A Program for Positive Jewish Theology

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This is a paper on the development of a positive Jewish theology. This involves adapting the arguments of a movement in analytical theology called "Theological Realism."[1] Theological realism means that God is an independent Being separate from the cognitive structures of the human mind. In addition, God is separate from the world as its creator. Theological realism also includes the position that rational knowledge of God is attainable and that human language is capable of addressing God.[2] The project of positive theology includes the attempt to counter recent Jewish "negative theology" or apophatic theology with positive assertions about the nature and reality of God in the Jewish tradition. There are theoretical concerns initially set up by the Enlightenment that must be

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[1] For a collection of seminal essays on the subject see Andrew Moore and Michael Scott, eds., *Realism and Religion: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). For a Jewish philosophical presentation see Cass Fisher, "Theological Realism and its Alternatives in Contemporary Jewish Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology*, ed. Steven Kepnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

[2] Andrew Moore, "Theological Realism and the Observability of God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, vol. 1 (2000): 81.

addressed, and a variety of strategies from medieval philosophy and analytic philosophy can be of help. However, the deepest source of a positive Jewish theology is to be found in Jewish scripture. As the primary witness to the reality of God and a repository of positive assertions about God, the role of scripture or Torah as God's revelation is of crucial import. However, in scripture we are confronted with a contradiction that immediately challenges reason. This is the contradiction between the God of Being and God as person. In scripture, we may put this in the terms of the two faces of God: one that humans cannot see and remain alive, and the other who is spoken to "face to face." In medieval philosophy, this dichotomy can also be expressed as Maimonides's God of absolute Being and Yehuda Halevi's God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Thus, after arguing for the need and resources to develop a positive Jewish theology to combat the negative apophatic tendency in contemporary Jewish thought, one must also address the dichotomy between God's two faces. Here, I will employ a variety of strategies, one taken from the Jewish analytic theology of Yehuda Gellman and one from Peirce's semiotics of "the third" that provides a theory of mediation between dichotomies. This "third" then leads us back to the ultimate truth of Judaism that God is One and that as Zechariah says and Jews liturgically insist "His name will be One (14:9)" in the future.

I. From Negative to Positive Theology

The Problematic of Negative Theology

The title of Michael Fagenblat's *Negative Theology as Jewish Modernity*[3] says it well: almost all of modern (and postmodern) Jewish theology has been negative. Since Maimonides got it started in the medieval period, it is hard to deny that negative theology has an important place in the Jewish philosophical tradition. For Maimonides, the problem that negative theology addresses is the absolute Being of God who is radically separate

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[3] Michael Fagenblat, *Negative Theology as Jewish Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

from all other beings. The gap between God and humans is so great that human cognition and language cannot adequately grasp the nature of God. At best we can say what God is not, not what God is.

Modern negative theologies have a different basis than that of Maimonides, which is founded on Aristotelian problem of the relation of essence to existence. Modern negative theologies stem from foundationalist epistemologies of empiricism and positivism and the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal world that can be known and the noumenal world that cannot. Modern philosophy, with its criteria for what counts as "knowledge," declares that theology cannot be considered a form of knowledge. At best it is speculation, and at worst it is illusion.

Modern philosophy did not put an end to theology. Instead it initiated a creative series of new theologies that sought new ways of talking about God through ethics, aesthetics, and the religious experiences of individuals. But these strategies all avoided making direct propositional statements about God's nature and the revelation of God's word in scripture. In doing so, they then continued the tradition of negative theology. In postmodernism, with the denial of correspondence theories of truth, the critique of "logocentrism," and the championing of negative concepts like deconstruction, absence, and abyss as revelatory of what is really real, we have a truly radical form of negative theology that celebrates the negative as a value in its own right.

Certainly one can argue that the tradition of negative theology is necessary to clear the air of easy and too confident attempts to say we know who God is. Given the biblical and rabbinic prohibitions against idolatry, we can say that there is a place for negative theology in Judaism. Yet negative theology has always received a counterweight in positive statements about God's powers and qualities. This is seen in the Torah where God is described in multiple ways, but even in medieval philosophy, the true beginning of negative theology, Jewish thinkers like Gersonides and Crescas responded to the negative theology of Maimonides with creative theoretical moves that allowed that God does have attributes that can be articulated and known.

Modern and Postmodern Jewish Theology

The neo-Kantian Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen, who follows in the tradition of negative theology, suggests that God can be loved as an "Idea" alone—no Being, no reality to God is required. In the thought of Martin Buber, all theology is presented as a species of I-It language that puts the "Eternal Thou," or God, into categories and concepts, like a thing that can be described as opposed to a Thou whose wholeness can never be encapsulated. Emmanuel Levinas, too, speaks of the theological tradition as a failed attempt to contain the infinite God in a defined "totality." Levinas calls for an end to metaphysics and attempts to establish ethics as first philosophy built upon the face of the suffering other as its touchstone.

What Levinas seeks is "God beyond being," a formulation that we also see in his book, *Otherwise Than Being.* [4] This God, one might say, is absolutely transcendent and as such, according to Levinas, "does not have a meaning" and "is not a concept at all."[5] In his apophatic formulations, Elliot Wolfson tells us that even negative theology says too much about God and remains within the spectrum of what he calls Western "theomania"; it is better to behold God in self-contradictory theological poetry and radical nothingness.[6]

All of these modern and postmodern Jewish forms of apophaticism follow the limitations established by Kant when he relegated what he called "onto-theology" to the unknowable "noumenal" realm that was inaccessible to rational thought. They also follow the dictates of the empiricists whose foundational epistemologies required "self-evident truths" on the model of mathematics and empirical evidence delivered through the scientific method to establish the truth of belief claims. Since God and theology could not meet these narrow criteria for what counts as

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[4] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being (1978),* trans. A Lingis (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1981).

[5] Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy (1975)," in *Collected Philosophical Papers,* trans. A Lingis (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1987), 154.

[6] Elliot Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (New York: Fordham, 2014).

knowledge, modern theologians turned away from traditional philosophy as the basis of theology, and they turned toward the existential experience of the individual, the aesthetic strategies of myth, the thick descriptions of phenomenology, and then to the radical denial of the whole meaning-making project of religion and culture in postmodern deconstructionism.

What all the post-Enlightenment and postmodern negative theology and apophatism do to Jewish theology is to make it impossible to really say anything positive at all about God. As Jacques Derrida has said, "[A]pophasis inclines almost toward atheism."[7] So I think it not wrong to say that postmodern negative theology really signals the end of theology even as, it speaks of the end of philosophy and the long Western tradition of using human reason to form knowledge of the world, of humans, and of God.

Beginning Again

If apophatic theologies signal an end point in philosophical and theological thought, the next most obvious and productive step is to begin again. I believe that we need to go back to the Enlightenment to retrace the original steps that brought us to this impasse. Here I am speaking of British Empiricism and Kantian philosophy that established the epistemologies that discounted theology as a form of knowledge.

