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THE DIALECTICAL SELF: BETWEEN LIBERAL AUTONOMY AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

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If we are intended to be free beings, why do our freedoms often put us into direct conflict with either the divine or natural order of things? Why do most of us experience a deep tension between those parts of ourselves that are drawn to a scientific explanation for everything and those parts of our being that yearn for the spiritual, the poetic, the ethical and the sublime? Dr. Hashkes, in her rigorous and insightful essay "Autonomy, Community, and the Jewish Self," immediately engages her readers with these intellectual, spiritual, and emotional tensions, which have befuddled religious and philosophical thinkers for ages. Dr. Hashkes' essay captures the rich dialectical tension between those parts of ourselves that strive for self- reliance and self-regulation (auto-nomos) versus those parts of ourselves that wish to be imbricated within living communities that often revolve around boundaries, restrictions, and sometimes a surrendering of our autonomy. In her essay Dr. Hashkes sums up this dialectical tension in the following terms:

> Modern individuals seem to be committed to their right of self-determination, their free and open-ended creative thinking, and their liberal, autonomous practices. Why then would they voluntarily surrender their freedom to a religious community with its determinative power over the individual and restrictive scope of ideas and customs?[1]

Dr. Hashkes starts by proposing what is perhaps the fundamental question for anyone who identifies with a religious community: given the high premium on individual autonomy and freedom of expression within our modern culture, how do those of us who wish to be both critically minded intellectuals and, at the same time, remain sensitive to the appeal of religious identities, simultaneously draw on liberal political philosophy in order to justify voluntary adherence to religious structures of authority as an equally legitimate expression of self-determination? Additionally, given the centrality of bourgeois and avant-garde ideals of self-fashioning in the modern age, is it really possible to accept religious constrictions on individual freedoms as an equal expression of autonomy? There are no simple answers to these dilemmas, but my goal here is to reflect on how we can both affirm our religious selves as an expression of our autonomy and self-determination while simultaneously maintaining the traditional liberal distinction between the private and public sphere as the best model for avoiding a return to the religious wars that plagued our past and are currently threatening to further ignite political strife around the world.

Most citizens of the modern world are confronted with what Peter Berger famously referred to as the "heretical imperative" of having to exist within, and sometimes choose between, several simultaneous, competing worldviews of meaning and final vocabularies.[2] For Berger and other sociologists of religion, the modern world is constituted around an ideology of choice and autonomy such that even those who remain loyal to orthodox religious worldviews are still participating in an imperative of choice. In other words, structurally, there is no exit.

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[1] Hashkes, section 1.

[2] Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1979).

The problem with a purely sociological analyses of religious existence, however, is that often there is a disconnect between social structures, individual behavior, and consciousness. This makes discussion over the nature of what counts as a genuine experience or expression of personal autonomy all the more difficult. In order to avoid the religious wars of our past, liberal political philosophy has largely agreed that the best way to maximize freedom of consciousness and personal agency is to not concern ourselves with the nature of individual experience or beliefs, but rather to just focus on actions that are clearly discernible and have the potential to cause harm or negatively affect the freedoms of other citizens. This has traditionally made it easier to maximize freedoms by accepting a diversity of religious beliefs, so long as personal actions in the public arena remain in compliance with the civic norms established by the state.

Dr. Hashkes, however, takes her analysis the next step beyond the realm of actions. She continues her critique in the following terms:

> These accounts don't capture the *experience* of individuals within religious groups with respect to the tension between freedom and determination, and they in effect leave out an essential piece of this puzzle. What does it mean for a religious individual's sense of freedom to choose to join, or continue to affiliate with, a religious community? What is the *consciousness* that accompanies the engagement in such a community?[3] (Emphasis mine.)

Dr. Hashkes adds to the debate the question of how we should evaluate the "experience" and "consciousness" of those who voluntarily choose to be part of religious communities. By focusing on "psychological, anthropological and sociological frameworks," Dr. Hashkes suggests that part of the bias of these "frameworks" are presumably the implicit Enlightenment/liberal critique that voluntary submission to a religious community categorically involves a constriction of individual autonomy and self-determination. The task she sets for herself throughout the rest of the essay is to demonstrate why—contrary to most social scientific

[3] Hashkes, section 1.

disciplines and liberal political philosophy—the "consciousness" and/or experience of individuals who "voluntarily surrender their freedom to a religious community" are expressing just as much autonomy and self-determination, if not more so, as those who resist the heteronomy and particularism of being inscribed within the cultural norms of a religious community.

