greater than other nations did I choose you, not because you obey My commandments more than the nations, for they follow My commandments even though they were not bidden to do it, and also magnify My name more than you, as it says, "From the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name is great among the nations (Malachi 1:11)."[95]

Jews choose/are chosen for Torah and *mitzvot,* although most emphatically not because of intrinsic superiority. Other peoples are chosen/choose their own paths to holiness and righteousness.

This understanding comes not just from modern rabbis and theologians; it emerges from the Torah and rabbinics, as well. The prophet Isaiah exults, "In that day, Israel shall be a third partner with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing on earth; for the Holy One of Hosts will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be My people Egypt, My handiwork Assyria, and My very own Israel.'"[96] He also inquires, "Is it too light a thing that you should be My servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel? I will give you as a light to the nations, that My salvation shall reach to the ends of the earth."[97] We are God's servants both to return Israel to a covenantal life, but also to be a light to the nations of the world. The prophet Amos reminds us that others have been chosen too: "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says the Holy One. Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from

Kir?"[98] All peoples are God's people; all children are children of God. The Rabbis, as well, comment that we chose/were chosen, not because we are greater, not because we are more observant, not because we glorify God's name more; we choose/are chosen because God is discerned in our relationship—to God, to each other, to God's creation—and that relationship is not abstract logic, it is a particular relationship involving a people, a place, a history, and a way. And relationship is always in process.

Salvation and Afterlife

As it was in the beginning, so it shall be in the end. Our stories of beginnings took advantage of dipolarity to embrace two plausible scientific/mythic tellings: Big Bang *and* Eternal Inflation, each redolent with biblical, midrashic, and kabbalistic imagery and insight. Each of these tellings takes us beyond the limits of empirical knowing (although they are each constrained by current scientific knowledge to reflect a minimal standard of plausibility). Now, turning to questions of death and afterlife, we seek yet again to peek behind the curtain, where certainty and knowledge cannot arbitrate. Process Thinking joins Jewish tradition in offering two plausible paradigms. Rather than the false swagger of pretended certainty, we can embrace the openness of aggadic hope and multiplicity, knowing that truth flashes just under the surface of such tellings.

A Process perspective on death and afterlife affirms the same speculative metaphysics as all Process insight: We generally think of ourselves as substances, but we are really organized patterns of energy. Everything is in flux, everything is dynamic, everything is volts of electricity—which is to say, a great light that was made at the beginning and hidden away. As we serially flash in and out of existence, on every level, we are free to determine our next choice, constrained only by our previous choices and the instantaneous impact of the rest of choosing creation. God does not know the future. God knows objectively and retains forever all that has already occurred. Integrating and responding to our choices and actions is one of the ways God changes. After we are offered the initial aim—God's best possible option—we then select our subjective aim, choosing what we prefer. That choice, and its subsequent series of events, then becomes eternally part of God. God's integration of those events that have have come to pass is eternal.

Process Thinking allows us to formulate a plausible understanding of life in the coming world *(olam ha-ba)*. *Olam ha-ba* is the biblical/rabbinic term for our continuing as objectively real aspects of God's thought. We are not substances now in life, and we will not be substances after life ends. We are patterns of energy now, and there is no necessity to believe that we will not continue as patterns of energy in God's eternity.

At this point, however, the specifics of the nature of that continuing existence diverge, both for Process Thinking and for classical Jewish texts as well. Judaism insists on belief in eternal life. The Talmud insists that one who will not proclaim the prayer for the resurrection of the dead is immediately removed as prayer leader,[99] and Maimonides lists affirmation of the afterlife as one of the core required beliefs of traditional Judaism.[100] Beyond affirming faith in some form of continuing existence, however, Jewish wisdom is remarkably open. As Rabbi Louis Jacobs writes,

> Religious agnosticism in some aspects of this whole area is not only legitimate but altogether desirable. As Maimonides (1135–1204) says, we simply can have no idea of what pure spiritual bliss in the Hereafter is like. Agnosticism on the basic issue of whether there is a Hereafter would seem narrowness of vision believing what we do of God. But once the basic affirmation is made, it is almost as narrow to project our poor, early imaginings on the landscape of Heaven.[101]

This religious realism permeates Jewish theology—affirming what we can, and specifying only when possible. In this instance, Judaism traditionally affirms an afterlife, but refrains from specifying a single vision of that future. Value-concept terms—such as *gan eden* (Garden of Eden), *pardes* (paradise), *gehenna* (hell), *olam ha-ba* (the coming world), *t'ḥiyat ha-meitim* (resurrection), *gilgul ha-n'shamot* (reincarnation), *keitz ha-yamim* (end of days), and *yeshiva shel maalah* (supernal academy)—circulate in various Jewish conceptions of afterlife, but are never defined with precision or authoritatively. Using the building blocks of these value-concepts, many different conceptions of life after death abound within religious Jewish traditions. Those options remain viable for a Jewish Process thinker.

Once our lives are finished and done, we continue to exist—as we have lived—on multiple levels. All of the stuff of which we are composed contin-

ues in the world. The atoms that constitute us do not vanish with our death. Our proteins are recycled in the ongoing cycles of life. Everything that we are gets reused and continues.

- One possibility is that death marks the end of our individual consciousness. Our energy patterns continue unabated, but there is no governing central organization, no self-reflective awareness that continues beyond death. In such a possibility, we merge back into the oneness from which we emerged. We sleep as discrete individuals and awaken as the totality of the cosmos.
- A second possibility builds on the first, adding the plausible hope that consciousness and identity continue unimpaired. As God is process, and as God is the One who is supremely connected to everything, supremely related, and forgetting nothing, we remain eternally alive in God's memory, in God's thought—which, it turns out, is what we have been all along.

NOTES

1. Literally "tree of life" (cf. Genesis 3:24, Proverbs 3:18)—a favorite rabbinic metaphor for Torah in the broadest sense, the entirety of God and Jewry's ongoing revelation.

2. As a religious Jew, while I revere the great medieval theologians—Rav Saadia and Rambam preeminent among them—I reserve the term "classical" for Torah: Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) and Rabbinics (Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Codes). I think that the medieval sages would have concurred with that prioritization. I acknowledge the influence and domination (but not the normative privilege or superiority) of the neo-Platonizing Aristotelian scholastic blend, the so-called "classical" philosophical theology—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—as "dominant."

3. For a superb presentation of Aristotelian premises and logic in the context of religious philosophy, there is no better presentation than Norbert M. Samuelson, *Revelation and the God of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 22–28.

4. Job, by the way, provides brilliant evidence here that such a response is not the only biblical ideal. His theologian friends work to get him to see the logic of accepting the blame in order to preserve God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence, yet Job refuses. God's response is to applaud Job's integrity and vision and to chastise Eliphaz and the other theologians: "I am incensed at you and your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about Me as did My servant Job" (Job 42:7).

5. See Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," in Lawrence Vogel,

ed., *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), pp. 138–139; C. Robert Mesle, *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), pp. 26–32; and John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), pp. 52–54.