Foundationalism

In looking again at the roots of empiricism and the limits of its epistemology, we will refer to a group of analytic philosophers sometimes referred to as Christian philosophers or analytic theologians. Perhaps the leading theorist here is Alvin Plantinga. In his books *God and Other Minds*,[8] *Warranted Christian Belief*,[9] and his short summary work *Knowledge and*

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[7] Jacques Derrida "*Sauf le nom*," in Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, trans. John Leavey, Jr., ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 36.

[8] Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

[9] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Christian Belief,[10] Plantinga lays out an exhaustive critique of empiricist views on rational warrants for belief along with his constructive alternatives. This establishes the ground for both a positive and rational theism, meant not only to respond to Enlightenment philosophers but also to those who developed avowedly atheistic positions (W. K. Clifford, Bertrand Russell, Anthony Flew) as well as what Plantinga calls the new "Four Horsemen of Atheism" (Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens).

Like many current philosophers and theologians, Plantinga addresses classic empiricist epistemologies as a form of rational foundationalism. Plantinga begins with an analysis of the epistemology of John Locke and his *Essay on Human Understanding* written at the end of the 17th century. Plantinga claims that this is "the single most important work" in determining our modern view of how "to regulate our opinion with respect to belief."[11] In Locke's words, I must "regulate my opinion in such a way that I opine only that which is probable with respect to what is certain for me."[12] For Locke, this certainty was built upon a combination of self-evident propositions, such as those found in mathematics, and immediate truths brought by the mind and senses. Along with his foundationalist epistemology, Locke also suggests a deontological demand that makes it a moral and philosophical duty to deny any belief for which one lacks evidence. The deontological position was restated at the turn of the 20th century by W.K. Clifford: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."[13]

The main issue with foundationalism as a model for epistemology is that few forms of knowledge, outside of mathematics, conform to it. Thus, the empiricists themselves have cast doubt on the ability of the human

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[10] Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

[11] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief,* 72.

[12] Quoted in Ibid., 79.

[13] W. K Clifford, *Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1901), as quoted in William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1987), 8.

mind and senses to deliver certain knowledge, so that much of modern philosophy has been occupied with skepticism and uncertainty even while stating its goal to be the opposite. However, where some could use the prevailing fact of epistemological skepticism in modern analytic philosophy as a death knell to the entire epistemological enterprise, Plantinga and other analytic theologians take this fact in a different direction. What Plantinga argues is that the inability of philosophers to establish epistemological certainty is not a problem with knowledge and what humans can rationally know and believe; it is a problem with the foundationalist model for what counts as knowledge.

One figure to whom Plantinga likes to refer us to debunk foundationalism is the philosopher of common sense, Thomas Reid (d. 1796). In his dialogue with another great British skeptic, David Hume, Reid argues that we ought to trust that most of our common perceptions of the world and self are reliable despite the doubts of the skeptics. He states that "common sense," which he takes from an analysis of common human beliefs, human languages, and cultural traditions, determines that "that those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be." [14] Plantinga's teacher William Alston extends this view to argue that, just as we ought to take our sense perceptions of objects in the world as serious evidence for belief in their existence, we ought also to take seriously sense perceptions of God that people report in mystical experiences as evidence for belief in God.[15]

Plantinga argues that forms of knowledge like memories and an awareness of the past cannot meet the standards of certain knowledge that foundationalism establishes. How do I establish beyond doubt, for example, that I had eggs for breakfast two days ago, if I have only my memory of it—no eggshells, no dirty dish, no witnesses to my consuming them? I do not have the kind of certainty about many of my memories that I have, for instance, that 2+5=7. Nevertheless, I, and most humans,

[14] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man (1785),* in *The Works of Thomas Reid,* ed. William Hamilton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1895), 6.5.

[15] William Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991).

would say that personal memories supply a reasonably reliable record of at least my immediate past and a relatively reliable record of my distant past. Indeed, I could say this about the notion of the past in general. Neither I, nor really any human, possesses absolute certainty about the existence of the past.   Even with documents, pictures, relics, and recordings, it is possible to say that these all are recently concocted pieces of evidence created by some person or trouble-making demon. Still, most people would also say that it is rational to believe that there is a past and, indeed, Plantinga endorses this view.

From here Plantinga moves to compare our knowledge of memories and the past to our knowledge of God. Like our memories and belief in the past for which we do not have incontrovertible evidence, we ought to trust our own perceptions, thoughts, and experiences in the world and church as basically reliable bases to build our beliefs about God.[16] This is not to say that we ought to accept every and all of our theological perceptions and experiences as true; indeed we ought to test them carefully. Here theological tradition and teachers have an important role in helping to clarify, correct, refine, and develop given theological sensibilities and experiences into rational beliefs.[17] Thus, religious doubt has a productive role to play in theology.

Plantinga argues, however, that just because we cannot accept all that our perception and religious tradition teaches about God, and just because our knowledge cannot comprehend all that the nature of God includes, it does not mean that all of theism must be rejected. Here, Plantinga

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[16] I do not follow Plantinga in his attempt to ground belief in Calvin's *sensus divinitatis,* sense of divinity. This sense supplies humans with faculties like perception, memory, and *a priori* knowledge so that theistic belief can have the status of "properly basic" beliefs (Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief,* ch. 3).

[17] In *Perceiving God,* Alston has a very helpful notion of "doxastic practices," or socially established "belief forming mechanisms" that include "background beliefs" from the religious tradition that help to test, support, and develop perceptual experiences of God (153ff). Cass Fisher has used the notion of doxastic practice with promising results to argue that Judaism has a series of such practices that help to form its theology (*Contemplative Nation: A Philosophical Account of Jewish Theological Language* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012], ch. 2).

addresses both the skeptic and the negative theologian when he argues that ignorance of the totality of God does not discount partial knowledge:

> Is there really a substantial reason for believing that we can't think or talk about God?…No doubt there is appropriate caution here. And no doubt it is true that we can't comprehend him, if to comprehend God is to know a significant proportion of what there is to be known about God. But of course that doesn't mean we can't think about God *at all* and it doesn't mean that we can't know some extremely important things about God.[18]

Although the analytic philosopher Plantinga might find it strange to be placed in the company of a pragmatist philosopher, his position is not far from that of the American pragmatist William James. In his famous essay, "The Will to Believe,"[19] James offers one of the most serious rejections of foundationalist characterizations of knowledge and the view that theistic belief is not justifiable. James argues that the classic foundationalist model of knowledge and justified belief is all well and good with regard to scientific knowledge of the world and certain truths of empiricism. But this model is largely useless, unhelpful, and potentially harmful when used for the truly important personal decisions of our lives and the formation of ultimate beliefs about God and religion.