Dr. Hashkes concludes her essay with a celebration of the best of our cosmopolitan liberal pragmatic heritage. In doing so, she answers in part the dilemma of how to both subscribe to the structures of authority that she correctly identifies as defining the particularity of Jewish identity, while at the same time affirming multiple discourses of personal meaning for all who struggle to reconcile their religious identity with modernity. Her essay concludes with the following statement:

> Equipped with a sense of transcendence and our communal set of symbols, we are all lawmakers, we are all reasoners, and we are all autonomous, as Jewish selves, scientific selves, or ethical selves. The crucial point is that being part of a communal discourse is a condition of our ability to exercise thought and therefore freedom, not a hindrance to it... Modernity's gift is affording us the ability to stand within more than one set of symbols, to belong to more than one community. ... We don't need to synthesize, we can stand in parallel worlds, and in this respect we have multiple selves.[4] (Emphasis mine.)

In contrast to the ideals of "monadological individualism" that have defined the romantic and existentialist traditions in which authenticity is affirmed through distancing the self from the collective, Dr. Hashkes presents a communitarian defense based on the premise that "being part of a communal discourse is a condition for our ability to exercise thought and therefore freedom, not a hindrance to it."[5] According to Dr. Hashkes,

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[4] Hashkes, section 6.

[5] Ibid. See Alain Renault, *The Era of the Individual: A Contribution to a History of Subjectivity,* trans. M. B. DeBevoise and Franklin Phillip (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), and Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion,* trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999). Also see Jeffrey R. Stout, *Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1987), and *Democracy and Tradition: New Forum Books*. (Princeton,

participation in a religious community is simply an extension of our general need for a "communal discourse" that provides meaningful signifiers from which our self-understanding emerges. The great thing about living in a democratic liberal society is that we are often given the maximal amount of freedom possible to choose between competing narratives on our own terms. From a theoretically perspective, there would appear to be very little wrong with affirming the greatest variety of discourses possible in order to expand the choices of content and meaning utilized for our identity projects. In a society committed to pluralism Dr. Hashkes' affirmation of "parallel worlds"[6] can be read as yet one more expression of what it means to enjoy individual rights and tolerance.

Some find this cosmopolitan view of the self as drawing on a variety of discourses for meaning and purpose exhilarating and liberating, while others find it threatening and degenerate. For those of us who choose to embrace this vision of the cosmopolitan self, we affirm our autonomy by remaining open and committed to disparate discourses that often conflict. In one sphere we may be attracted to participating in the performance of a religious identity predicated on social hierarchies and authoritarian ideals, while in another sphere we may find ourselves attracted to performing avant-garde discourses that seek to challenge these very same ideals of absolute boundaries and authoritarian structures. At one moment we like the prediction and control that science gives us, and at other moments we want the poetry of the sublime that binds us to others in moments of communal ecstasy, or brings us into peaceful moments of quiet and awe as sunlight dances on tree leaves, as stars twinkle on a clear summer night, or as we witness a child being born. On some days we may want to affirm a special relationship and heteronomous subservience to God as a source of power, while on other days of the week we are happy to enjoy the rights and privileges of living in a liberal society premised on

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NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Daniel Frank, ed., *Autonomy and Judaism: The Individual and the Community in Jewish Philosophical Thought* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992).

[6] Ibid.

the idea that, with few exceptions, these religious vocabularies and structures of authority have no bearing on the public arena.

Admittedly, there might be something schizophrenic about trying to allow all these disparate discourses to speak to different parts of ourselves. Most people who partake in the modern world and have some level of religious identity have experienced a degree of this kind of schizophrenia. I believe Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan was addressing this schizophrenia and tension when he wrote about the "cultural hyphenisms" of Jews and Catholics within liberal democratic societies.[7] Depending on the richness, freedom, and cosmopolitan inclination of our culture, we experience and mediate the world through a variety of different discourses. Part of being a self is to be engaged in a process of connecting all these disparate sensibilities and narratives together, but often this quest for wholeness is incomplete and sometimes impossible to hold together. Just as we are often beset with conflicting and confusing emotions, so too we are often forced to adjudicate between conflicting narratives over how to best flourish and stumble towards happiness.[8]

Progressives and liberals are absolutely right, however, to voice concerns for the type of experience and/or consciousness generated through cultural practices that center on the veneration of authoritarian structures that have the potential to adversely affect an individual's sense of autonomy. I may experience moments of prayer in which I express my deference to the Lord and imagine myself living out a life of obedience to the highest principles that govern the cosmos, but the type of "autonomy" expressed through the freedom to engage in prayer that draws upon heteronomous discourse is qualifiedly different than the autonomy I enjoy

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[7] See Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Towards a Reconstruction of Jewish Life* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 217.