6. See "El Shaddai" in Nahum M. Sarna, ed., *The JPS Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp. 384–385.

7. Psalm 145:3, Job 9:10.

8. B. Berakhot 59a.

9. Jonas, "Concept of God," p. 137.

10. Harold Kushner, "Would an All-Powerful God Be Worthy of Worship?" in Sandra B. Lubarsky and David Ray Griffin, eds., *Jewish Theology and Process Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 90.

11. This dynamism and relatedness is magnificently recounted in three books: Joel R. Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams, *The View from the Center of the Universe: Discovering Our Extraordinary Place in the Cosmos* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006); Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (New York: HarperOne, 1994); and Harold Morowitz, *The Emergence of Everything: How the World Became Complex* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

12. Alfred North Whitehead called this "occasions of experience." See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition,* David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, eds. (New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 16; and David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 108–109.

13. Whitehead's word for this immediate, internal intuition is "prehension"—that we immediately prehend all of existence. See John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), pp. 19–20.

14. Whitehead called this "the primordial aspect of God," that part of God that is eternally fixed; the part of God that is unchanging because it has already been decided. See Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman, eds., *Handbook of Process Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), pp. 7–8.

15. McDaniel and Bowman, *Handbook*, p. 6.

16. Yehudah bar Ilai, B. Menaḥot 29b.

17. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 5:1.

18. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra to Leviticus 22:31.

19. Deuteronomy 14:1.

20. Most originally, Charles Hartshorne. See Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), pp. 1–15.

21. Jeremiah 23:23–24. All biblical translations are taken from JPS *Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation,* David E.S. Stein, ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

22. Midrash Temurah, ch. 1.

23. Rabbi Yehudah Loew of Prague, Ḥiddushei Aggadot 2:89.

24. Rabbi Menaḥem Naḥum of Chernobyl, Me'or Einayim, Ḥayei Sarah.

25. Isaiah 6:3.

26. A useful illustration might be filling a pitcher with water: this is made possible by the reality that the pitcher, water, and I exist within the same spacetime, are made of the same components, and are thus in important ways ontologically continuous. Were that not so, the connection between me and the pitcher, the pitcher and the water, would be impossible. One cannot pour water from a different spacetime bubble into a pitcher in this one!

27. Piska 1:2.

28. B. Bava Batra 25a.

29. See Charles Hartshorne, "Some Causes of My Intellectual Growth," in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Charles Hartshorne* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1991), p. 43.

30. Genesis Rabbah 11:6.

31. Genesis 6:6.

32. Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, Shiur Komah to Zohar 3:14b (s.v. *idra rabba*).

33. Genesis Rabbah 1:10.

34. Genesis Rabbah 68:9.

35. Zechariah 4:6.

36. Tanḥuma, Mishpatim 1, citing Psalm 99:4.

37. See Catherine Keller, "After Omnipotence: Power as Process," in *On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), pp. 69–90.

38. McDaniel and Bowman, *Handbook,* p. 7; Griffin, *Reenchatment,* pp. 146–147, 150–151.

39. Jonas, "Concept of God," p. 141.

40. Pesikta Rabbati xxvi, ed. Buber, p. 166b.

41. Hosea 2:21–22.

42. B. Yoma 54a.

43. Isaiah 63:9.

44. Psalm 91:15.

45. M. Sanhedrin 6:5.

46. Psalm 139:6.

47. Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* Samuel Rosenblatt, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), Treatise 1, Exordium, p. 38.

48. See Primack and Abrams, *View,* pp. 156–166. As they point out, from the limit of our cosmic horizon, at 10^{28} cm as a maximum to the Planck length at the smallest (10^{-25} cm), there is about 60 orders of magnitude. Our intuition works near

the center, from 10^{-5} cm to 10^{5} cm. At sizes much larger or smaller than these sizes, our assumptions, intuition, and logic no longer hold. The same limits pertain to time frames vastly more quick or more slow than the middle range of our own. The Uroborus comes from Nancy Abrams and Joel Primack, *The New Universe and the Human Future* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) and is reproduced here with the authors' kind permission; see also Sheldon Glashow with Ben Bova, *Interactions* (Warner, 1988), ch. 14, and Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 8.

49. For discussions of other biblical texts on creation, see Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).

50. Genesis 1:2.

51. See Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003).

52. Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot Ha-Kodesh*.

53. Genesis 1:1.

54. Genesis 1:12; 21; 24.

55. See, for instance, Genesis 1:24. Discussion is found in Robert K. Gnuse, *The Old Testament and Process Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 103–107.

56. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25.

57. Genesis 1:31.

58. Gnuse, *The Old Testament and Process Theology*, p. 102.

59. 12b and in the morning liturgy.

60. Proverbs 3:19.

61. Zohar 1:207a.

62. Reb Simḥah Bunam of Przysucha, *Siaḥ Sarfei Kodesh,* 2:17.

63. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya,* ch. 25.

64. Primack and Abrams, *View,* p. 190.

65. See Martin Rees, loc. cit. and Neil deGrasse Tyson and Donald Goldsmith, *Origins: Fourteen Billion Years of Cosmic Evolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 98–107.

66. Ecclesiastes 3:11.

67. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:13.

68. The translation is taken from Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Shlomo Pines, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), II: 22, p. 320.

69. Isaiah 21:11.

70. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III:12, p. 442.

71. Isaiah 45:7. NJPS translates as "I make weal and create woe."

72. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III:12, p. 443.

73. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III:12, p. 444.

74. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III:12, p. 445.

75. Haggai 1:13.
76. B. Yoma 86a, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5.
77. B. Nedarim 81a.
78. I Kings 19:12.
79. Tanḥuma, Yitro 7.
80. Y. Peah 2:17a. See also Sifrei Deuteronomy 11:13 and Y. Megillah 1:7.
81. Hans Jonas, *Memoirs,* Christian Wiese, ed. (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2008), p. 30.
82. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya,* ch. 25.
83. Zohar III, 234a.
84. Pesikta Rabbati, piska 3.
85. Deuteronomy 4:6.
86. B. Shabbat 88a.
87. Esther 9:27.
88. B. Shabbat 88a.
89. Exodus 24:7.
90. See Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
91. B. Berakhot 63a.
92. Sifrei Deuteronomy, piska 312.
93. Pesikta Rabbati, piska 21.
94. Deuteronomy 7:7.
95. Tanḥuma (Warsaw Edition), Ekev, ch.3.
96. Isaiah 19:24.
97. Isaiah 49:6.
98. Amos 9:7.
99. B. Berakhot 26b, 29a.
100. Maimonides, introduction to ch. 10 of M. Sanhedrin.
101. Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), p. 321.