Here, the insistence upon certainty and evidential sufficiency is detrimental to belief precisely because, in the most important decisions in our lives, we will usually lack sufficient evidence to make a judgment. Let us take our beliefs about the trustworthiness of acquaintances and friends. If we must always be seeking more and more evidence of their goodness, we will probably miss the opportunity to befriend them. Similarly and more importantly, beliefs about the suitability of which university to attend, a partner's appropriateness for marriage, or career choices, usually must be made on the basis of insufficient evidence. Thus, we simply cannot afford to follow the deontological principle of foundationalism if we want to live a productive and meaningful life.

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[18] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief,* 5.

[19] William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1956).

The skeptical philosopher who waits for certainty in the truly momentous decisions in life is like the jockey sitting on a racehorse who refuses to enter the race because he first wants assurances that he will win. James asks us to consider how rational is it to fail to embrace life's challenges because one does not have sufficient evidence to take the risk of failing. James, indeed, argues that faith and its related virtue, hope, has a kind of rationality to it that is displayed in all of the truly great achievements of humankind. In these achievements—fighting a moral battle, finding a cure for a terrible disease, bringing water to the desert — reason often tells us that it can't be done, that the end cannot be achieved. But faith not only says something different, but it is a necessary element in the achievement when it comes: "There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming. And where faith in a fact can help create the fact, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the 'lowest kind of immorality' into which a thinking being can fall."[20] Thus, James sees in the skepticism of the philosopher a form of irrationality that is the opposite of what she seeks: "A rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule."[21]

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[20] Ibid., 25.

[21] Ibid., 28. James also has another response to the empiricist claim that there is insufficient evidence for religious belief in his book *Varieties of Religious Experience (1901)* (New York: Penguin, 1982). James enters into what he calls a "radical empiricism" that takes religion seriously on the basis of hundreds of testimonies to the religious experiences of people throughout human history. *Varieties* reveals that religion is not a mere hypothesis, nor is it only a serious of philosophical beliefs; rather, it is a lived experience, and often the most important experience that a person has in her or his life. James then offers the empiricist a large variety of religious experiences that show religion to be a force—sometimes for ill, but more often for good—for healing, for insight, and for ecstatic joy in peoples' lives. What James makes clear in his review of the lives of saints and other religious persons, for instance, is that religious experience often moves people to dedicate their lives to moral activity in the world, such that the real practical fruits of the religious life form another empirical validation of the truth of religious belief.

Getting Beyond Kant

Where Plantinga argues that Locke is the central figure in the original establishment of foundationalist epistemologies in the English-speaking world, much of modern Jewish thought was developed on the Continent in German speaking lands. This means that the effect of Kant on Jewish philosophy and religious thought is immense. We can see the assumptions of Kant's epistemology—most notably the separation of the phenomenal and noumenal worlds and the critique of classical metaphysics—in the religious thought of Cohen, Buber, and Levinas, the canonical thinkers of modern Jewish philosophy.

However, the assumptions (and limitations) of Kant's epistemology can be traced to his 18th century Newtonian physics. This mechanistic and deterministic model has little place for freedom and creativity in the workings of the universe. Therefore God, who must certainly be free if God is to be able to do any of the things we expect of God (create, judge, will) is relegated to the unknown noumenal realm. However, what if the cosmos itself is a dynamic and changing system full of spontaneity and creativity? What if "freedom," then, is a basic element in the fabric of the cosmos and a reflection of God as creator of the cosmos? This is precisely the view of cosmology today, so that a notion of God as free—and, indeed, of all life, animal and human, as free from an absolute, fixed, and determinate form— makes rational sense.[22]

And what of Kant's famous notion of the thing in itself? In Kant's own day, the philosopher Friedrich Jacobi questioned the contradictory claims made by Kant for the thing in itself. If we cannot know the thing in itself, how do we know that it is there at all? The thing in itself then suffers from the same problem as God in negative theology: it is an entity that we assume exists, yet at the same time we cannot know that it exists. Furthermore, Kant asserts that, although we do not know the thing in itself, it has a constitutive role in our knowledge of things. Indeed, the unknowable thing in itself enters into some causal chain with our minds

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[22] Lenn Goodman, *Creation and Evolution* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 52. See also ch. 5.

through which knowledge of the world is produced. This view of knowledge is of course possible, but given that we do not and cannot know the first cause of the chain of knowledge—the thing in itself—and also cannot know how it is that the thing in itself interacts with our minds, why should we believe this Kantian rendition of things?

Furthermore, as Philip Kitcher shows, Kant's view of space and time seems to be derived from principles of early modern arithmetic and Euclidean geometry.[23] Gary Harfield argues that even by the last decades of the 19th century, "non-Euclidian geometry…refuted Kant's full doctrine of space."[24] Kant's notion of time was equally undermined by 20th century views of a space/time continuum. This shows that Kant's epistemology is derived from Newtonian physics, early modern mathematics and logic, and Euclidian geometry. This means that Kant's supposedly universal and necessary *a priori* intuitions of space and time and the categories of understanding should really be considered *a posteriori* summaries of 18th century science. These, then, say little about the universal "conditions of the possibility of knowledge" and a lot about the conditions and limitations of knowledge of the world in 18th century Europe.

What these criticisms of Kant's epistemology suggest is that his *a priori* principles must give way to more sophisticated understandings both of the mind (in cognitive science) and of the world (in quantum mechanics, sub-atomic particles, the space/time continuum, genetics, etc.) When these advances are taken into consideration, the barrier to knowledge of the thing in itself appears to have been crossed, and the very notion of the thing in itself unnecessary. Certainly there will always remain mysteries about objects and beings in the world, including God, but the categorical attempt to set aside rational attempts to understand these realities as part of an unknowable noumenal realm does not make sense.

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[23] Philip Kitcher, "A priori," *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006), 52.

[24] Gary Hatfield, "Kant on the Perception of Space and Time," *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, 61.

