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Sensibilities, Transmission, and Deep Metaphors

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Vanessa Ochs has given us a wonderful gift: a jumping off point for a discussion which–God willing–will go on for a very long time. I am honored by the invitation to pull up a chair at the table. My sources are both textual and experiential. I am, by profession, a teacher of theology at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. I have also spent the better part of my life as a congregant in various Reconstructionist communities, finding myself in the role of participant observer. The questions that most interest my students are the ones being asked in the pews. I see my role as similar to that often taken by Eugene Borowitz, raising philosophical issues but always keeping a close eye on the narratives of individuals and communities.

This response will explore three questions that emerge for me from Ochs' paper. The first is related to Ochs' choice of sensibilities, particularly her privileging universalistic values to the near exclusion of particularistic values, especially the value of *brit*. While Ochs' own "top ten" happen to resonate with me personally, I believe a fuller list would more adequately track the sensibilities contemporary committed Jews are juggling today. Arguably, Ochs' list fails to capture that which is most distinctive about

Jewish values– the persistence into the modern era of a more tribal understanding of obligation even alongside the universal one.

The second relates to Ochs' description of the transmission process. I agree with Ochs that the transmission process is "helter skelter" but I am less sanguine than she that it will continue to work in the future. Will these sensibilities continue to be passed down through the generations at all, much less as identifiably Jewish? Mordecai Kaplan wrote with a sense of urgency in the early part of the last century, convinced that unless we rebuilt Jewish communal life we would hardly stand a chance of passing our values on through the generations. I don't believe we are in any less of a crisis today. Indeed, the crisis has intensified. While Ochs distinguishes her sensibilities from *halakha*, she claims that the sensibilities "have some of the felt impact of law." Yet the whole question of norms and how the non-Orthodox Jewish world will relate to them, or how a community can be sustained without them, is left unaddressed.

Third, I want to explore the theological question that is not of concern in Ochs' anthropological perspective. I will do this by looking at two of the sensibilities–"*tzelem elohim*" and "*yesh tikvah*"–as examples of "deep metaphors" as understood by Don Browning. [1] I will suggest that we should pay serious attention to recent work in the human sciences. Developments in the fields of evolutionary psychology, cognitive neuroscience and mind-body medicine offer new challenges and new opportunities for theology. Biologically based social science is offering the culture its own deep metaphors and theologians will need to enter into a "critical conversation."

My first question relates to the choice of sensibilities. It is not entirely clear to me that the values suggested by Ochs are embraced by Jews more than by individuals from other traditional religious cultures. For example, as an anthropologist Ochs knows that *havdalah* and *zechut avot* characterize any culture that holds on to its ritual and mythic past. In the case of some of the values discussed, I think other traditions may actually give more

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[1] Don Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987).

weight to the value than Judaism does. For example, Ochs counts *teshuva* as a Jewish value, but in my experience, forgiveness (particularly the part about forgiving others) is more core to the culture of Christians than Jews.

Furthermore, Ochs does not mention Jewish values that (I am guessing) are less appealing to her. For example, I would argue that there is a strong cultural Jewish tradition that values the intellect over other modes of being and knowing. One way this plays out in health care decisions is that Jews are more likely than others to abort a fetus with Down syndrome and are less likely to adopt a child with mental disabilities. As technology develops which allows us greater knowledge and choice regarding genetic make-up, this may be a value we want to examine critically, despite its Jewish pedigree.

Most important, however, is that Ochs' list of ten sensibilities is heavily weighted toward the universalistic dimension of Jewish tradition. Not one of the sensibilities Ochs highlights comes from the particularistic strand of Jewish sacred texts, communal customs, liturgical ideals, etc. (her #6, "be a *mensch*," hedges by talking about showing compassion to all Jews and *also* to all people.) Aside from including a Hebrew or Yiddish word or phrase, each and every one of these "Jewish sensibilities" could also be found in other traditions. When I selected a Quaker private school for my children's secondary education, I read over the list of "testimonies" which they planned to witness as part of the education and concluded that it was completely acceptable to me. It sounded very much like Ochs' list.