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The Force of Bradley Artson's "Process Theology" and Its Limitations

RIVON KRYGIER

Translated from the French by Martin S. Cohen

When the famous French philosopher and author Ernest Renan was asked if, in his opinion, God existed, his disconcerting response was, "Not yet."[1] His insight, formulated as tersely as a mathematic formula, could hardly be simpler; yet moderns, contemplating Renan's remark, will also be hard pressed to find, I believe, a more relevant and forceful answer in all the history of theology. I hope to explain in this essay why and in what sense this response both converges with and diverges from the concept of Process Theology as set forth by Brad Artson in his essay, "*Ba-derekh:* On the Way—A Presentation of Process Theology." In choosing to address both issues, I hope also to express myself fully on the critical points in Artson's argument on which I humbly wish to take a position.

The Reasons We Have to Believe

I should begin by being perfectly clear that, far from finding the notion of Process Theology "shocking, perhaps even irreligious," as Artson suggests people unfamiliar with the concept likely will, I myself share the conviction that God and the world are engaged "in continuous, dynamic change, of related interaction and becoming." Moreover, I'm convinced that Artson has put his finger on a crucial concept that deserves to be at the very center of the theological approach of the Conservative/*Masorti* movement (if not dogmati-

cally, then surely highly suggestively): the notion that the world, the Torah, Israel, and even God are entities whose very nature involves constant inner development, mirrored by their permanent and ongoing states of becoming.

Before I move on to say why and precisely to what extent I share Artson's vision, however, I wish briefly to pause to ask what value there can be in bothering to agree or disagree with metaphysical principles in the first place. (The ability to answer this question, incidentally, should be a methodological prerequisite for all theological debate.) Or, in other words, I wonder what kind of arguments can reasonably be brought to bear on a topic as inherently speculative as theology. Are there reliable, verifiable criteria one can adduce in determining one speculative system to be more relevant than another? Surely any self-respecting contemporary philosopher will insist that the time for professing that one can definitively prove or disprove the existence of such ultimately transcendent realities as God, the immortal soul, or the world to come is long past. But must faith henceforth be reduced either to a Tertullianesque "leap into the absurd" or to a Kirkegaardian "paradox," or else to the kind of "purely voluntarist decision" of which Yeshayahu Leibowitz so often spoke and wrote?[2] Indeed, the very fact that for the large majority of theologians the theological process itself requires some sort of reconciliation between reason and religion shows almost categorically that questions of faith cannot be considered in purely subjective terms. In fact, there exists a huge gray zone between the domain of opinion and conjecture, on the one hand, and the domain of knowledge and certainty (founded, as surely certainty must be, on "objective scientific criteria"), on the other. And this is precisely where we find the great laboratory in which religious convictions and articles of faith are successfully or unsuccessfully produced and tested.

According to Kant, this median is where ideas live that, subjectively speaking, "feel" sufficiently reasonable to be accepted, but which nevertheless can still not be objectively confirmed. Is faith then indefensible, thus devoid of any rational justification? Not entirely! Absent deductive or empirical proof, there still remains the possibility of perception of (and communication regarding) notions like the existence of God or the immortality of the soul that we know from scriptural and rabbinic sources through our intuitive feeling and our inductive reasoning, by moving back from effect to cause. The whole enterprise will always have a certain tentative feel to it.

Yet, in the end, induction is a legitimate logical method *if* one's jumping-off point is sufficiently plausible.[3] How then can it be that people of integrity nevertheless *do* manage to hold some specific beliefs but not others? First, they develop a grid of phenomena observed and experiences lived through, by means of a process of reasoning and extrapolation. Some of these they find more compelling than others, generally because they resonate with others or because they seem to converge into the same world of intuitive perception. Indeed, it is precisely in this manner that mutually dependent sympathetic beliefs develop and gain intellectual traction.

It is well worth noting that this process of coming to faith (that is, the process that leads us to choose theism over atheism) is not really very different from the way we develop our political beliefs—by opting for the views of the right or the left, based on what we believe will profit society most meaningfully. Indeed, if we dare to explore the terrain of metaphysics (including the region occupied specifically by our Jewish faith) that by definition exists without reference to our immediate perceptive capabilities, it is generally *precisely* because we have become convinced that the physical world cannot completely explain itself. And, indeed, the physical world does suggest to many of us that it exists more profoundly than merely as a physical reality and that, at least to those willing to look carefully, the world strongly (if subtly) hints at the reality of dimensions other than those readily visible, by including traces of real transcendence and intelligent design.

For us, materialism as a worldview is rank reductionism. And, indeed, it is through this process of considering the world that we come slowly to understand what Heschel meant by "wonder." Not simply amazement, Heschel used "wonder" to denote the experience of recognizing some specific phenomenon to surpass the horizon of our immediate and regular perceptive capabilities and thus to point to the mysterious irruption of a new dimension animating the universe we inhabit. Some of these phenomena are almost universally experienced: the emergence of the mind beyond the material body, the quiet inner voice that summons us forward to act justly, the belief human beings share that we have the free will to respond to that voice without subjugating ourselves to external or inner influences, our intuitive desire to seek out the good, the just, and the true (and, at the same time, the conviction that this choice constitutes the foundation of human existence at its most noble), the unusual destiny of certain people or peoples

(and notably in this regard the Jewish people) to play a key role in the evolution and the redemption of the whole world, the intensity of presence certain persons seem inexplicably to display, the unanticipated *satori* some experience that provides the abruptly enlightened party with knowledge that surpasses book learning, and the teleological orientation of nature or even of history itself. All these "testimonies," although none can be "proven" empirically to exist outside of our own imagination, serve nonetheless as so many elements that together constitute a coherent body of clues, the vanishing point of which is clearly far outside our line of vision but which remains sufficiently identifiable to anchor our faith in what we can define as the divine principle and source of reality.

The Persuasiveness of Process Theology

Accepting that faith involves a wide range of legitimate, yet wildly diverse, constructions and perspectives, however, does not oblige us to accept any ideas at all merely because they present themselves to us garbed in the language of theological belief. Indeed, beliefs that we deem *irrational* (in the sense that they are, rationally speaking, impossible to prove) may indeed not be *unreasonable*. In other words, if the foundational ideas of faith are not rational in themselves, they must still pass the test of reasonability in order to be deemed credible. And what can possibly serve as the indispensible secondary criterion of "reasonability" that we bring to bear in judging the value of a theological hypothesis? As I will assert in the course of this essay, the answer has to be consistency of thought.[4] In my opinion, this requirement is clearly the pivot on which Artson's critical thinking regarding classical theology turns. Most people do not bother to impose much order on their thoughts, especially when it comes to matters of religion. Indeed, without realizing it, such people discredit the very concept of faith by embracing as tenets of personal belief a mishmash of eclectic and contradictory notions, which can be reconciled neither with other fields of knowledge nor with each other. On the other hand, Artson posits the necessity of a totally integrated theological belief system which obeys the twin requirements of internal coherence and compatibility with modern epistemology—that is to say, one that takes into account the accumulation of universal knowledge and the most elaborately methodological sciences.[5]

I wonder, however, about the value of this dual requirement, beginning with the worth of conforming to the norms of modern epistemology which serve as the basis for Artson's theology. In the nineteenth century, the Western view of the world grew out of an acceptance of the evolutionary paradigm. And consequently, civilizations were evaluated as the concept of evolution was brought to bear in the analysis of history, philology, archeology, and literature. With Lamarck and then Darwin, it was eventually proposed that even animal life itself was evolving. And a century later, with the Big Bang theory first proposed by Georges Lemaître and then extensively corroborated by so many others, it was discovered that the cosmos itself has somehow evolved from the most elementary particles to the most complex of distant galaxies. Following this line of thought, we can only be tempted (following Whitehead, from whom Artson draws much of his inspiration and terminology) to lay siege to the last bastion of the old (i.e., pre-modern) thinking: theology. Indeed, the new idea is no longer to see God as the immutable essence behind everything (thus as Being), but henceforth rather as Becoming—as Being in the ongoing process of self-manufacture and self-refinement.