Contemporary physics, with its notions of the Big Bang as a beginning to the expanding and dynamic universe, have been found by many theologians to be more congenial to theism than 18th century science. After all, the Big Bang suggests something akin to a notion of an origin of the universe that has affinities with the biblical notion of creation. Thoughts such as these on the correlation of modern science and theology reopen the door to discussions of natural theology, which Kant effectively shut when he declared theology off limits to philosophy. Here, a metaphysics in which God plays a role in the creation and telos of the universe becomes a possibility for rational thought. This, then, allows for a return to notions of natural theology that Kant effectively ruled out in his epistemology. This means, for instance, that the cosmological argument and argument from design deserve to be revisited. Similarly, when foundational criteria of knowledge are loosened and a more trusting attitude to human supersensible experiences is taken, religious assertions about the existence of God can regain credence. Indeed, we see some of this in the work of Christian philosophers. For example, the Christian philosopher Richard Swinburne has argued that theism retains its explanatory power for the natural world, especially as science has moved from mathematical certainties to probabilistic accounts and quantum physics. In Swinburne's terms, theism is not only more elegant and simple as an explanation for the origin of the universe, but it is also more probable than the view that the complex physical and organic systems we now have come into existence through mere processes of accident and chance over long periods of time. As Swinburne puts it, "It is very unlikely that a universe would exist uncaused." But the universe "can be made comprehensible if we suppose that it is brought about by God."[25]

Nagel and the Need for a Teleological Principle

In addition to figures in the sciences, the philosopher Thomas Nagel has argued that the ability of Darwin's theory to fully explain the

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[25] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 132.

development of complex biological systems is so compromised that we might as well think of the theory as false.[26] In addition, Nagel suggests that the reality of human consciousness continues to plague the attempt to reduce the mind to the brain. He suggests that philosophy and science must adopt some sort of teleological explanation, something like Aristotle's telos or the traditional God (although Nagel refuses to go that far) to explain the existence of these most curious of creatures called human beings. This does not mean that scientific cosmologies and biological evolution are to be totally replaced by theism, but, as in classical metaphysics, a role for God as first cause and last telos is added to physics and chemistry to produce a comprehensive explanatory schema. Theistic notions of origin and telos also fill in the huge moral gap of a value-free science.

From Modern Reason to Classical Reason

Although Plantinga, Alston, and other analytic theologians have attempted to challenge modern foundationalism as a model for epistemology, it is important to see that they do not mean to toss out the epistemological project of establishing bases for rational beliefs. Rather, they mean to expand the criteria for what counts as knowledge—most notably, to include religious knowledge of God. This means that the overall project of epistemology—a correspondence theory of truth and the construction of propositions built upon various forms of deductive and inductive logic—remains intact. On the other hand, this more modulated approach is not what we see in postmodern thought and American Pragmatism. Here, propositions, syllogisms, deductive and inductive logic, and correspondence theories of truth, have all been declared, by one

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[26] Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

theorist or another, ineffective or misleading tools in the search for knowledge and truth.[27]

Certainly, as the critics show, these methods of philosophy have not produced the results they have promised. At the same time, the radical undermining of these forms of knowledge is tantamount to an undermining of rationality itself. From here we are too easily tossed to and fro on the seas of irrationality ruled by subjective opinion and feeling. In the theological domain, when we throw out traditional forms of rational thought, I believe we handcuff ourselves in our ability to speak about what we actually know and perceive about God from experience, tradition, texts, rituals, and liturgies. As I have shown, we are left with the inarticulate feelings and encounters and negative theologies of Jewish modernity.

Thus, I no longer think that we must accept the limitations on the use of traditional logical forms like deduction and the syllogism and propositional forms of truth that pragmatism and postmodernism attempt to impose upon thought. The Jewish pragmatist philosopher Peter Ochs often has said that traditional logic and propositional statements of truth work for many expressions of truth. In everyday living and thinking, we are constantly deducing from the general to the particular case: given the standards of an A paper, this is a B; if this governmental policy is unjust, then that one is barely civil. In everyday speech we present propositions: it is cold; he is tall; they are generous, and we have been stingy. We need complex semiotics to express the more difficult epistemological challenges: for example, the making of scientific hypothesis (thus abduction), poetic discourse and the complexities and paradoxes of theology (thus rhetoric and textuality). However, propositional statements like "God is good" *(Hodu Adonai, Ki Tov)*, "God is eternal" *(El Olam)*, "God is wise" *(Elohim Chakam)*, or "God is creator" *(Borah Olam)*, while not adequate to all that we might want to express in a theology,

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remain excellent formulations of aspects of God's nature and reality. They communicate knowledge of God and can stimulate contemplation, exploration, and the development of theology. Given God's ultimate unknowability and difference from us, all propositional statements about God need to be regarded with some suspicion as too facile, too simple. At the same time, as the Talmud says, "God speaks in human language." We are in our rights to use human language to speak about God. Here, medieval philosophers like Crescas in the Jewish world, Aquinas in the Christian, and Averroes in Islam developed ways of speaking propositional truths about God as a series of "perfections" that are part of God's very essence and therefore not accidental attributes that we normally use to describe a being's qualities and characteristics. And finally, medieval reason has the advantage of allowing for divine participation in reason through the "active intellect" of God. This divine element in rational thought then elevates philosophical exploration to a form of contemplation that at once could be called the quest for truth and also a kind of prayer.

II. Beginning Again: God of Being

Medieval Musings on a Positive Theology

In the first part of this paper, I have stated the overall goal of re-establishing a theological realism and a positive theology. I reviewed a number of apophatic strategies in modern and postmodern theology that I see as undermining a positive Jewish theology. I then reviewed enlightenment sources of modern negative theology in the epistemologies of Locke and Kant. Postmodern critiques of philosophy and theology leave us with more radical forms of negative theology, in which the negation of all meaning is presented as exalted as a form of revelation in itself. As I have argued, this leads to the end of theology: like an uroborus eating its tail, it destroys itself in the very act of positing itself.

In the specifically Jewish context, it is hard to imagine how Judaism could continue with radical apophatic theologies since, if nothing at all can be said about its God, the commandments lose their anchoring in a

commanding presence. It is hard to imagine how this God could be conceived as entering into history to give the Torah or redeem the Israelites from slavery. Thus, as well as marking an endpoint for philosophy and theology, I would offer that postmodern apophaticism also signals something of an end to Judaism. Therefore, having come to this end, I see no option but to begin again.

Despite its Aristotelian physics and neo-Platonic theology of emanation, and even despite its own negative theology, I have found it most productive to begin again in medieval Jewish theology. There are two reasons I make this move. One, medieval theology places God at the center of Judaism and, in the words of Maimonides, presents the existence of God as the fundamental reality and philosophical principle of Judaism. Two, medieval theology establishes the structure of Judaism with God at the top, and humans and the rest of the world as less than God. This gives rise to the entire system of Judaism as an attempt to move Jews upward toward God and God's reality, truth, and goodness. In biblical terms, Judaism is structured like Jacob's ladder to open, discipline, and elevate human existence to the heights of divine perfection.

God as Absolute Being

In his commentary on the Mishna (Tractate Sanhedrin, chapter 10), Maimonides speaks of the existence of God as the fundamental reality and principle of Judaism in the first of his 13 principles of faith. In some ways, this is all that must be said to establish a positive Jewish theology, and it is important to note that, for Maimonides, belief in God is the first and most fundamental of the *mitsvot*, of the *Aseret HaDibrot* (Ten Commandments) given by God at Sinai. Thus Jews are required

> [t]o believe in the existence of the Creator; that there is an Existent complete in all the senses of the word "existence." He is the cause of all existence. In Him all else subsists and from Him derives. It is inconceivable that He does not exist, for should He not exist the existence of all else would be extinguished and nothing could persist. If we imagine the absence of any other existent thing, however, G-d's existence would not thereby be extinguished nor diminished. For unity and mastery are

only G-d's, since He is sufficient to Himself. All else, whether angels or celestials and whatever is in them or below them, needs Him to exist. This first fundamental principle is taught in the biblical verse: "I am the LORD your G-d" (Ex. 20:2).