Yet, surely, the very first sensibility, "*havdalah*," is only partially described by Ochs when she omits the strong Jewish tendency to make distinctions between Jews and non-Jews (as one of the phrases of the *Havdalah* service reminds us). There is a whole complex of values that Jews transmit, sensibilities that are passed on in the same manner as Ochs's ten, that involve this distinction. These include special loyalty to the welfare of Jewish people, practices that create separation between Jews and non-Jews, maintenance of boundaries around Jewish identity, support of the State of Israel, perpetuation of Jewish culture, preference for in marrying. It is only when one adds these sensibilities to the mix that one understands the conflicts that are dealt with by individual Jews and communities when

they engage in decision making. In Ochs's own example, the question of the *aliyah* to the Torah for a non-Jewish parent is only an issue if there is a sensibility in conflict with *shalom bayit*, that is, Jewish identity boundaries. This is precisely where things get interesting!

The following story will illustrate my point. Anne was a fellow congregant who came to me seeking rabbinic advice. She was a Jew from an assimilated background who had recently been "born again" as a passionately involved Reconstructionist. She had joined a synagogue because of her husband's interest in Judaism, but had remained aloof from the project for many years. Her battle with cancer brought her in contact with the "*gemilut hesed*" function of the community, and, in the last year of her life, she found herself increasingly involved in prayer, study and spiritual practice, especially involving healing. Now, it was time to make decisions concerning her death. To Anne's surprise, it now mattered a great deal that she make a choice which not only met her needs but that was in some sense a proper "Jewish" choice. She wanted help in making a decision.

Her parents had been cremated and her entire family was more comfortable with cremation. She was personally drawn in that direction as well. In fact, she had an instinctive fear of burial. She asked me for a "Jewish perspective" on the question of burial vs. cremation. The classic liberal version of this process would go something like this: 1) examine the Jewish tradition 2) ascertain what the individual really wants to do from a personal and modern perspective 3) conclude that the past has a vote but not a veto and that the individual is ultimately autonomous 4) set Judaism aside for this decision.

Compared to that process, Ochs' sensibilities approach has much to recommend it. It allows the decision to be within the Jewish conversation, as broadly defined. In this case, I was able to share with her some of the sensibilities Ochs presents as Jewish and allow Anne to see the Jewishness of her desire for cremation, how Jewish sensibilities might give rise to and support that option. Nevertheless, as this example makes clear, something more is needed. Even as I shared the Jewish sensibilities with Anne, I

knew that there were strong Jewish reasons for burial rather than cremation, but I did not find those sensibilities listed.

When I added them, I was able to engage with her in a Reconstructionist values-based decision-making process.[2] This process assumes that Jewish values (or sensibilities, if you will) are not always congruent. Anne was clearly needing to juggling values. All the values in play were Jewish values and she would have to find a solution which could honor as many of them as possible. Some of the values that spoke to cremation included *shalom bayit* (her husband and children would be happier), *kavod av va'em* (this respected her parents' ways), *briyah* (in this case, her mental health), *bal tashchit* (ecological arguments for cremation). There were also values which really mattered to her that spoke to burial: *k'lal yisrael* (unity and survival of the Jewish people), *kehilah* (commitment to community), and *brit* (covenanting among members of the Jewish community). Ultimately, while the options in this case were mutually exclusive, she began to experience the wholeness of her own value perspective and knew that she would make a holy decision. She was able to consider unconventional options such as *taharah* [process for preparing the deceased for burial; literally, 'purification'] followed by cremation.