It happens quite often in the history of thought that philosophical or theological ideas limp along behind the advances of science, and it was therefore only to be expected that the evolutionary paradigm would eventually shape theology, including Jewish theology. The question however arises about whether this "update" corresponds to any actual need. After all, being "modern" (which so often means nothing at all, other than wanting to be conformist—or, as we say today, "politically correct") cannot be an end unto itself. Nor may we ignore the likelihood that paradigms of thought may eventually become obsolete. Indeed, Maimonides himself fell prey in his time to this perilous exercise when he brought Aristotelian geocentrism to bear in the elucidation of theology in the third chapter of his *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah!* It must have sounded reasonable at the time, but once the earth was banished (so to speak) from its place at center of the universe Maimonides' theology took a serious blow—which ended up casting suspicion on the worth of his methodology in determining the laws presented in the Mishneh Torah, even when they had nothing to do with Aristotelian cosmology. Are we not courting the same risk with Artson's Process Theology? We cannot exclude such a possibility. Experience shows

that no theological theory is inherently immune from *ex post facto* unraveling. In some respects, there is nothing more credible than the most advanced epistemology. But, on the other hand, we cannot consider it as an absolute. And if it is a necessary condition, it still may not be a sufficient one. Hence, the most striking problem I see with Artson's theology has to do with the second criterion of reliability mentioned above, namely the question of internal consistency.[6] The real question is, therefore, whether Process Theology constitutes the kind of breakthrough in theological thinking that can effectively resolve, at least as far as possible, the fundamental issues related to the compatibility of beliefs articulated in Scripture and rabbinic writings.

On the one hand, the answer is clearly that it surely *does* constitute that kind of meaningful advance. Indeed, as Artson points out with force and precision, the kind of theology labeled "classical" or "scholastic" on which we in the West still depend for our theological presuppositions (channeled to Christians through Neo-Platonists like St. Thomas Aquinas, to Jews through Maimonides, and to Muslims through Averroes), is riddled with inconsistencies and logical dead ends. Artson is absolutely right therefore to emphasize that this theology has failed to provide a convincing resolution of the famous conflict between divine omniscience and human free will, nor has it successfully demonstrated the compatibility between the theories of divine omnipotence and divine omnibenevolence.[7] The inability to articulate a cogent theodicy capable of explicating the conundrum of divine inactivity in the face of evil surely embodies a bitter failure of classical theology. Moreover, it is the "scandal of evil" itself, as Kant called the pervasiveness and persistence of injustice in the world, that constitutes its more scathing failure.[8] In fact, classical theology failed utterly to find a convincing solution to the problem which was formulated early on with the most forceful acuity by the classical tetralemma of the Greek philosophers who argued as follows: "Either God wants to eradicate evil but cannot do it, or else God can eradicate evil but does not want to do so, or else God neither wants to eradicate evil nor can, or else God both wants to eradicate evil and also can do it. If God wants it and cannot do it, then God is *impotent,* which is utterly at odds with our conception of divine reality. If God *can* eradicate evil and simply does not wish to, then God is *wicked,* which is also at odds with everything we purport to know of God. If God neither can eradicate

evil nor wishes to do so, then God is both *impotent and wicked* and therefore cannot be God. But if God wants to eradicate evil and can, which perfectly suits our prior conception of God, then why is there evil in the world and why, given that evil does exist, does God not simply eradicate it?"[9]

The importance of Process Theology is the wide way it opens this question up for analysis. If God is a "Becoming" rather than a Being imprisoned (so to speak) in a kind of static, self-sufficient, and inescapable perfection, as Maimonides and his many followers repeatedly proclaim, then human beings really *can* interact with God and work together with the Creator on a world left unfinished and imperfect at creation. The free will of human beings, their actions, and their prayers can be supposed to exert a real impact on God. The injustice in the world can now be explained without needing to exonerate the Creator, which would be the philosophical equivalent of attempting to purify oneself by bathing in a *mikveh* while still grasping the lizard that was the source of one's contamination in the first place![10]

Judaism Is Not Dualism

We have seen the specific way in which Process Theology is consequentially meaningful. On the other hand, however, I fear that the paradigm proposed by Artson will exact a heavy price from those who subscribe to it, since it does not successfully resolve the issue of divine impotence pointed to by the tetralemma. While Artson undoubtedly is correct that there are many passages in the Bible and the Talmud that portray a God whose power is not fully deployed, and even a One constantly frustrated by the unfinished state of humankind, it is far from obvious that this divine helplessness is as fundamental or as radical a notion as Artson claims it to be. In my humble opinion, Artson goes very far—in fact, too far—when he blithely writes that the world is "self-created and self-creating" and that the "cosmos is a partner with God in its own becoming." A self-created and self-creating cosmos? Where can this strange notion come from, since Artson himself recognizes that it is God "who renews every day the work of creation?" Artson (channeling Whitehead) claims that the world bears a kind of inner complementary creativity.[11] What is particularly problematic in this definition of cosmic self-creativity is that it depends on the pre-existence of chaos, that is to say on the idea of chaos as a fully real property that existed

both before creation and independently of the will of God: "A contextual reading of the opening chapters of Genesis yields the recognition that the unformed darkness and void *(tohu va-vohu)* existed when God began creating. That bubbling, irrepressible depth remains the source of self-creativity, potentialities, and resistance to all imposed power" (Arston). That bubbling, irrepressible depth remains the source of self-creativity, potentialities, and resistance to all imposed power."[12]

Let me be clear. Artson is absolutely right to stress the importance of the Bible's use of the notion of "chaos" at the very beginning of the creation story. And that usage is undeniably a key to understanding that the source of evil lies in the inherent imperfection of creation, thus in the resistance to the divine plan of edification which precedes even the first steps of human beings on the earth. We should agree that this feature is hardly only negative. Chaos (along with its siblings, indeterminacy and contingency) is also the context for all subsequent becoming and evolution, as well as for the creation of human beings possessed of freedom of will. But to suppose that chaos may retain its *full* autonomy and that it is precisely that autonomy that endows the world with its creative energy risks toppling Artson's theology into the chasm of dualism.