In some ways, the assertion of the "complete existence of God" in all senses of the word 'existence' is all that must be said to propose a theological realism and positive theology. God's existence is neither dependent upon the existence of the world nor upon the human mind. It is complete and sufficient unto itself, and so it cannot be reduced to any non-divine existence. Indeed, if there is to be a reduction, it must be a reduction of the world and humans to God, since God is the creator and sustainer of "the existence of all else." For Maimonides, God's existence is "the first and most fundamental principle" of Judaism. This is where it all begins. Negative theology, then, is about whether or not human cognition and language is appropriate to comprehend the nature of God. It has none of the modern doubts about the existence of God, and certainly none of the postmodern sense of God as the abyss or nothingness that defies meaning. God is, for Maimonides and all of medieval theology, not a negative at all, but an intense and infinite positive. Indeed, in the words of the neo-Thomistic theologian Etienne Gilson, God's being is "the very excess of positivity which hides the divine being from our eye." God's positivity is "the light which lights up the rest."[28]

In philosophical terms, in naming himself as Being, God is declaring God's aseity. To use the language of Kant and Heidegger against them, in declaring God's name "I Am," as absolute being, God is making the primary statement of "onto-theology." It is God and God alone that provides all there is with an ontology, its basis for existence. This means, furthermore, that nothing else ranks as true and real as God does.

Having posited the aseity or existence of God as complete Being, as necessary and sufficient Being, Maimonides and Islamic philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes, and the Christian theologian Aquinas after them, attempt to deduce a series of other propositions about God. From the

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[28] Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Thomism* (New York: Kennedy and Sons, 1964), 52.

complete existence of God they deduce that God is perfect, since God is "endowed with absolute sufficiency" and neither lacks nor requires anything to complete his being. The philosophers also deduce that God is the creator of all that is not God, since there must be a primal cause of what is; if not, there will be an infinite regress of causes. God must also be eternal because his sufficiency means he is without change. And finally, if God is necessary, sufficient, perfect, eternal, and creator, then God is good. God is good and God is the source of the good. God as good is the source and promise and basis of the reality and truth of goodness and God's providence in the world. In the words of Plotinus, evil is the lack of good, "the privation of good." Evil is a result of confusion among multiple goods. God is the really real, evil is the not-real.

This series of propositions about God's sufficiency, eternality, oneness, perfection, and goodness make up the philosophical portrait of the monotheistic God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The extent to which these features of God are to be considered "attributes," in the sense in which non-Godly beings have an "essence" and "attributes," is a contested issue. Averroes suggests that in God essence and attribute is one —or, to put this in another way, God's attributes are part of God's essence. Certainly if we want a positive theology, Averroes' position, which is followed by Gersonides and Crescas in Judaism and Aquinas and contemporary neo-Thomists in Christianity, offers us one compelling model. I do not think we want or need to take these propositions about God alone as sufficient for a positive theology today. They and the deductions upon which they are based are not enough to deliver the certain knowledge of God that is proposed for them. However, they are a good starting point for theological debate, and as summaries of biblical concepts and theological notions in other sacred texts and throughout the tradition, they are extremely helpful. Indeed, they need to be considered as part of what Cardinal Newman called the "grammar of assent" to theological beliefs that include doctrines, tradition, sacred texts, and human experience.

However, I would suggest that, at the very least, what is to be gained from a return to medieval theology for the projects of theological realism

and positive theology is the first principle that God exists as sufficient and absolute Being and that God's existence provides the ground and sustenance foe all other beings. The Being of God as absolute Being must be considered a rational option to explain the basis of all that is, or what has been called "metaphysics," given the failures of foundationalism and Kantianism as epistemological models, the failure of materialist reductionism to physics and chemistry with the weak explanation that the most complex forms of life emerged through processes of accident and chance, and, finally, an epistemology based upon probability and not certainty. This belief, as I have suggested, is enough to establish a positive theology, since it asserts the existence of God as ontological basis of what is real, irreducible to the world and to human thought. The belief in God as absolute Being is a rational belief, one could say, because it does what reason does: it "makes sense" of the world—of its origin, of its existence, and of its order. God as absolute Being is a positive assertion and not a negative one because it presents God as the fundamental given behind all other givens, the fundamental "*yesh*" or "yes" before the "*ayin"* or "no" that might detract from what is given. Is the theistic assertion of a primal and sufficient Being an incontrovertible fact of metaphysics? Can we explain all that is without this Being? Yes, sure. But, at this point in human history and science, given what we know, we can no longer say with the modern and postmodern atheists that this theistic belief is irrational.

Furthermore, if belief in God's absolute existence is rational, there is, as I suggested, a structure, an order, and a telos that is established in the universe, and this provides the structure of the monotheistic religions. We can see this from what Gilson says about the implications of God's sufficient Being: "If God is Being, He is not only total being…He is more especially true being: *verum esse.* And that means everything else is only partial being and hardly deserves the name of being at all." Gilson quotes Genesis here: "For dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19).[29]

If God is absolute and complete Being, we are obviously less so. Since God is the origin, creator, and sustainer of all that exists, God is worthy of

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[29] Ibid., 65.

our continuing gratitude. And all of Judaism is structured to deliver this gratitude through praise, prayer, thanks, and thought and obedience to the *mitsvot*. Since God is the complete Being, and we are incomplete, imperfect and mortal, God is also worthy of our idealization. We strive to be both closer to God as ultimate reality, and we strive to be like God in perfection and completeness. Thus God's absolute Being establishes the meaning, purpose, and goal of life as *imitatio dei*.

However, as helpful as the medieval notion of God as absolute Being is, it is not enough to serve all the needs of Jewish theology. After all, the God of Being remains the distant transcendent God. This is God that Moses cannot see and remain alive. This is God at Sinai from whom the people are warned to keep their distance "lest they perish." This is the God of whom Israel is told to make no image or form: "Be most careful—since you saw no shape when the Lord your God spoke to you at Horeb, out of the fire—not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculpted image in any likeness whatever" (Deut. 4:15-16). This is the God of pure biblical monotheism who, when he first gets closer, is seen as Wisdom and Light, King of Kings, God of Judgment. This is the Righteous One whose scales of justice are blind, whose account book is clean, unaffected by emotion or mercy for the poor or bias to the rich.

But the God who reveals Godself in the Torah is also the speaking, hearing, willing, saving God that the Israelites see "with an outstretched arm." This is the merciful one who leads Israel as a "pillar of fire" to light the night and a "cloud of smoke" to show the way by day. This is God who visits the sick, cares for the orphan, supports the lame, and finds the lost. In short, this is God as person, as subject. This is a God who acts both in history and for the individual in her need.