In short, Ochs' approach is helpful in allowing us to name important contemporary sensibilities as Jewish, rather than setting up Jewish tradition as an alternative to some other, more attractive and authoritative truth. In that setup, the liberal Jew will rarely end up opting for the "Jewish" path. The sensibilities approach keeps Judaism in the conversation in a positive way. Yet, I would argue that it avoids some of the real challenges of Jewish values-based decision making by neglecting to acknowledge the particularistic sensibilities. When those are added, one

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[2] See David A. Teutsch, "Values-Based Decision Making," *Reconstructionist*, Spring 2001, 22-28; For a list of values and an example of VBDM used for "Kashrut" see Teutsch, *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Introduction, Attitudes, Values and Beliefs,* (Wyncote, PA: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Press, 2000). For an example of values-based decision-making shaping social policy, see *Homosexuality and Judaism: The Reconstructionist Position. The Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality* (Wyncote, PA: Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot,1993).

has a helpful way to begin to think about challenging choices in a holy and Jewishly informed way.

My second concern relates to the method of transmission Ochs describes as working to preserve these values through the generations. How were these sensibilities transmitted in the past and is that transmission process changing? The problem, of course, is how to make any of this have an impact on the lives of individual Jews who no longer inhabit organic Jewish communities. Mordecai Kaplan's dream of reconstituting such a community has not happened.

Of course, Kaplan saw that coming. In a poignant entry in his diary in 1930 he wrote,

> I feel like a polar bear on an ice floe that is drifting into warmer zones as he watches with growling impotence the steady dwindling of his home.[3]

That home, the organic Jewish community, was indeed dwindling. While Peter Berger spoke of "the sacred canopy," Kaplan referred to it as "a roof over the head." In an unpublished 1950 diary entry he wrote,

> The great value that the religious tradition had for mankind lay not so much in the specific beliefs and practices that it prescribed as in the general orientation that it provided. As a result of such orientation human beings felt at home in the world. Men struggled and suffered but they had, so to speak, a roof over their heads.

Given that our synagogues are not 24/7 communities but rather (in Robert Bellah's term) "lifestyle enclaves," what does it mean to talk about Torah as a way of life? In an important article, Hayim Soloveitchik argued that traditional Judaism's characteristic mode of transmission was mimetic, "imbibed from parents and friends, and patterned on conduct regularly observed in home and street, synagogue and school."

It is just this mimetic learning which Ochs also relies upon in her understanding of Jewish sensibilities. Yet, Solovetichik observed that in recent years mimetic learning has broken down in the Orthodox world and that it precisely this breakdown which has led to the greater reliance

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[3] Mel Scult, *Communings of the Spirit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 394.

on text and legal norms and to far greater stringency in those communities.[4]

What then shall we say of the non-Orthodox world where the home is likely to have only one Jewish parent and where the street and school are not necessarily Jewish at all?[5] Might not liberal Jews, as well, need to turn to text and to more stringent norms in the absence of a vital mimetic system? Again, let me offer a narrative from the community in which I have led my adult religious life, a Reconstructionist congregation in Philadelphia.

Barry Schwartz, a psychology professor at Swarthmore, included a discussion of this community in his book *The Costs of Living: How Market Freedom Erodes the Best Things in Life*. Barry Schwartz was a self-declared "pediatric Jew," someone who remembered he was Jewish only when his oldest child was old enough for a Jewish education. Indeed, once the younger one was past thirteen, Barry fully anticipated forgetting it once again. Then something unanticipated happened. He became excited by the vision of a young Reconstructionist rabbi who told him that Judaism was about activism on behalf of social justice. As he wrote, "Whether being a good Jew required this, as my rabbi contended, I could not say. But it did seem to me that being a good American required it."

No sooner did the new congregation with its progressive political vision get off the ground than questions began to emerge. In order to compensate the owners of the building in which we met, congregants had to each spend one afternoon a year cleaning the bathrooms. Some people wanted to dispense their obligations on Saturday, even as their fellow congregants were finishing up their Kiddush, and when the rabbi said, "You just can't clean bathrooms on Shabbat!" they replied, "Why not?"

Why not, indeed? Who's to say what feels holy to me? For Barry, it was a startling realization that in his search to fill the moral vacuum he

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[4] Hayim Soleveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Summer 1994).