I agree with Artson that the NJPS translation of Genesis 1:1 ("When God began to create heaven and earth, the earth being unformed and void," following Rashi's interpretation) is quite reasonable. Still, I still cannot sign on to Artson's certainty that the first verse of Genesis refers to "the unformed and void darkness [that] existed when God began creating," thus signalling that chaos predated creation. It is true, of course, that the remark that the earth was "darkness and void" at the beginning of the creation narrative implies that the chaos of the earth was the first state of existence. But the process announced in the first verse of the Bible includes the *creation* of the earth! We can just as legitimately suppose that the darkness and void, the *tohu va-vohu,* was a part of God's creation! The idea simply seems to be that God set the primary elements (earth, water, deep) in place before granting them form by speaking the creative word aloud. In any case, as mysterious as the text might be, nothing in it really suggests that the world is self-created or self-creating. If I have correctly understood Artson, the chaos that existed before the creation of the universe imposes its own reality and its own law, and on that condition rests the evolutionary *process* in Process Theology.[13]

On the one hand, some redemption is still possible, since we can fight against the evil that derives directly from chaos by responding to God's invitation: "Evil is that aspect of reality *not yet* touched by God's lure or that part of creation that ignores God's lure."[14] On the other hand, however, evil is entrenched in the world because the impotence of God is inexorably linked to the fact that God is embroiled in a process that constrains divine action and acts as an ineradicable irritant. This deleterious condition cannot be eradicated because it posits an entity that is permanently concurrent with God. Process Theology thus departs significantly from "simple" monotheism and turns into a kind of dualism that features a compassionate God fighting desperately against relentless chaos that is forever threatening, thus basically triumphant. Given that in this world "becoming" invariably cedes to "perishing," such is the inevitable law of the process![15] There is no possible way to resolve the fundamental antagonism between the idea of a permanently regnant God and a permanently becoming one—wherein lies precisely the great advance promised by monotheism. If the God of the scholastics is totally unmoved by the misery of the world, then that of Artson seems particularly vulnerable to it. And if the God of Artson does not wish to impose divine will on the world (and instead only "coaxes and summons" existence to respond to the call of the Divine), the consequence is that the world imposes itself on God (or rather chaos, as part of the world, does). We can certainly convince ourselves that it is this divine vulnerability that explains the miserable state of the world in which we live. But if the state of things is inexorably inherent to the process, how can there still be room to believe in an eventual era of true redemption that will supplant this one, which is characterized to such a great extent by evil and death?

The Salvation of the Soul

The most significant implication of this instantiation of chaotic power in Artson's work is revealed in the role it then plays in the sensitive issue of the salvation of the soul: "We are not substances now in life, and we will not be substances after life ends. We are patterns of energy now, and there is *no necessity to believe* that we will not continue as patterns of energy in God's eternity."[16] And then a little further on in his essay, we read: "One possibility is that death marks the end of our individual consciousness."[17]

Of course, in and of itself, it is never "necessary to believe" anything at all about the soul. Why should it be? Indeed, it is perfectly plausible, philosophically speaking, to suppose that our individual consciousnesses are reduced after death into simple "patterns of energy" that somehow dissolve into divine eternity.[18] Another question worth asking is whether this line of thinking is consistent with the core tenets of Jewish thought. Artson admits he is traveling beyond the traditional framework of Jewish tradition, justifying himself with reference to Louis Jacobs's oft-cited comment that in matters of eschatology, modern theologians can reasonably adopt a kind of theistic agnosticism, so that "this religious realism permeates Jewish theology—affirming what we can and specifying only when possible."[19]

This allegation is very surprising indeed. After all, from a strict rationalistic point of view, should we not prefer to say nothing with certainty about metaphysical questions at all, and so to confine ourselves to a cautious agnostic approach? Surely the existence of God itself is no more empirically provable than is the putative salvation of the soul! This is why I allowed myself, at the beginning of this article, to dwell on the methodological task that can—and must!—operate behind all theological discussion: namely, the insistence that no plausible belief be essentially incompatible with other beliefs or with facts deemed true, a double process we might refer to as bringing both internal and external criteria to bear in the quest for coherence of thought. Now, to use Louis Jacobs' comment to justify a sort of religious agnosticism regarding the question of the salvation of the soul is to forget that for him this topic was not like an option on a menu card that he chose over some other equally appetizing choice, but rather a position of consistency he took because he was convinced that the (possible) salvation of the soul is an integral part of our belief in God. Louis Jacobs wrote: "To be honest, my faith in God is not affected if I doubt whether the Messiah will come one day or whether the dead will one day be revived. These belong to the working of God's plan for mankind and one can and should leave all this to Him. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, however, is an entirely different matter. If death is the end, if there is no afterlife, if God has created only to destroy, I cannot reconcile these realities with the God as taught by Judaism."[20]

Surely must we add to this point the problematic fact that, when preferring belief in the almost all-powerful might of chaos over belief in the salva-

tion of the soul, Artson is putting himself in the very difficult position of wanting to exonerate God of the kind of intentional cruelty of which he clearly wishes his God not to be guilty. Indeed, if God is the Creator who has deliberately plunged the souls and minds of humankind into a world full of suffering (and then made matters that much worse by allowing terrestrials briefly to know the joy of living, but without offering any hope at all of personal redemption), would that really be "responsible," "sensitive," or "compassionate"? Can we imagine without disillusionment, without falling into a kind of Spinozian naturalism, that the God who created the world can do nothing at all to save the souls of individual men and women from the onslaught of chaos? And in what sense would it be edifying to posit that God created a world populated by "patterns of energy" endowed with perceptive consciousness, if the only point is for those patterns of energy eventually to return to God as so many post-expiration-date energy packets? Is this the great "partnership" between humankind and God?

The Double Face of God

How did Artson arrive at such conclusions? In fact, as he explains at length, he cannot conceive—and here we come back to the logic of the tetralemma—that God has the power to eliminate evil and death but simply refuses to do so. That being the case, Artson has no choice but to posit the existence of something that definitively restricts God's activity, so that God can resist either not at all or at least not sufficiently powerfully to ensure the actual survival of the human soul. And this something, it turns out, is none other than the process itself which, by sustaining chaos at the root of every existent thing, thus becomes itself un-uprootable. Importantly, the Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas, whose belief system was actually quite close to Artson's, understood perfectly the risk inherent in this drift towards theological dualism. Allow me to cite Jonas at length:

> The mere permitting, indeed, of human freedom involved a renunciation of sole divine power. And at any rate our discussion of power has already led us to deny divine omnipotence. The elimination of divine omnipotence leaves the theoretical choice between the alternatives of either some pre-existent-theological or ontological-dualism, or of God's self-limitation

> through the act of creation from nothing. The dualistic alternative in turn might take the Manichaean form of an active force of evil forever opposing the divine purpose in the universal scheme of things (i.e., a two-god theology) or the Platonic form of a passive medium imposing, and no less universally, imperfection on the embodiment of the ideal in the world (thus a kind of form-matter dualism). The first is plainly unacceptable to Judaism. The second at best answers the problem of imperfection and natural necessity but not that of positive evil, which implies a freedom empowered by its own authority independent of that of God, and it is the fact and success of deliberate evil rather than the inflictions of blind, natural causality in the hands of responsible officers—Auschwitz 1944 rather than Lisbon 1755—with which Jewish theology has to contend at this hour. Only with creation from nothing do we have the oneness of the divine principle combined with that self-limitation that permits (if merely by giving "room" to) the existence and autonomy of a world. Creation was that act of absolute sovereignty with which it consented, for the sake of self-determined finitude, to be no more absolute—an act, therefore, of divine self-restriction.[21]