III. God as Person

As Yehudah HaLevi, the great medieval foil to Maimonides, says in the *Kuzari*, in the Torah, God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob before He is the austere God of the philosophers. Thus, the *peshat*, or most direct and immediate sense of scripture, is not the God

of the philosophers, the God of absolute Being and the God of the Ethical Ideal. God is a God who hears me, who is with me in my suffering, who "restores my soul," and who hears my "still small voice."

The most important implication of the subjectivity of God is that it allows us to form a relationship to God. Buber was correct when he saw in the Bible a series of meetings between God and humans. That God is a person means that we as persons can develop a relationship to God both like and unlike our relations with humans. That God is a person does not mean that we need to suspend our philosophical thought about God; indeed, the issues that prompt philosophical thought—what is the nature of ultimate reality? what existed before time and creation? is there an afterlife? why do the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper?— continue to be a spur to thought. However, with God as subject, these questions now receive a wise hearer as a sounding board and presence that ensures that these questions do finally have answers.

The contemporary neo-Thomist theologian Norris Clarke speaks of theology as having an "outer and inner path."[30] The outer path is the path of the medieval philosophers, and the inner path is the path of the psalms and prophets. The outer describes God as distant absolute Being, the inner describes God as person and focuses on our relationship to Him.

The Paradoxical Nature of Jewish Belief in God

Idolatry and Adultery

In their book, *Idolatry*,[31] Moshe Halberthal and Avishai Margalit sum up the contradiction of the God of absolute Being and the personal God of intimate relationship with their discussion of two aspects of the prohibition on idolatry. On the one hand, the prohibition on idolatry uses the model of monogamous marriage to describe the dynamics of the

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[30] Norris Clarke, *The Philosophical Approach to God: A New Thomistic Perspective* (NY: Fordham University Press, 2007.

[31] Moshe Halberthal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

relationship between Israel and God. In this analogy, Israel is the wife and God the husband, and there is even a suggestion here that "idolatry is a sexual sin."[32] Here, the worship of idols is akin to the religious adultery of Israel with foreign gods, and this suggests the deeply emotional and intimate character of the relationship between God and Israel. The prophet who makes most use of the equivalence of adultery and idolatry is, of course, Hosea. However, Yochanan Muffs reviews many cases where prophetic figures, from Moses onward, play upon God's sensitivity and even need for human affection.[33] Muffs points us to a remarkable passage in Jeremiah where God presents Israel as a garment that he requires to "cleave to My body…for my glory" (Jer. 3:11).[34]

On the other hand the commandment "You shall make no graven images!" is taken to refer to false worship of God through images and statues. This interpretation is stressed in the Deuteronomic repetition of the Sinai revelation. At Sinai, "You heard the sound of words but perceived no shape—nothing but a voice" (Deut. 4:12). The earlier formulation of idolatry as worshipping other false gods can be opposed to worshipping the real God falsely through the use of images and forms that are inappropriate to the imageless nature of God.

Therefore, in the very heart of the prohibition of idolatry, we have two important theological strands represented. On the one hand, God requires that Israel love only God in an intimate relationship modeled on monogamous marriage and, on the other hand, Israel cannot represent their God in graven images, especially in the anthropomorphic forms that the marriage relationship suggests. Seeing this theological contradiction or paradox, the tendency of the philosophers is to resolve the contradiction and to do so on the side of the non-imagined, transcendent, non-personal God. This we see in the philosophical tradition from Philo

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[32] Ibid., 11.

[33] Yochanan Muffs, *Love and Joy: Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), ch.1.

[34] Ibid., 51.

to Saadia Gaon to Maimonides, to Hermann Cohen in the modern period. We can say that the mystical tradition chose to take the other side of the paradox and attempted to develop the embodied, personal, and immanent side of God through fantastic imagery, albeit presented in word and not plastic forms.

Not Either/Or but Both/And

Although one can see why one might want to claim one or other of the philosophical or personal theological strategies toward God, we must preserve both. The God that is revealed in Torah requires us, if we are to do a theology worthy of the revelation of God in the text of the Torah, to move beyond the medieval deductive logic of Maimonides to more flexible categories of thought that include polarity, paradox, and even contradiction. These are categories that we move to precisely because they are so evident in the textual expression of the Torah.

The position of embracing contradiction, of course, is not a comfortable one for a philosopher to be in. Indeed, it is not only that our philosophical father Aristotle articulated the law of non-contradiction as fundamental to philosophy, but the Western philosophical tradition reasserts this principle throughout its history up until today in the very way in which it goes about establishing arguments, asserting that one proposition is true and the other false, and judging that this thinker is good and that one less good or simply bad.

The analytic Jewish philosopher Samuel Lebens[35] reviews the work of Graham Priest, one noted analytical philosopher who argues for the validity of what is called "dialethism," or the assertion of two contradictory truths.[36] But Priest himself admits that dialethism is not a desirable position for a philosopher to take. Sometimes, however, we must simply adopt it because it is the best we can do, and we hope that in the future we will find a way out. Lebens himself argues that dialethism has not found a particularly welcoming reception by philosophers, and he too

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[35] Samuel Lebens, *The Principles of Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[36] Graham Priest, *In Contradiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

seems to want to attempt to preserve Aristotle's fundamental logical rule in his work on Jewish philosophy.

However, I simply see no way out of the dilemma of accepting contradiction as the price to pay for a Jewish theology that is true to the fundamental source of Judaism—i.e., the Torah. In some way it comes down to this: What is your primary source for Jewish thought? Is it philosophy or is it Torah? I often think of Augustine, who, despite some anti-Jewish polemics, remains one of the most profound theologians of all time. In his *Confessions* he tells us that in the beginning of his religious journey, philosophy was primary for him, and the Bible was so full of contradictions, miracles, repetitions, and lacunae that he could hardly read it. But as his thinking matured and his quest for God deepened, he returned to scripture. He realized that its formulations of God were more true than philosophical ones, and its description of the human condition and its prescriptions for the good life and genuine salvation were most compelling.

The intelligent, thinking person cannot lightly embrace contradiction. It is not something you want to recommend to the young philosopher. However, perhaps we can say that religion as a subject matter simply demands different things of the philosopher than other topics. Aristotle said that philosophy, in its search for truth, must adapt its epistemology to its subject matter. Different subject matters require different epistemological approaches.

I would suggest that the philosophy of religion is one of the most interesting philosophical forms precisely because philosophy is stretched to its limits and even forced to go beyond its limits. I would like to speak of a few models in the philosophy of religion that I think are helpful for a Jewish theology that is adequate to the Torah's record of a God who is to be both seen and not be seen by humans. The first model I will review is offered by the Jewish philosopher of religion and theologian Jerome (Yehudah) Gellman in his notion of "double-mindedness." The second model is offered by C. S Peirce and his semiotic system. Both strategies suggest that the contradictions of the Torah do not signal epistemological

defeat, but that they push us to adapt new epistemological and even logical forms.