[5] According to the 2000 Jewish Population Study, 45% of Jewish college students today have only one born Jewish parent.

felt in American society he had landed in a community which was going to challenge his fundamental sense of autonomy, the distinction between public and private, and his freedom. Barry began to wonder,

> Was our community supposed to become the center of our lives–spiritually, ethically, politically and even socially and economically? Did congregants have special responsibilities and obligations? If, by some chance, our community was able to agree on what kinds of worship, of diet, of sexual practices, of living arrangements, of political involvements were "kosher" were the members of the community supposed to abide by those laws? If they did not, could they be publicly sanctioned? There was a strong tendency in our community to resist any tendency to total commitment. *On the other hand* [emphasis added] there was a very deep longing in people to belong to something, something that would accept, nurture and protect those who made commitments to it. What many of us did not know at first and slowly came to realize was that we would surely have to sacrifice some of our individualism in our public lives and even in our private lives as well.[6]

Let me take up the narrative now in my own voice. As we struggled with these questions, we came upon a fundamental ambivalence within Reconstructionist thought. On the one hand, Kaplan said that folkways ought to be maintained only if they "do not involve an unreasonable amount of time, effort and expense."[7] On the other hand, he recognized that "the program of a movement must ask much and give much."[8] So, when the rabbi suggested that Shabbat should be the day of worship, learning, and family and tried to establish Hebrew School on Saturdays, congregants had to face hard choices. Soccer games were on Saturdays. Would being Jewish mean actually giving up a staple of suburban childhood?

Barry, who is well-known for his work on the "paradox of choice" (turns out more choice does not make us happier, says the psychologist),

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[6] Barry Schwartz, *The Costs of Living: How Market Freedom Erodes the Best Things in Life* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1994), 329.

[7] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: toward a reconstruction of American-Jewish life*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1994), 439.

[8] *Judaism as a Civilization*, 112.

was actually quite open to clipping his wings in order to experience the gains of community.[9] So were some others. Autonomy turned out not to be the biggest issue. The problem was that the sensibilities around Shabbat as a day of rest were largely foreign. For many congregants (the non-Jewish partners as well as Jews who had been alienated from the community for many years, if not their whole lives), the problem was not one of issues of autonomy but rather, just as Kaplan had predicted, the loss of the organic community. It was only when we began to live Shabbat as a group, in part by the bold decision to hold Shabbat school, that the community began to move forward.

In the absence of a milieu in which to live the sensibilities, Jews may continue to live out many of the values Ochs describes, but they will not identify them with their being Jewish. In fact, it is precisely those particularistic values and sensibilities that were not on Ochs's list which will become identified in the minds of younger people as "the essence of Judaism."

Several years ago, I collaborated with a group of social workers to create a "Youth Mitzvah Corps." We wanted to provide an opportunity for young people to volunteer in nursing homes, homeless shelters and tutoring programs as part of their bar and bat mitzvah training. Before designing the program, we visited a local suburban conservative synagogue and asked the adults and children what information and skills young people needed to acquire around the time of their bar mitzvah to become "good adult Jews."

As Ochs would have predicted, the parents answered that they wanted their children to learn "how to be a *mensch*." Being a good Jew meant, in their minds, "making the world a better place." The children, however, had a completely different response. While these twelve-year-olds may, in fact, have been *mensches* of the highest order, they did not think that their virtues were connected to being Jews. In fact, they believed that to be a good Jew you needed to "know how to chant Torah and recite

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[9] Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why Less is More* (New York: Ecco, 2004).

prayers," "read Hebrew," "give money to Israel," and, from the more cynical among them, "purchase the right clothes and know the right dances for b'nai mitzvah parties." Perhaps that informal transmission of the universalistic sensibilities which Ochs describes may be breaking down. Even if the children are acquiring those sensibilities, they are not identifying them as related to Jewish identity. Many parents told us they did not need the Youth Mitzvah Corps as their kids already had volunteer opportunities, since "community service" is now a requirement in some public school systems.