[8] In synagogue I might feel comfortable with venerating ancient social hierarchies—for example, allowing certain communal blessings to only be done by the descendants from the ancient Kohenite priesthood – but in the civil society at large I would strongly resist any attempt to give this very same priesthood special privileges with regard to civil affairs or impose their privileges on anyone who does not voluntarily desire to recognize the history of their privileged spiritual status.

as a citizen of a liberal democratic society. This is a crucial distinction that can all too easily be overlooked in our attempts to celebrate diversity and bring religious discourse back to the table in our post-Enlightenment era. Thankfully, the hermeneutics of suspicion developed by thinkers like Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud gave us terms like "illusions, resentment, opiates, bad-faith, compensation, wish-fulfillment" and "false consciousness" so that any intellectual has to be uncomfortable with the fact that religious discourses often historically functioned to sanctify ideologies of social hierarchies, power, and inequalities. These thinkers continue to force us to ask hard questions, such as why in one sphere we may be willing to tolerate discourses that seem to limit our autonomy while in other spheres we might fight against these very same encumbrances. I would even go so far as to say that critics of religion have forced us to wrestle with our traditions, and in fact, through the process of struggle, we've been able to create healthier expressions of religious identity that can overcome the "bad conscience" (as Nietzsche puts it) of our ancestors.

Nevertheless, as long as an individual's deference to a pre-modern priestly caste, for example, does not affect their conduct in the public arena, our liberal social contract of maintaining a standard of tolerance still remains the best assurance for enhancing the freedom of consciousness within a largely diverse and multi-ethnic society. For some, it is a great source of consternation that the vocabularies used in the private sphere are not standardized within the public arena, while others are more reconciled to the compromise of not insisting that all the vocabularies they privately share be equally valued in the liberal culture around them.

To be a Jew willing to live with this comprise, I propose, is to have a polyphonic cosmopolitan Jewish self, i.e. a "Jewish self" attuned to the dialectical tension of being open to the symphony of competing voices while simultaneously holding out the hope that one day (perhaps when the messiah comes and discourse itself becomes replaced by direct and authentic communication) all the various narratives that we have constructed to give us meaning and hope (i.e. religion), as well as

prediction and control over our environment (i.e. science), will someday be brought together into a unified whole.[9] I believe Borowitz held this view when he described "dialectical autonomy" as "a life of freedom-exercised-in-Covenant."[10] A healthy fluctuation can exist between being imbricated within a living tradition and community while also recognizing that its vocabulary of meaning need not be the only final vocabulary for both one's self and others. I imagine a *polyphonic Jewish self*, capable of embracing the dialectics of accepting a "post-Babel" world in which multiple vocabularies thrive, while also retaining the hope for greater synthesis and eventual wholeness.

I consider myself mostly within this post-modernist neo-pragmatic camp that seeks to extend a degree of cosmopolitan liberal charity to most discourses used for constructing an identity, both religious and secular.[11] Therefore, I completely share Dr. Hashkes' affirmation of our liberal freedoms from having to always synthesize our multiple selves, or having to provide a rational justification for how to make disparate vocabularies of meaning cohere. Lately, however, I have become more ambivalent about extending this neo-pragmatic charity to all discourses. In the rest of this essay I will focus my comments on two main concerns:

1. Hashkes may be right that "we are all lawmakers, we are all reasoners, and we are all autonomous, as Jewish selves, scientific

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[9] See also Israel Knohl, *The Divine Symphony: The Bible's Many Voices* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003).

[10] See Eugene Borowitz, *Reclaiming the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 288. Also see Eugene Borowitz et. al., *Reviewing the Covenant: Eugene B. Borowitz and the Postmodern Revival of Jewish Theology,* ed. Peter Ochs (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

[11] See Gary B. Madison and Marty Fairbarn, *The Ethics of Postmodernity: Current Trends in Continental Thought* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Borowitz, *Our Way to a Postmodern Judaism: Three Lectures* (University of San Francisco, Swig Judaic Studies Program, 1993); Steven Kepnes ed., *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); and Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs, and Robert Gibbs, *Reasoning after Revelation: Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001).

selves, or ethical selves," but the question I have is the following: *should we consider all discourses of self-determination and autonomy as equivalent?* Should we equally value all discourses that give expression to our self-determination and autonomy? What about false- consciousness? Shouldn't we be worried that some discourses and cultures give us a false sense of autonomy, or manipulate our sense of self-determination so that certain authoritarian structures can remain intact?