Double-Mindedness, Thirdness, and the Paradoxical Nature of Jewish Belief in God

Double-Mindedness

Gellman takes the notion of double-mindedness from scripture itself. He uses it to explain Abraham's mindset in going out to sacrifice Isaac after being commanded by God to do so. One the one hand, Abraham had to believe that he would not have to sacrifice Isaac, that God "would provide" a way out. On the other hand, he had to believe that he would have to sacrifice Isaac. Without this "double-mindedness," we cannot understand the trial that God had put Abraham through. Without this paradox, we cannot understand the psychological and religious stress Abraham was under.[37]

Gellman's notion of double-mindedness has some affinities with Kierkegaard's notion of Abraham making a "double movement" (*Fear and Trembling*).[38] It also relates to Kierkegaard's notion of the sacrifice of Isaac as "the absurd." However, Gellman wants to avoid the irrationality suggested by this term, suggesting that "double-mindedness" is not absurd, irrational, or a-rational. Indeed, he wants to say that there is a rationality to the position of double-mindedness. It is rational because it helps us to understand in the clearest way, despite the contradiction, what was actually going on Abraham's mind as he traveled with Isaac to Moriah. It is rational because it helps bring understanding and insight into Abraham's mental state as he traveled to Moriah with his son. It is rational because it displays most clearly Abraham's religious struggle. It is rational

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[37] "Abraham was of two minds. …Abraham truly expected to be losing Isaac, in virtue of the Divine command to sacrifice Isaac. …But in addition, and quite paradoxically, also truly expected…that this was not to be" (Jerome Gellman, *The Fear, The Trembling and the Fire* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994], 74).

[38] Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death,* trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press 1954), n.124.

because it fulfills the function of reason: to make the strange familiar, the opaque clear, and the obscure distinct.

Although Gellman does not use his notion of "double-mindedness" outside of the Akedah story, I am suggesting here that the notion is helpful for us as we contemplate what is required to believe in the God of Israel, the Lord, YHVH. Double-mindedness is precisely what is required for belief in this God. On the one hand, we know God is incorporeal, imageless, and utterly beyond our ways of thinking; on the other, we know we can talk to God at any moment just like we would to a person. On the one hand, we think of God as distanced, eternal, without connection to the earthly world where beings grow, become, and die; on the other hand we think of God as listening, speaking, getting angry, loving, and dispensing judgment and mercy, like an involved and caring parent. We make use of these personal and embodied images to help us imagine God, to contemplate God's powers, and, most importantly, to emulate God, so that we can become more like God. Therefore, double-mindedness is the complex mindset required for belief in the God of Torah. Jews perform the cognitive gymnastics of double-mindedness whenever they read the Torah and worship in synagogue or study Talmud where they are confronted with a mixed discourse of philosophical directives to think of God as distanced and personal images to address God as a Thou.[39]

Gellman goes further in talking about the rationality of double-mindedness by discussing philosophical positions on inconsistency

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[39] In correspondence with me, Mark Randall James has mentioned Averroes as a medieval resource to address the "double-truth" at which I am using Gellman to get. Here the double truth is set forth as the opposition between scriptural truth and demonstrative (or philosophical) truth in his *Decisive Treatise* (see *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, ed. McGinnis and Reisman [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007]. I want to suggest, however, that scripture itself presents us with a double truth of God as Being and God as Person. This means that the God of Being is not extraneous to scripture (and therefore, as with many moderns, can be dispensed with), but intrinsic to it. I speak of this as the two faces of God in scripture to justify the philosophical or rational element, indeed of theology, as a form of scriptural reasoning.

developed by philosophers Norman Rescher and Robert Brandom. They argue that despite Aristotle's logic, which proclaims as one of its central positions the "law of non-contradiction," there can be a "logic of inconsistency." This logic helps us to see that "it can be perfectly rational to believe in the truth of (some) contradictions."[40]

Gellman gives us a phenomenology of double-mindedness that describes how we might come to accept it as a philosophical position: "I have a certain kind of occurrent thought…and I also have this other thought which may be contradictory to the first within a logical calculus." Since both positions make rational sense to me, I wish to hold both with "equal strength."[41] I then adopt the position of "double-mindedness," and I thereby "gain freedom from the imposition to demand to divest myself of mutually opposing categories of thought."[42]

Peirce's Thirdness and the Work of Peter Ochs

Where Gellman helps us to articulate Jewish faith in God as a form of double-mindedness that oscillates between two experiences of God, there is also the sense in Jewish theology that the experience of God is a unitary experience. By this I mean that Jews learn, in a process that is hard to identify, to think of God simultaneously as disembodied and personal. When it is said that Moses "sees God face to face," then, there is an understanding that this seeing is of a different sort than seeing a human person. Here, we must move perhaps to metaphoric language and say that what Moses sees in seeing God is "like" seeing a human person, yet at the same time different from seeing a person since there is no body, no form, no image that he sees. Perhaps this is what is meant by scripture when it speaks of Moses seeing a "bush all aflame but the bush was not consumed" (Exodus 3:3). This is then a model for all Jews who must learn to both "see" God as an intimate personal presence and at the same time not see God as having a body or a face.

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[40] Gellman, *The Fear*, 80.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 81.

While in logical terms we may want to call this a contradiction, there has been some significant thought given to assigning a sort of logic to what we are trying to express here. We can start by identifying the form we are trying to express with the "excluded middle" between A and non-A. Aristotelian logic prohibits the excluded middle from rational thought. However, the modern semiotician and pragmatist C. S. Peirce suggests that the excluded middle represents a kind of thinking that is crucial to all thinking, which pushes beyond the existing boundaries of Aristotelian epistemological systems.

Peirce articulates the properties of the excluded middle with his notion of "thirdness."[43] Thirdness is the term Peirce uses to address the most complex challenges of semiosis.[44] Firstness addresses signs when they want to be as clear as possible: the green light means go, the red stop, the knock at the door means someone is there.[45] Secondness addresses signs that point to its object: the arrow points to the road to the north, the picture over the door shows a big shoe and thus opens to a shoe store. The plant is green; the pillow is soft. Secondness functions with descriptives and known categories. Thirdness employs multiple signs in combinations to form complex often abstract ideas. Thirdness is about mediation, harmony, dissonance, the vague yet knowable semiotic space of "the between." Thirdness is metaphor and the poetic use of language. In logic, thirdness is the "excluded middle" between yes and no, the space of contradiction that defies Aristotle's law of contradiction. In science, thirdness is the hypothesis-making moment when the experimenter is thinking, "Perhaps it is this," "Perhaps that," "Let me try it this way," "Perhaps this is the solution, the answer." Pierce, who loves to make up terms, calls this moment of hypothesis-making "abduction" and distinguishes it from deduction and induction in the toolbox of scientific

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[43] C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers,* ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 1:337.