For Jonas, then, God alone is self-limiting. He does, it is true, adopt a form of Process Theology in his essay, retaining the relevant aspects that we have outlined above—including the concept of self-imposed divine impotence. But he carefully avoids the trap of dualism because he believes, if not precisely in the omnipotence of God (whom he believes to have forsworn any interference in the affairs of humankind below), then at least in the human capacity effectively to combat chaos in this world. It is therefore the human being who helps God. And if God can reasonably be said to provide any sort of help for humanity, it is in that the Creator invested in creation itself the capacity to resist evil. If redemption is not a sure bet—and surely God took a huge chance by entrusting the fate of creation to the created—then it at least remains possible. In fact, Jonas did not press his own theology to its logical limits and it is therefore difficult to say more systematically what his "inevitable" conclusions would or should have been.

But since Jonas and Artson both look to the work of kabbalists (like Isaac Luria) for the idea of *tzimtzum* (that is, the doctrine of divine self-contraction), it is instructive to recall briefly how the existence of evil was

explained by one of the most brilliant kabbalists of all time, Moshe Ḥayim Luzzatto.[22] According to his theology, the imperfection of the world is merely the part of God's plan for creation, which provides human beings with the opportunity to perfect themselves by struggling to perfect the world. The impotence of God is thus understood by Luzzatto as a choice made by God, and thus by definition as something transitory rather than unavoidably and permanently self-imposed. Furthermore, if divine impotence is deemed necessary to the world as it now exists, then the emergence of chaos, and thus also the risk of evil existing, are parts of God's plan. These jointly serve as the necessary prerequisites for human vitality and freedom and specifically do *not* malign the work of some unexpected agent outside of God. And this divine impotence, in its evil consequences, will at any rate eventually be reabsorbed into the Godhead.[23]

In fact, Jewish theology regularly offers us a glimpse of the double face of the God acknowledged by tradition both as a transcendent, invincible, and invulnerable Deity ensconced in a distant, heavenly palace and *also* as a fully immanent God, wholly engaged and involved in the affairs of humankind below and thus sensitive to the horrors of exile and the generally miserable state of the lower world. This internal tension is associated with God's burden of being both Creator and Partner in creation, thus at once a God who acts but also One who forebears to act, a Creator who voluntarily chooses to be (self-)subjugated to creation. This tension is reflected in passages ranging from the Bible and the Talmud to the Zohar (which is filled with passages that openly evoke this tension, and which even posit a spectrum of potential degrees of rupture between the blessed Holy One and the Shekhinah). Nevertheless, the fundamental optimism that characterizes Jewish tradition derives precisely from the fact that God is *not* engulfed by the world and its woes. Something in the nature of divine being (which is also the fundamental quality that ensures its unity) remains transcendent, intact, and integral, and as such guarantees the salvation of the righteous, "for the Eternal One of Israel neither lies nor reneges" (1 Samuel 15:29). Curiously, Artson appears fully to accept the double facet of divine existence constituted by transcendence and immanence. But he appears not to have noticed—or at least not to have accepted—that he is closing the door to one of the central ideas of the Jewish faith: namely, the assumption that the soul can, by virtue of its relationship to the Divine,

accede to its own transcendence because, to speak poetically, God is always there and always waiting at the end of the journey—always just as kindly all-patient as potentially all-powerful.

Once purged of its dualistic and naturalistic tendencies, what of Process Theology can reasonably be retained if not its fundamental realism? It does, after all, explain exceedingly well why nothing in creation is fully reflective of the Creator's values and why nothing is in truly working order; it does this by asserting that everything is *still* in a state of ongoing becoming. And this prompts me to conclude with Ernest Renan, just as I began with him.[24] There is a God, but God does not yet exist—or at least does not yet *fully* exist, in the sense that the power of divine being has not yet been fully deployed.[25] Similarly, never-ending questions like "Is God truly just?" or "Is God truly good?" must be answered with Renan's same "not yet." Indeed, with Renan we can all affirm that God *will be* just and good . . . but only *le'atid lavo,* at the end of the days, at the end of life, at the (redemptive) end of the Becoming. God is simply not just *yet* because the world is not *yet* redeemed. Indeed, this is why it is beyond folly to claim that everything that happens in the world is just![26] Or should we perhaps say that if God *is* just right now, then it can only be so in the sense that God currently labors in the world for good and that, in the end (but *only* in the end), justice will be done. Divine justice is a determining factor in the world, not the end-product of divine action. Furthermore, if evil, injustice, and death are rampant in this world, it is because God and humanity have not *yet* triumphed. As long as humankind has not fulfilled its task, in fact, God cannot eliminate evil and is simply (self-)committed to remaining (self-)restrained for as long as it takes for humanity to mature, thus also not to intervene powerfully on the stage of history except perhaps only on rare and specific occasions.[27] Artson rejects the possibility of God deliberately holding back because he, Artson, sees that as essentially cruel. He is not totally wrong. The classical midrash assumes as much.[28] But while the midrash sees this restrained posturing of God as a function of divine patience, Artson prefers to attribute it to the very nature of God—a Deity that is by nature not coercive but persuasive.[29] In the traditional sources we find in fact traces of both approaches, as depictions of divine love and mercy alternate with those of divine impatience and coercion. The relationship of God to human beings is complex and dynamic, therefore difficult to reduce to a set of unvarying (much less invariable) positions. Sometimes we see God embracing *middat ha-*

din (the quality of strict discipline), and sometimes *middat ha-ḥesed* (the quality of tenderness), and sometimes a synthesis of the two. Artson wants to grant life to the God of Israel, whom the classical philosophers preferred to imprison in a straightjacket of uniformity and impassibility. But the God with whom Artson wants to replace the God of the philosophers lacks both strength and stamina. We certainly know that there was an Auschwitz. But must we therefore suppose that God has of necessity totally and definitively abandoned history? We do not believe this to be the case, choosing instead humbly to admit that, although we can always deal with our own inadequacy simply by choosing to trust in God, the task of assertively finding a definitive answer to this great question remains intractably beyond us.