2. What are the practical consequences of placing the narratives that inform our "Jewish selves, scientific selves, or ethical selves" on the same level? For the sake of the general good, doesn't the idea of citizenship in liberal democracies depend on individuals privileging certain discourses in the public arena? Shouldn't my obligations as a citizen to both tolerate diversity while striving to forge a more perfect union through discourses that promote solidarity with those different from me take precedent over the idiosyncratic discourses I draw upon for personal identity and meaning? Consequently, shouldn't we demand that when individuals participate in the public arena, their "scientific selves" should take precedent over their "religious selves"?

The Cosmopolitan Self and Its Discontents

What counts as a legitimate expression of autonomy and freedom? What does it mean to choose to be an "encumbered self" (Sandel) where the expression of self-determination and autonomy are employed precisely to affirm its negation?[12] In more contemporary sensationalist terms that have seized upon public debate, does wearing a burka, for example, or other religious strategies for subverting public gaze, qualify as a form of self-determination equal to voting, acquiring an education, or

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[12] See Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Idem., *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998); and Idem., *Liberalism and Its Critics* (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

exercising the right to personal sexual expression? For liberal religious thinkers like myself, I may agree with Dr. Hashkes' thesis that "freedom entails social affiliation,"[13] but are all discourses of self-determination and modes of "social affiliation" equal expressions of one's autonomy?

As someone who is drawn to the postmodern/neo-pragmatic position that most discourses should be viewed as just another set of tools for contributing to our various projects of seeking happiness, I agree with the sentiment that the world has simply become too dynamic and interconnected to assume that only one language game can address all our needs. Avant-garde philosophers like Nietzsche, pragmatists like James and Dewey, and Freudians all gave cogent expression to this perhaps uniquely postmodern celebration of allowing multiple varieties of self-fashioning to simultaneously prosper and compete. This cosmopolitan, democratic, bourgeois sensibility strives to allow individuals the right to experience the fluidity of using multiple vocabularies and to identity expressions as tools for different needs and ideals of human flourishing.

While we may enjoy the dynamism and fluidity of embracing multiple discourses for our identity projects, the other great strength of Dr. Hashkes' essay is her focus on the limits of this cosmopolitan identity by pointing to the importance of structure and meaning often provided within religious communities. Any identity that strives to embrace a polyphonic cosmopolitan self has to also be open to the reality that most people additionally need to partake in cultures that provide a sense of localism, as well as and structures of authority that make our norms and boundaries rooted in something beyond just the contingencies of time and place. The fact that we are allowed to draw on a variety of different discourses and are rarely forced to "synthesize" depending on our needs and goals is an amazing achievement of Western liberal democratic culture. Nevertheless, this looseness of character and culture that encourages a fluid embrace of different modes of being and behavior is almost impossible without a sense of a core self grounded in some form of ontological absolutes. Thus, I am in complete agreement with Dr. Hashkes

[13] Hashkes, section 1.

that some appreciation of transcendence is an essential component for almost any identity formation. It is very hard to imagine how the self can survive without a sense of connecting to something beyond itself. Just as the infinite cannot be appreciated without a contrasting finitude, so too the self needs boundaries that are not merely contingent upon its social location to expand and grow. Narratives about God and religious communities often play an essential role in providing a set of transcendental signifiers that give this quality of grounding and certainty in a world that is too often experienced as chaotic and constantly changing. For those of us who enjoy living in free democratic societies, but who also yearn for the sense of belonging and connectedness that comes from being part of a more particularized narrative shared by a more select grouping of people, the tension that comes from a desire to have all the vocabularies of the self coherent can generate levels of discontents. Despite the best neo-pragmatic utopian hopes (such as those articulated by the late neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty) that we can live in a fluid state of constant openness and appreciation for the contingencies of our final vocabularies, I have also become increasingly convinced that we may never be able to overcome the impulses for security that lead to what Dewey described as the "quest certainty." At the same time, however, mystics, Zen masters, and subatomic physicists remind us that the ideas that these boundaries are fixed, or that our selves stop evolving, or that we will ever establish a complete and coherent single narrative, may in fact just be another form of idolatry.