Jewish educators face the challenge of limited time and much to accomplish. Here are two vignettes that illustrate the problem:

ONE: On the weekend of the Columbia space disaster my nine-year-old nephew attended his Reform Sunday School where the students were asked to write letters to the family of the Israeli astronaut who lost his life. When he returned home, his mother mused aloud, "Why would the students write letters to just the Israeli family? Why would they not write letters to all the families that lost their loved ones?" It was clear to me that in two hours a week of Jewish education, the Jewish teacher must attempt to instill the sensibility that is *not* being taught the rest of the week. The children in public school would be encouraged to write letters to all the families. Jewish education must attempt (often in a tiny window of opportunity) to instill a sensibility that is quite foreign to American culture–a special concern for the tribe.

TWO: A friend sent her child to a Reform Sunday School where each week they learned about *tikkun olam*. Her husband, who was raised Catholic and who had agreed to raise the children as Jews, finally asked one day, "Why do they need to go to Hebrew School to learn they are opposed to the war and poverty? Don't they already know that? Where is the value added? When are they going to learn about the Bible?"

Jewish supplementary education, in my view, must teach particularistic sensibilities in an increasingly assimilated environment, and at the same time teach the sensibilities Ochs rightly calls Jewish and–here is the key point–help students to identify them with Judaism and Jewish sources. I believe we ought to do more to provide real life

experiences which both instill these sensibilities and provide skills for realizing them in daily life *in a Jewish milieu*.

We must teach a sense of Jewish peoplehood as well as the more universalistic sensibilities while *explicitly* connecting the latter to Jewish life through rooting them in Jewish text, tradition and *communal experiences*. Ultimately none of this works unless we build a rich Jewish culture which can serve as a medium for transmitting these sensibilities. If we do not live maximal Jewish lives, young American Jews will develop their humanistic values in their primary environments and see Judaism increasingly as only concerned with the particularistic values of group identity and perpetuation.

Finally, if our sensibilities are rooted not in absolute truths but rather in deep metaphors, how are these metaphors challenged and/or supported by the thinking and language of contemporary science? Eugene Borowitz has written for decades now about his concern for *amkha* and "their need for a new plausibility- structure for the felt duty we call Jewish ethics." The plausibility of our deep metaphors is related to our ability to enter into a critical conversation with the human sciences which have always implicitly, and more recently explicitly, offered their own metaphors and visions of the good life.

Don Browning has written that deep metaphors, often embellished into myths and narratives, provide the visional level of practical moral thinking.[10] As he explains it, when we try to determine what we should do, we ask what kind of world we live in. In answering this question, we resort to metaphorical language. It is his contention that "there are deep metaphors and implicit principles of obligation in the modern psychologies."[11] In other words, we are all seeking ways to order our inner lives and to decide how to act in the world. We do so in part through sensibilities shaped by the metaphors of Judaism and in part by those of

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[10] Op. cit. Browning, 9.

[11] Ibid., 17.

the human sciences. Again, Browning puts it well when he says, "modern individuals live on scraps."[12]

Ochs makes reference to two "master scraps"–*tzelem elohim* and *yesh tikvah*–which are fundamental to the theology of many contemporary Reconstructionists. In a course I taught this past year at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, we revisited Kaplan's writings in light of recent work in the social sciences which might best be characterized as "deepening Darwinism." After a semester of reading, we began to see that while Kaplan grappled with the social science of his day, the task needed to be taken up again for our generation. Our spiritual experiences are a new kind of challenge.