Trusting in God can certainly not be made reasonable by insisting that we live in a world of justice. Nor does it seem acceptable to posit that God is contentedly waiting in heaven for us to respond to the divine summons. The best demonstration of confidence in God would probably be to focus on the task assigned and to proclaim with Rabbi Akiva that *kol d'avid Raḥamana, l'tav avid,* Everything God does, God does *for good.*"[30] Not that God invariably does good, but that God invariably acts "for good." And this good, then, will last permanently, just as the prophet Malachi said: "You have wearied Adonai with your words. Yet you say, 'How have we wearied Him?' Surely it is when you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Adonai who delights in them,' or when you ask 'Where is the God of justice?'"[31] To this question, Malachi responds by focusing his confidence in God on the day of redemption: "Then you shall return and distinguish *(v'shavtem u-r'item)* between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who worships God and the one who does not."[32]

To conclude, I wish warmly to support Brad Artson's rich proposal that we integrate the contributions of Process Theology into Jewish theology and thus bring the latter to a level of relevance never before attained. In my humble opinion, however, this can only be accomplished if we consciously distance ourselves somehow from the naturalistic thought of Whitehead, which is the pedestal upon which this new approach to theology naturally yearns to sit. On the one hand, we cannot but recognize truth in Whitehead's stern admonition that "the kingdom [of heaven] is in the world, and *yet not* of the world."[33] But, on the other, we cannot follow along when he identifies the advent of the redemption as occurring merely inside of the

divine entity, as when he wrote that "the kingdom of heaven is God."[34] It is obvious in this latter formulation that Whitehead, being the very soul of philosophical discretion, has declined to relinquish any of his reservations about character of God or its corollary articles of faith having to do with the salvation of the personal soul. Yet these notions are central to rabbinic Judaism! A God who intentionally creates conscious and responsible souls that are fundamentally and worthily "other" than God (as Luzzatto made clear)[35] has to be conceived as willing to build into existence a lasting relationship of partnership and loyal alliance. It would be intolerable and immoral to posit a world in which the emergence of souls were to bear only the most fleeting relationship to the internal history of a wholly utilitarian God prepared to exploit human souls for inner-divine purposes and to the detriment of their own salvation. It is this specific point in Artson's thinking that I wish the most forcefully to challenge.

NOTES

1. Ernest Renan lived from 1823 to 1892.

2. Tertullian's famous statement, often cited as *"credo qui absurdum est,"* does not actually appear in his writing in so many words. The closest citation is at *Carne Christi* 5:22–26 but his remark is quoted as given above in many subsequent early Christian works. Tertullian, an early Church Father (150–230), was probably inspired by Paul's remark that faith in Christ crucified is "[unto Jews, a stumbling block and] unto Gentiles, foolishness" (I Corinthians 1:23)—in other words, something that no one can come to believe in rationally.

3. A similar methodological approach is at the heart of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), the founder of Process Theology, as evidenced by these words that appear in his *Process and Reality* (New York, 1929), p. 5: "The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization: and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation."

4. See also in this regard Whitehead's comment: "The second condition (after the intuitive divination) for the success of imaginative construction is the unflinching pursuit of the two rationalistic ideas, coherence and logical perfection" (*Process and Theology,* p. 6).

5. Can we not say then that Artson personally represents the essential concept driving Conservative/Masorti theology as it has evolved to our day—the mission to serve

as the hyphen linking religion and reason? This is, after all, the holy grail of religious thought in our day, the theological equivalent of the unified field theory in physics that permanently eluded Einstein. And if we accept that at the base of all monotheism is the notion that one unifying principle is at the origin of all existent things, then a belief system can hardly be more monotheistic than this Conservative/Masorti theology!

6. Mere internal coherence, of course, cannot render a theory credible any more than can its conformity to epistemological principles by itself, as Scripture itself says about the necessity of corroboration in assertions: "By the testimony of two witnesses or by the testimony of three shall the matter be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). One can reach stunning conclusions when working with totally false or merely epistemologically shaky premises and then be inordinately proud of one's impeccable "logic"!

7. Regarding the first theological conflict, see my book on the topic, *A la limite de Dieu: L'énigme de l'omniscience divine et du libre arbitre humain dans la pensé juive,* published by Publisud in Paris in 1998.

8. "(This leads to having to reconcile) the righteousness (of God) as Judge and the scandal of the impunity with which criminal perpetrators perpetrate their crimes." See I. Kant, "On the Failure of All Philosophical Efforts to Produce a Coherent Theodicy," in A.J. Festugière's *Pensées successives d'Emmanuel Kant sur la théodicée et la religion* (French; Paris, 1931 [reprinted, 1972]), p. 197.

9. The tetralemma is so called because it is a series of four lemmas offering four options on the question of providence. It was a topos that many Greek philosophical schools shared despite the incompatibility of their philosophical beliefs (Epicurean, Stoic, Peripatetic, etc.), and it is already found in an early version in Plato. (René Levy gives the various classic sources for this in his book, *L'insouciance de Dieu* [Lagrasse, 2008]), pp. 89–111. It is also found in Maimonides, who knows it from Alexander of Aphrodisias as a kind of pentalemma, since the dilemma of knowing anything of God is added in the first position. (Cf. his comments in the *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:16, "God either knows what is happening or else ignores it.") The tetralemma has been widely discussed in the philosophical literature. In fact, we cannot say simply that the classical Greek philosophers all failed to resolve the tetralemma. Indeed, they logically concluded that either God does not care much for what happens in the world, or that God's interest in the world is, at best, limited. The real failure rests, rather, with the classical theologians who claimed to show that the world functions in a state of perfect divine justice so that we can reasonably suppose ourselves to inhabit, in the words of Leibniz as caricatured by Voltaire, "the best possible world."

10. This oxymoron is found in Tosefta Taanit 1:8 (and also at many other places in rabbinic literature, cf. Maimonides' *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 2:3), where it appears as a way of mocking those who imagine they can gain forgiveness without giving up the behavior for which they need to be forgiven in the first place.

11. It is from Whitehead that Artson takes the idea that the world is "self-creating."

For Whitehead, however, this means that the world is in a state of continuous regeneration, and the fact of becoming is not a function of relentless determinism but serves rather as an antidote to the chaos inherent in the world with which God interacts. This leads to a kind of pantheism for Whitehead, who argues that God is immanent in the world and also concurrent with the world. Whitehead also incorporates some sort of animistic anthropomorphism, by positing a world that is somehow "sensitive" to God. All of this dual reality constituted by God and the world is thus under the fundamental law governing "process." There is a certain cosmological optimism in Whitehead that could almost be called redemptive in nature, whereby chaos does not prevail in the world because of God's unifying and creative efforts. But this is far from a "real" doctrine of human salvation as shown by Bertrand Saint-Sernin in his *Whitehead: Un univers en essai* (Paris, 2000), pp. 23–24, 133–135, and 200–201.

12. Artson, p. 17.

13. Artson seems to inject just a bit of ambiguity into his remarks by citing Isaiah 45:7, where the prophet acknowledges God as the One "who makes peace and creates evil." That verse suggests that God is the original and ultimate Creator of everything, including chaos.

14. Artson, p. 14; emphasis added.

15. Approvingly commenting on Maimonides' stand, Artson writes: "This realm of suffering is the logical manifestation of dynamism and change. The only alternative, a world of static eternity, is one that few of us would choose—even if it means embracing an alternative that also brings suffering and death" (p. 23 above).