For religious existentialists like Martin Buber, the epistemological desire to have a single narrative that could capture all experience has defined not just the history of philosophy, but has also infected the history of theology. In his famous work *I and Thou,* Buber critiqued this idolatrous impulse within religious narratives in the following terms, "Man desires to have God...he is loath to be satisfied with the inexpressible confirmation of the meaning; he wants to see it spread out as something that one can take out and handle again and again-a continuum unbroken in space and

time that insures life."[14] In contrast to an I- It relationship based on the epistemological certainty that comes from relating to a thing "as something that one can take out and handle again and again," for Buber the essence of one's personal "religiosity" (in contrast to the authoritative structures of religion) places the individual in a position of reciprocal encounter that requires an openness to "Otherness" in order to have an authentic self:[15] "I require a You to become; becoming I, I say you."[16] The phenomenology of encounter that Buber gives us is remarkable because, unlike most thinkers of religious thought and community, Buber's philosophical anthropology undermined the mystification of social hierarchies and heteronomous authority. Buber's antinomian view of spiritual presence and encounter was more in keeping with the openness of a cosmopolitan self than with the deference to the rigidity of heteronomous authority.

When talking about the nature of revelation, Buber states the following: "The meaning we receive can be put to the proof in action only by each person in the uniqueness of his being and in the uniqueness of his life. No prescription can lead us to the encounter, and none leads from it...the mystery has remained what it was."[17] In this statement, Buber implicitly critiques both Cartesian solipsism and religious heteronomy by emphasizing the importance of being fully present in "the uniqueness of his being" rather than the heteronomy of following specific religious "prescriptions" or social norms. For Buber the essence of religious experience is not about the performance of obedience, but it is rather about opening one's self to an ineffable sense of presence that comes through the encounter with a Thou. From this ultimate moment of encounter, we experience ourselves in relationship. And from this moment of relation,

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[14] Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* trans. S.G. Smith and Walter Kaufmann (New York: Free Press, 1971), 61.

[15] See Buber's essay "Jewish Religiosity" in *Buber, On Judaism,* ed. Nahum Norbert Glatzer, (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 79-94.

[16] Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

[17] Idem., 159.

the divine can become present and immanent in our everydayness, yet always beyond our cognitive and physical grasping.

The implicit antinomianism within his phenomenology of encounter allows us to appreciate how Buber's unique mixture of religiosity and existentialism also contributed to furthering a post-Enlightenment conversation over the nature of freedom, autonomy, and religious identity in the modern world. As a thinker who was drawn to the emphasis on lived-experience (*Erlebnis*) from his readings of both Nietzsche and the traditional world of Hasidism, Buber's thought perhaps best captures this tension, which I referred to earlier, of living with a Jewish identity that also embraces a polyphonic cosmopolitan openness. Buber's emphasis on the ineffable qualities of the I-Thou and divine encounter that resist all "prescriptions" can additionally be interpreted as complying with liberalism's emphasis on the importance of maintaining the boundaries of public and private discourse. If the most important parts of one's religiosity are inherently inexplicable, then, theoretically, there is less of a desire to impose one's religious narrative on the public arena since, by definition, it is nearly impossible to conduct public debate over that which remains ineffable.

Buber's social ethics and messianic hope, however, might also suggest the complete opposite, namely, that the most important part of one's religious experience is the ability to establish inter-subjective connections that necessitate a transformation of not just social interactions, but political and institutional structures as well. Although he affirmed the importance of the autonomous self in relationship to a Thou, Buber was also critical of attempts to rid the public arena of religious values. This tension in Buber's thought was never fully solved. Nevertheless, future generations of progressive religious thinkers have been inspired by Buber's writings to similarly strive at reconciling the autonomy and transgressive avant-garde expressions of liberation that come from shattering heteronomous "prescriptions" with religious narratives of transcendental encounter.

As one of the many progressive religious thinkers who carried forward the torch of Buber's phenomenology of encounter, Dr. Hashkes

correctly refers to Emanuel Levinas' efforts at transforming the heteronomy of religious authority into an alternative form of autonomy. According to Levinas, fear/awe of the Lord (*yirat ha'shem*) and the social obedience that followers should be reinterpreted as a more genuine form of self-affirmation. Building on Buber, Levinas takes the next step in stripping away the solipsism of Cartesian subjectivity by further developing the idea that real autonomy is only found through the heteronomy of embracing one's responsibility for "the Other." In contrast to Buber, however, Levinas' claim that "my uniqueness lies in the responsibility I display for the Other" places a greater emphasis on the self's deference to the ontological "height" of "the Other" as above the egotistical needs of the individual as the only legitimate ethical source for meaning.[18] The needs of "the Other" are a stand-in for an "infinity" that can never be satisfied. Consequently, the Other represents an "infinite responsibility"[19] over the ego that can never be fully addressed through social institutions based on a model of limiting individual responsibilities to an "economy" of social contracts based on rights and mutual tolerance.[20]

According to Levinas, we best discover our ethical selves when we display a saintly willingness to embrace the "difficult freedom"[21] of taking the "bread from one's mouth" in service to the Other.[22] The "gratuitous" and "saintly" qualities within Levinas' demand that our "infinite responsibility" necessitate a willingness to "jump into water to save someone" without even knowing how to swim suggests a type of martyrdom and masochism that is simply hard to reconcile with liberal

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[18] Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Baltimore, M.D.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 26.