Mordecai Kaplan's writings concerning God were, as several authors have shown, inconsistent and ultimately confusing. While denying aspiration toward metaphysics, he often made claims that could only be described as metaphysical, and his natural God was quite different than the God he sometimes wrote about as "transnatural."[13] When it came to values, however, his position was much clearer and more consistent. Torah could be understood as being composed of universal ethical values and of culturally specific vessels (sancta) for transmitting them. The latter, in Kaplan's view, were human creations, the highest and noblest of our cultural products, but culturally relative. The former, however, were not human projections but rather built into the universe. We do not need the Jewish people to know that justice is a good thing. We need the Jewish people to give us the holiday of Rosh Hashanah to embody it for ourselves and our children. Justice itself is a universal truth.

This view gave a more affirming and positive take on ritual and traditions (what Kaplan called folkways) than the Reform had offered at that point, but, in contrast to Conservative Judaism, clearly broke with any notion that ritual could be understood as law. The truth of the universal

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[12] Ibid., 1.

[13] See, for example, Jacob Staub, "Kaplan and Process Theology," in *The American Judaism of Mordecai Kaplan*, eds. Emanuel S. Goldsmith, Mel Scult, and Robert M. Seltzer (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1990).

spiritual values was not at issue. He found it easy to make claims about the "law of spiritual selection" (as opposed to the law of natural selection),[14] "the eventual triumph of justice over brute force,"[15] and the "recognition in us of a vital strength that links us with the inexhaustible life of the universe, with the 'life of the worlds,' with God."[16] Kaplan reinterpreted *tzelem elohim* in terms of those aspects of human nature which he saw as reflecting transcendent spiritual values. Hopelessness was "the true meaning of damnation," and, by extension, hope was an important redemptive reality.[17]

In the course we examined two areas of research: evolutionary psychology (originally called sociobiology) and cognitive neuroscience with its offshoot "neurotheology." Both of these fields are essentially materialist in their understanding of the world. As Browning would predict, both offer a series of metaphors and have implicit and often explicit implications for an understanding of obligation.

Evolutionary psychologists such as E.O. Wilson, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Pinker, Daniel Dennett, and William Sloan Wilson take Darwin's concept of natural selection and apply it more thoroughly to the understanding of human nature than what they call the "standard social science model," which they accuse of overemphasizing culture at the expense of biology.[18] Darwin's theory of evolution is not in controversy here, despite the persistence of creationist views in certain religious circles. That argument has been concluded in academia, and liberal Judaism, along with its Christian counterparts, has long since caught its breath and moved on from that challenge. Rather, the questions being

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[14] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Basic Values in Jewish Religion*, (New York, NY: Reconstructionist Press, 1957) [reprinted from *The Future of the American Jew*, 1948] 4.

[15] Ibid., 43.

[16] Ibid., 19.

[17]Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew* (New York, NY: Macmillan Co., 1948), 266.

[18] For a good introduction to the field see Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: Why We Are the Way We Are: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

raised have to do with the extent to which theories of natural selection can be applied to human behavior and human nature. There is a debate going on of some fury within the academic world over how far Darwin can go in explaining human psychology. Those of us interested in values might well attend to this debate.

The evolutionary psychologists would accuse much of liberal Jewish theological writing on human nature of presuming that people are far more malleable than they are. In fact, in their view, human nature and behavior are shaped significantly, if not decisively, by humans having evolved through natural selection, the product of a lengthy competitive struggle to survive and reproduce within a setting of scarcity and danger. They see Darwin's ideas, when fully applied as, in the words of Daniel Dennett, "universal acid;" that is, "it eats through just about every traditional concept."[19] This may or may not be true, but it is certainly the case that this line of thinking offers a different set of deep metaphors and theory of obligation than traditional Judaism or Kaplan's reconstruction in terms of "spiritual values." The ethics emerging from this field tends to be utilitarian and the metaphors reflect and support a capitalist society.