[44] Ibid., 2:85.

[45] Ibid., 2:84.

epistemology. [46] To refer back to Gellman's notion of "double-mindedness," thirdness involves not only complex signifying content but also involves a state of mind, a "mind-set" in Gellman's terms. Thirdness involves a mindset beyond binaries and dichotomies. It is a mindset of contemplation and reflection and extended interpretation of multiple signs.

Most importantly, however, if it is to be effective, thirdness requires an element of practice. The third then depends upon the active role of the interpreter who engages signs in an interpretive event. Thirdness then needs to be initiated by interpreters who seek to use signs to solve a problem, address a specific situation, and join together a community of interpreters.

The philosopher Peter Ochs has dedicated much of his work to applying Peirce to scripture.[47] Ochs argues that Peirce supplies us with the tools to develop a "logic of scripture" that helps us to understand Torah as a complex system of signs aimed not only at understanding the nature of God, but also at applying divine healing energy to a human situation of need. Given the complexity of scripture and its obvious gaps, repetitions, contradictions, and dichotomies, scripture, as a religious medium, requires a different logic than traditional philosophy with its law of contradiction. Ochs argues that the reasoning of scripture is neither primitive nor confused, but that scripture displays a logic ruled by what Peirce calls abduction and thirdness. It uses these logical forms to push human logic toward divine logic. The pragmatic dimension of a sign's use, its relation to the interpretant and the community of interpretation, provides a way to understand the rich Jewish traditions of interpretation of scripture in midrash, aggadah (stories), and medieval exegesis, as ways of generating new understandings of God diachronically through tradition. Ochs helps us to see that the semiosis of God is no simple matter. Indeed, it requires a complex use of signs that rivals the use of signs by

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[46] Ibid., 5:172.

[47] Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

mathematics and physics to express the fundamentals of our knowledge of reality. Given this, it is no wonder that the Torah and the Jewish theological tradition stretches our normal use of language to its limits in its attempt to express the inexpressible.[48]

Rabbinic Theology as a Theology of Thirdness

An advantage of Peirce's notion of thirdness is that it suggests that there is a third way beyond a stalemated contradiction or dichotomy where the dual nature of God as seen and not seen, as absolutely transcendent and immanent as a person, can be negotiated. We see this particularly clearly in rabbinic presentations of the *nefesh* or soul as a third to the embodied and non-embodied God. Consider for example this rabbinic text:

> As the Holy One, Blessed Be He, fills the whole world, so also the soul fills the whole body. As the Holy One, Blessed be He, sees but cannot be seen, so also the soul sees and cannot be seen. As the Holy One, Blessed Be He, nourishes the whole world, the soul also the soul nourishes the whole body. As the Holy One, Blessed be He, is pure, so also is the soul pure. As the Holy One Blessed Be He dwells in the inmost part of the universe, so the soul dwells in the inmost part of the body. (b. Berakhot 10a)

The text seems to acknowledge that there is a difficult theological problem with a God who at times is unseen and distanced and a God who is close by, familiar, indeed part of the human world. It therefore suggests a solution in the notion of the *nefesh* or soul that itself is unseen yet is as intimate to us as our own body. The soul, indeed, is a kind of "third" thing both tangible and intangible, like God. The soul thus helps to mediate

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[48] In his earlier work before he adopted the apophatic theological strategy, Elliot Wolfson employed Henry Corbin's notion of the "imaginal" to describe the way in which embodied images are employed in Judaism. The imaginal "serves as a symbolic intermediary allowing for the imaging of the imageless God" (Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines* [Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994], 8).

between the corporeal and incorporeal, between the heavenly and the earthly, between us and God.

We may also look at the following text from Midrash Tehillim on the issue of God's simultaneous presence in heaven and on earth:

> With an earthly King, when he is in the bed-chamber he cannot be in the reception hall. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, fills the upper regions and the lower. As it is said, "His glory is over the earth and the heavens" (Ps. 10:13) simultaneously; as it is written "Do not I fill the heaven and the earth"? (Jer. 23:24). (Midrash Tehillim 24:5)

Here we see that the rabbis want to assert that God is present to us like a body in space but different from a spatial body in that He can be present everywhere at the same time. A common rabbinical maxim is: "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, is the place of His universe, but the universe is not His place" (Genesis Rabbah 67, 9). This is further complicated by the use of the word *makom* or "Place" as one of the names of God Himself. Here I think the rabbis are playing with the notion that God is like a body in God's ability to be tangibly present to us. God is like a "place" in that we can go to him. We can seek and find God. Yet God is different from a body in that God cannot be seen or touched. Also, like a king, God can be sought out for a hearing, yet at the same time God is unlike a king since God can be at once in heaven and present on earth (in the bedroom and reception hall at the same time).[49]

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[49] Scholar of Late Antiquity Paula Fredriksen argues that in the first few centuries, Judaism establishes the dual character of God as both personal and Jewish and also transcendent and universal—i.e. attentive to all peoples. Jewish belief then requires the believer to adopt a kind of double-sight, to use a unique pair of binoculars whereby God is both seen and unseen, transcendent and immanent, infinite light and intimate person. However, in this dual role, Judaism does make one significant and unique theological move that gives a slight nod to the unseen. Fredriksen argues that it is this biblical an iconic tradition that sets YHVH and his cult apart from all Greco-Roman religions. In all pagan Temples, one finds images and statutes; in the synagogues of the Jews, there are no images and statutes of YHVH. God is "visible to the mind alone"! (Paula Fredriksen, "How Jewish is God," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 1 [2018]: 193-212).

The One God

There is one more thing that I must say, however, before ending this paper: that the condition for the possibility of God's contradictory status as both distant and present, transcendent and immanent, the condition for the double-mindedness I am arguing for, is God's oneness. If God were two there would be no problem, no contradiction, since we could say that God A is transcendent and God B is immanent. However, the Shema teaches us that we must remain with God's oneness. And maybe the prophet Zachariah is addressing the hope of the philosopher when he says. *biyom hahu, ihyeh Adonai Achad u Shemo Echad* ("In that day the LORD shall be One, and His name One"). This means that redemption is not only the solution to the problems of exile and sin, suffering and evil, but it is also the solution to the philosophical problem of the contradiction of seeing and not seeing God.

Most Jews will know the words of Zachariah from the last line of the Aleinu prayer that is sung liturgically at the end of daily and festival Jewish religious services. Here, the unity of God, beyond the contradictions of his many faces and names, is ritually enacted by Jews. This ritual enacting provides a kind of proleptic experiencing of the unity of God that will be realized at the end of days.