[19] Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings,* trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 193.

[20] Idem., 100.

[21] Idem., 37.

[22] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 74.

versions of personal freedom and autonomy.[23] Levinas' gratuitous ethics certainly provides an ideal that perhaps can be applied to family relations, but are these reasonable expectations for how to relate to those outside our local loyalties?[24] Dr. Hashkes is right when she points out that Levinas "cast doubt upon the claim that strong social affiliation and commitment curtails personal freedom,"[25] but I question whether he provides an adequate notion of personal freedom that simultaneously addresses the legitimate concerns progressives and liberals have with heteronomous deference towards religious authority and social structures. Levinas' desire to resuscitate a very traditionalist admiration for the obedience expected from ancient Israelites in relation to revelation is certainly understandable given the impotence of bourgeois European society to adequately stand up against the nihilism and brutishness of Nazism. Nevertheless, I am not convinced that the type of mixture of autonomy through heteronomy within Levinas' writings is an equal substitute for a cosmopolitan liberal Enlightenment ideal of personal autonomy and rights protected by the state. Not all discourses are equal, not all expressions of autonomy are the same, and not all discourses that claim to give genuine expression to an individual's autonomy and freedom function in the same way. Just as I am reluctant to view a women's right to wear a burka as an equal expression of self-determination and autonomy as, for example, defending a woman's right to vote, so too I am reluctant to view the heteronomous accents within Levinas' philosophy as legitimate substitutes for the tradition of equal rights and justice.

Despite the commendable effort Levinas made in addressing, according to Dr. Hashkes, "the question of the possibility of autonomy

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[23] Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence,* trans. Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone, 1999), 164.

[24] Levinas acknowledges that justice, and therefore the liberal regime of rights, is necessary for addressing the fact that a "third person," in addition to the other before me, has an ethical claim. Nevertheless, the question that Levinas himself poses, namely, "Who in this plurality, comes first?" is never sufficiently answered. See Levinas, *Time and the Other,* trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1990), 106.

[25] Hashkes, section 3.

within a context of a self committed to a heteronomous voice,"[26] I am also not convinced that it is possible to affirm a communitarian ideal of seeing one's self as encumbered by "social affiliation and commitments" as an equal expression of personal freedoms. Part of what makes "social affiliation and commitments" meaningful and appealing is precisely because they often necessitate curtailing our autonomy and what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel referred to as the "tyranny of the ego." In order for our commitments to matter, we have to create boundaries and make hard choices that entail sacrifices to our personal freedoms. In fact, because limits are placed on personal freedoms, it can be argued that this is precisely what makes social affiliations and commitments appealing. For avant-garde followers of Nietzsche and Foucault, who may find such traditionalist and absolutist discourses too hegemonic and stifling, no amount of Levinasian phenomenology will suffice for the thrill of transgression and sense of entrepreneurial novelty. Although Levinas provides a compelling critique of bourgeois expressions of autonomy, he ultimately fails to provide a viable alternative to liberal concerns for civic rights and self- determination. There may be a "negative dialectic" (Adorno) at work here that makes it impossible to reconcile Levinas' ideal of "infinite responsibility" with a Nietzschean ideal of self-fashioning, yet this may be a worthwhile dialectical discomfort to live with in order to maintain a healthy liberal society.

Out of all the religious thinkers Dr. Hashkes brings into her essay, this is why I find Buber much more reasonable in allowing for the dialectical swing between I-Thou and I-It relationships. Although he referred to this dynamic as the "sublime melancholy of our lot,"[27] Buber was much more tolerant of the fact that sometimes we are capable of genuine encounters with others as persons, while at other times we relate to the world from a position of being narcissistic egos who place people and things at a distance in order to reinforce our sense of autonomy and agency. Although Buber laments the I-It relationship as the source of our

[26] Ibid.