16. Artson, p. 30, emphasis added.

17. Artson, p. 31.

18. The assertion that we are now "patterns of energy" is no less problematic. What does this mean? Does discrediting the concept of "substance" clarify anything? Can human consciousness be reduced so easily to a mere pattern of energy? Is this an explanation? Here is what a great philosopher of science wrote in an attempt to summarize the contemporary state of affairs: "Between primary consciousness and the physical base represented by emerging intermediate levels is what some call an explanatory chasm" (Michel Bitbol, *Physique et philosophie de l'esprit* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), p. 16. See also the subject of Yeshayahu Leibowitz's Hebrew-language pamphlet, "Body and Spirit: The Psychophysical Problem" (Jerusalem, 1982). Artson yields here to a reduction, to a "physicalization of the soul." This is clearly part of the Whiteheadian philosophical logic that attributes autocreative potential to the cosmos. But it cannot serve as an elucidation of what the nature of the human soul is.

19. Artson, p. 30.

20. Louis Jacobs, *God, Torah, Israel* (London: Masorti Publications, 1999), p. 74, first published by the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1990.

21. Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God After Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice," in *Wrestling with God,* edited by Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 634–635. Jonas is referring

to the great earthquake that shattered Lisbon in 1755, a natural disaster which at the time prompted many to doubt their faith and to voice accusations against God and the concept of divine providence.

22. Cf., e.g., his *Sefer Daat Tevunot* 1–42, where Luzzatto presents a detailed exposition of his theological beliefs as a dialogue between the soul and reason itself.

23. If we dare speculate just a bit further, it is not impossible to imagine that chaos was already an internal dimension of God, or even an intrinsic condition of divine existence, at the time of creation. The emergence of chaos would then not, strictly speaking, constitute a choice of the Deity. But for all it could then be reasonably deemed necessary, intrinsic, or organic (if one can say such a thing with respect to divine reality), it would still not represent a real obstacle to the realization of God's redemptive plan for the world. In the same vein, it is quite conceivable that neither self-fulfillment nor redemption—not for God or for humanity—is the ultimate end of any process, but rather the attainment of a stage in the vital and ongoing process that flows from the inmost nature of the involved parties. This idea is suggested by the passage in the Talmud that reads: "R. Ḥiyya b. Ashi said in the name of Rav: The disciples of the Sages shall have no rest even in the World to Come, as it is said: 'They go from strength to strength, every one of them appearing before God in Zion'" (Psalm 84:8; B. Moed Katan 29a). If redemption leads to the end of all forms of the "process," then it must be an essentially destructive force!

24. In fact, Ernest Renan did not "do" theology. Speaking as a scientist of his day, he posited a God who is mainly a metaphor for good: "When science succeeds at describing everything that is knowable in the universe, then God will be complete if we make God's word synonymous with the totality of existence. In this sense, God is always in a state of 'will be' rather than a state of 'is,' thus a Deity who exists *in fieri,* who is continually engaged in the effort of self-construction. But to stop there would be to be left with a very incomplete theology. God is greater than the totality of existence, thus correctly called the Absolute. God, the living Principle of wellbeing, beauty, and truth, exists where mathematics, metaphysics, and logic are all equally true. Seen this way, God exists fully and unreservedly, eternal and unchanging, without development or becoming" (from "Natural Sciences and Historical Sciences," a letter to Marcellin Berthelot, 1863). But at the same time (and also at the same time that Whitehead was writing), the less famous French pastor Wilfred Monod (1867–1943) wrote from a more religious perspective that "God is always underway." In his book *Aux croyants et aux athées* (Paris, 1906; pp. 194–195), Monod developed the argument that it only makes sense to embrace the omnipotence of God while peering into the future, never solely while contemplating the present.

25. Etymologically, "to exist" derives from the Latin prefix "ex" (outside of) and the verb "sistere" (which means "to stand"). Thus "to exist" in such a perspective means "to make manifest one's being."

26. We therefore go astray when we translate the famous *dayyan ha-emet* blessing (traditionally pronounced upon hearing the news of someone's death) as "Praised are You . . . Judge of truth," as though to approve of death as a just sentence (albeit one we freely admit being unable to understand or explain). Can the death of a child or an innocent person ever be just? The mistake is to take the word *emet* to refer to *conceptual* truth, as though the individual uttering the blessing wishes to affirm that the divine verdict must have been reasonable even if no one here below can fathom its logic. Instead, we should understand *emet* in this context as referring to a *relational* truth, which is how the term is very often used in the Bible and in the liturgy (as in, for instance the first blessing following the haftarah), thus yielding the sense that what we mean to affirm is the loyalty that must always prevail in a relationship between true partners in dialogue. Saying "Praised are You . . . Judge of loyalty" is not to assent to death undeserved or inappropriate in our eyes, but rather to acknowledge God as being unfailingly loyal to the divine promise eventually to raise and revivify the dead. (In this sense, the Hebrew word *emet* is directly related to the word *ne'eman,* as in the famous expression *vene'eman atah l'haḥayot meitim,* "and so do we affirm Your loyalty to Your own promise to resurrect the dead.") To recite this blessing is thus tantamount to declaring that the dead person in question has not attained his or her final existential state, just as no other dead person has, precisely because the decedent will eventually be loyally and faithfully judged for what he or she accomplished "truly" in life and God will then restore him or her to life in accordance with the resultant verdict. The *emet* in the blessing has to do far more with the future than with the past! It does not suggest resignation to reality, therefore, but rather hope and confidence in the future of justice. Insisting that whatever happens in the world is by definition just because the world is so overtly reflective of divine justice, would be taking God's name in vain!

27. A good illustration of this conception of divine restraint in the face of history (and the process of human maturation) comes through surreptitiously in a talmudic passage about the coming messianic deliverance: "Scripture said: 'And therefore will Adonai wait, so as to be gracious to you, and therefore will God be exalted, so as to have mercy upon you (Isaiah 30:18).' But since we look forward to it, and God does likewise, what then delays (God's coming)? The Attribute of Justice delays it! But since the Attribute of Justice delays it, why do we await it? To be rewarded [for hoping], as it is written: Blessed are all they that wait for him" (B. Sanhedrin 97b).

28. See for example: "[God says:] Because of your sins, you have made of Me a cruel being and you have altered My attributes [from merciful to cruel]" (Tanḥuma, Beḥukotai 2).

29. See for example, "Daniel came and said: 'Foreigners are enslaving God's children. Where are God's mighty deeds? Hence he omitted the word *mighty* [from the divine attributes mentioned in the first blessing of the Amidah].' But they [the men of the Great Assembly] came and said: 'On the contrary! God's mighty deeds are

visible specifically in the suppression of divine wrath when God deals patiently with the wicked'" (B. Yoma 69b).

30. B. Berakhot 60b; cf. Shulḥan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayim 230:5.

31. Malachi 2:17.

32. Malachi 3:18.

33. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge, 1927; rprnt. New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), p. 75.

34. Ibid., p. 138.

35. Cf. my forthcoming essay, "What Are We on Earth To Do?" which is currently scheduled for eventual publication in this journal.

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