Evolutionary psychologists have advanced a variety of theories to explain the emergence and persistence of religion. Even mystical experience can be deconstructed in an entirely material framework. Which brings us to a second and related area of research–cognitive neuroscience. Andrew Newberg, a radiologist at the University of Pennsylvania, asked Tibetan monks and Franciscan nuns to engage in meditation and he did sophisticated SPECT (Single Photon Emission Computer-Tomography) studies of their brains. At the moments when they reported transcendent experience, he observed a distinct decline in neuronal activity in the posterior superior parietal lobe, the region of our brain that locates us in space and alerts us to boundaries. The fluid sense of communion reported by mystics across cultures now has a biological reference point in the

[19] Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 63.

dulling of spatial perception. A person having a religious experience does, indeed, become "one with the universe."

The authors have coined a culturally neutral term, Absolute Unitary Being, and they play with the idea that this kind of research can lead to "neurotheology" and even that they may be taking a "photograph of God."[20] While the authors appear to encourage the religious apologists to use this line of research to their advantage, it seems to also carry quite the opposite implication. If we are to base our values on experience and our experience is actually a brain event with very little to say about the world outside, why do we persist in our claims concerning divine or absolute values? This line of research does nothing, in fact, to challenge the basic materialism at the core of today's neuroscience, a materialism which challenges the whole notion of soul (or mind) as something different from brain.

These bodies of research challenge both *tzelem elohim* and *yesh tikvah*. First, evolutionary psychologists have interesting insights to offer concerning the persistence of gender inequality, violence, tribalism and other traits which we prefer to believe are–or should be–on the wane in human nature. There is no reason to assume a master plan or anything like a hopeful conclusion to this process. Indeed, there are good reasons to fear the opposite. Second, they can explain behaviors that we think of as our "higher selves" in terms of the functions of our selfish genes. Finally, the whole question of "*nefesh*" or soul seems to elude us. At which point in the human evolution from animals do we begin to speak of the *tzelem elohim*? (Corresponding ethical questions: How much pain is permissible to inflict on primates in a lab? At which point does the embryo become *tzelem elohim*? When does the image of God fade out at the end of life?) If mystical

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[20] Andrew Newberg and Eugene d'Aquili, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2001). In related research, not yet completed, Mario Beauregard of the Universite de Montreal is using MRI, PET and EEG to "identify underlying circuitry and neuroelectirical and neurochemical correlates of the "mystical union with God" as achieved by Carmelite nuns." Metanexus Institute on Religion and Science, "The Spiritual Transformation Scientific Research Program," 2004.

experience is seen as an event in the brain what does that do to the values traditionally derived from those experiences?

At the same time, the biological study of human beings and human nature may take us in other and more positive directions. Although Kaplan wrote so much about hope, as someone committed to the best science of his day, he would not have applied hope to something as specific as praying for a sick individual. Along with most liberal religionists of his time, he eschewed a view of healing that was other than strictly medical. Indeed, when I was trained at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in the late seventies, no one would think teaching us how to offer prayers for healing the sick as part of Reconstructionist services or pastoral care.

The introduction of such spiritual modalities into an understanding of health is now commonplace in liberal circles. This is not only due to an understanding of how welcome metaphor can be in situations where a newly humbled science reaches its limits, but also because science itself has changed. In a recent book, *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness*, physician/research scientist Jerome Groopman relates a series of compelling narratives concerning the role of hope in the care of individuals with cancer. In the final chapters he reviews a tiny portion of the voluminous and growing literature on mind/body connection, on the placebo effect, on endorphins and enkephalins and how what we believe can have a real influence on what happens in our bodies.[21] So, while there may be no "ghost in the machine" (i.e. a transcendent soul that is different from a material body, brain, etc.), there is a new understanding emerging from within science of the connections between the different parts of that machine-thoughts, emotions, body- which may be fruitful for theology.

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[21] Jerome E. Groopman, *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness* (New York: Random House, 2004), 161-207.

Thus, Ochs' sensibilities are part of a full vision of human life which in some ways is at odds with other visions emerging from the study of human nature today. On the other hand, there are areas of scientific research which may offer support for some of that vision. In either case, we need to be mindful that the metaphors will only continue to sustain a theory of obligation if those who use them remain in serious dialogue with science and the culture of our time.