[27] Buber, *I and Thou*, 68.

alienation, he was more nuanced and forgiving of the necessity of engaging in utilitarian projects for the satisfaction of different desires. Buber was also more willing to recognize the importance of what Levinas later referred to as the "economy" of reciprocal recognition between individuals.[28] Although Buber shared many of Levinas' concerns for the "political principle" that defined the bourgeois social order, the modernist and Enlightenment accents within Buber's concerns with the importance of maintaining a self in the midst of relationship are ultimately more amenable to liberal ideals of autonomy and self-determination.[29]

The Liberal Solution: The Public Versus the Private Realm

The difficulty of reconciling Levinas' approach to contemporary liberal political philosophy additionally touches upon a central dilemma that most progressive religious thinkers face, namely, how do those of us who wish to live in both worlds of liberal autonomy and religious communities—who, for example, may wish to hold onto various narratives within Judaism that speak to a need for absolute authority, covenant, commandment and messianic hope —simultaneously contribute to the liberatory discourses generated by the Enlightenment? Is it possible to be part of a religious community and also simultaneously celebrate the courageous revolts against the heteronomy of religious institutions and social structures? Can we celebrate both epistemological individualism and also the giving of the self over to the experience of awe

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[28] For more on Levinas's discussion of Buber's subjectivity, see Levinas's essay "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber,* ed. Paul Arthur Schlipp and Maurice Friedman (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1967), 97-132. Also see Levinas's essay "Martin Buber's Thought and Contemporary Judaism," in his *Outside the Subject,* trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 4-19. For Levinas's critique of Buber's "Jewish materialism" also see *Outside the Subject*, 18-19, and *Alterity and Transcendence*, 101.

[29] See Buber's *Paths in Utopia,* trans. R. F. Hull (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), and *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays,* trans. and ed. Maurice S. Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

and mystery within our inherited traditions without violating our sense of autonomy?

For the German-Jewish political philosopher Leo Strauss, we must face up to the resolute decision of either submitting ourselves to the obedience of revelation or committing ourselves to the never-ending, truth- seeking probity of the philosopher/scientist.[30] Remaining obedient to the world of "Jerusalem's" (i.e. religion's) emphasis on revelation, according to Strauss, gives us the social stability and security that comes from submitting to the idea that the universe is grounded in an absolute moral authority, whereas the legacy from Athens (i.e. philosophy/science) gives individuals ultimate access to the laws of causality and power within the world. Both discourses have a role to play, but the claims to know the whole totality of what determines the universe within each tradition simply cannot be harmonized with the absolutist claims of the other. There is something both disturbing and comforting in thinking that there is perhaps only one real defining decision to be made. In comparison to the complexity and nuance involved with Buber and other progressive religious thinkers who expect us to walk along the "narrow ridge" between the extremes of the autonomy of monadological individualism versus the encumbrances of communitarianism, the resoluteness that Strauss appears to embrace in some of his writings makes this dilemma easier: we simply need to choose between the legacy of Athens or Jerusalem. All the rest is commentary.

Nevertheless, for most intellectuals who find themselves drawn to religious communities and discourses, Dr. Hashkes' celebration of our "multiple selves," despite all the discontents it generates, is a much more appealing dialectic to live with. I would only add to this celebration the importance of also maintaining the standard liberal distinction between our public and private selves, even though this solution does not satisfy the depth of meaning many of us desire. Communion with a sense of unity (*yihud*), or moments of communal ecstasy in which we can experience the

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[30] See Strauss' essay, "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections" in his *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought,* ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), 377-406.

one flowing into the all and the all flowing back into the one, may speak to a metaphysical ideal of how we can celebrate our multiple selves. Yet, this spiritual sensibility is entirely unhelpful when it comes to the hard civic decisions of how to balance our competing social needs for freedom, security, justice, prosperity, and peace.[31] Only a community of fellow inquirers, committed to the "reflective equilibrium" (as Rawls puts it) of weighing and adjudicating between a wide body of evidence in the service of the public good, will succeed. In this sense, Dr. Hashkes is absolutely right that communal affiliation becomes an essential component of fulfilling the demands of democratic flourishing. Yet, in a large, democratic, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious, public arena such as the one enjoyed by most Western cultures, problems arise if there isn't a collective commitment to terms that can be shared in common. Our "religious selves" need not share these terms, but our "scientific selves" are defined by the terms we share in common.

In conclusion, science does a better job of providing common terms than religious communities. When thinking with my "scientific self" I am more likely to find agreement with others who are similarly thinking with their "scientific selves" over basic issues such as maintaining public health, for example, than when we think through the lenses of our "religious selves." For the purposes of living together, it is also more important that we agree on basic scientific principles than it is for us to agree on the same religious principles. The importance of maintaining a distinction between our public and private selves has its limitations, especially for those of us who still hold onto messianic hopes for one day living in communities that address our whole being and for arriving at a complete understanding of the whole. Nevertheless, until that day comes, maintaining a public/private distinction still remains one of the best

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[31] In the private realm it is fine to celebrate the "perspectivism" (Nietzsche) of our multiple selves, yet we still face the hard task of figuring out how to live together while maintaining a commitment to tolerance and freedom. As John Rawls puts it, "How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?" (*Introduction to Political Liberalism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2005], xviii).

compromises we can adopt for maximizing freedom, tolerance, and coherence of the public sphere.

I am mostly in agreement with Dr. Hashkes' embrace of "multiple selves," yet I am concerned that we not treat all discourses as the same. Additionally, I am uncomfortable with the quasi-"perspectivism" (per Nietzsche) implicit in placing our "religious selves" on the same level with our "scientific selves." There are fundamental distinctions between the various discourses we use. In the words of Rorty, "Science enables us to predict and control, whereas religion offers us a larger hope, thereby something to live for."[32] I believe Dr. Hashkes is expressing a similar sentiment when she argues that "these two worlds are different" and "we don't need to synthesize." I think it is important to expand upon this "separate realms" theory with regard to religion and science by adding that there are also important gradations to discourses of autonomy and self- determination. The real question is how we objectively determine the degree of determent caused. It is beyond the confines of this essay to elaborate on how we establish a method for evaluating these gradations, but nevertheless, it is still important that we remain committed to the idea that we differentiate between "different types of communities of discourse"[33] when it comes to evaluating what counts as genuine autonomy and self-determination.[34]

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[32] See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999) 153.

[33] Hashkes, section 6.

[34] I agree with Dr. Hashkes that a wonderful thing about living in a liberal democratic society is that we get to celebrate our "Jewish selves" alongside our "scientific selves" and are relatively free from having to synthesize all these disparate discourses into a single hegemonic totality. Within the public arena, however, my fellow citizens have a right to insist that my scientific self should take precedence when voting, for example, over whether or not to address public health concerns by building more hospitals or, conversely, building more prayer centers. The maintenance of our civil society and the autonomy we enjoy depends on keeping a public prioritization of certain discourses over others within the public arena. At a time when national politicians cynically embrace a perspectivism that allows them to disregard the fundamentals of scientific discourse (such as evolution or global warming) as just one of many language games used by liberals to corrupt the soul of America, I can't help but worry that putting too much stress on our "multiple selves" will weaken our ability to insist on hierarchizing which language games are suitable for public debate and which

Most of the time we are stuck with having to live with the discomforts and discontents of having to utilize a variety of different language games in order to make meaning out of the important events in our lives. Dr. Hashkes' claim, that we "don't need to synthesize" the various narratives that contribute to our "multiple selves," is absolutely right. At the same time, however, we do not have a right to insist that in the public arena that others recognize all the narratives we use for our sense of identity as being either appropriate for public debate, or constituting an equal form of autonomy and self-determination. Just as it would be wrong to assume that there is no self-determination within heteronomous communal structures, so too it is wrong to assume that all discourses of self-expression and identity commitments are equal expressions of our autonomy. Given our historical moment, when the pendulum has swung so far towards a negation of the universalistic pretenses within scientific inquiry, we must remain vigilant against the potentially cynical use of postmodern perspectivism to weaken the liberal bulwark against a theocratic encroachment on the public sphere. Ironically, this is something that my "Jewish self" can agree on as well.

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language games are better sequestered to the private realm. Returning to an epistemological quest for certainty and absolutes wont do—most of us are just too post-modern for that—but neither will the claim that there are "no essential difference between different types of communities of discourse" (Hashkes, 44) help with the important task of trying to figure out what parts of our religious heritage can contribute to furthering Enlightenment ideals of autonomy and what parts should either remain private or be discarded all together. The reality of which narratives are privileged with the designation of being "objective" within the public arena is of course a lot murkier and complicated than simply insisting on a public/private distinction would seem to admit. Although I am reluctant to embrace a correspondence theory of truth that would make it much easier to hierarchize the various discourses we have, nevertheless, the health of our society demands that we make distinctions between discourses that should be taken seriously in the public arena versus discourses that are better conducted privately amongst fellow believers.