

Shalom Carmy

“Tell Them I’ve Had a Good Enough Life”

Heaven forbid to change the name of the sick person, unless it is done by one whose every action is virtually inspired. For surely the name given a person at birth is invariably appointed by God, insofar as it is his name above, and the vitality of the person all the days that he lives on the face of the earth. Now the sick person surely needs sustenance, and sometimes he has none other than that of the name. If that is uprooted, as when they proclaim, “your name is no longer called Jacob,” and the second name may not be of his vitality, then he remains without that which would sustain his vitality.

(R. Yehiel Mikhal of Zlotchlow?)

Tears poured down his face: he was not at the moment afraid of damnation—even the fear of pain was in the background. He felt only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. It seemed to him at that moment that it would have been quite easy to have been a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint and a little courage.

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He felt like someone who had missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted—to be a saint.

(Graham Greene)²

1

For the saintly person, whole-heartedly devoted to the service of God, "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God" (Psalms 111:10). The endeavor to harness all of one's passions and creative gifts to this end is not suspended in the face of suffering and adversity. To the contrary, the commanding voice of Halakha determines that misfortune engenders a specific obligation of self-examination; in time of trouble, one is instructed to turn to God.³ This obedient and creative response presupposes a normative belief in God's concern for man, and in the righteousness and integrity of God's judgment. Beyond these fundamental principles, practical wisdom need not postulate a particular theory about God's governance of the world; it need not claim to know the precise operation of divine justice and mercy; it does not affect perversity as to the respective merit and corruption of human beings. We are charged with the task of repenting our sins, not with that of calculating our deserts. We are here to serve God, not to inspect ourselves from the outside, as it were, under the aspect of eternity.

Nevertheless, many God-fearing Jews have reflected deeply on God's providence for the world of His creation, and for the creatures to whom He has revealed His will. Some pious people have shunned thinking about these matters. Because "the matter of judgment is hidden, and we must have faith in His righteousness as the true judge, may He be blessed and exalted," writes Ramban, there are those who would dispense with what they regard as fruitless inquiry and wearying discussion, trusting that "in the end, there are before Him neither iniquity nor oblivion."⁴ But this, continues Ramban, "is the argument of fools who reject wisdom."⁴ When we formulate an account of God's actions towards the world, we are engaged in the quest for *dat Hashem*, the knowledge of God. Insofar as we succeed in situating ourselves in the mysterious economy of the universe, we are better suited, intellectually and morally, to become the individuals that God bids us to be. That is the saintly individual's goal in life.

If the purpose of our investigation, in keeping with Ramban's dictum, is *dat Hashem*, and in particular the existential appropriation of that insight in order to comprehend our place in the divine economy, we have yet to define the nature of our inquiry. Much depends on

how we make this move. Traditionally the inquiry has been called *theodicy*, meaning literally "the justification of God."⁵ It opens with a problem that cries out for a solution: the apparent contradiction between the benevolence of the Creator and the imperfection of creation. The religious philosopher's efforts aim to show that the contradiction is merely apparent. He or she does so by deploying a variety of familiar strategies: evil is illusory in the present, or becomes illusory from the perspective of a privileged future time; evil is a necessary ingredient in the greater good, or the inevitable consequence of human freedom, the exercise of which is itself essential for the *summum bonum*; and so forth. In the end, there always comes an appeal to human ignorance. Lacking, as we do, the requisite temporal perspective, mescent of the complex logical dependencies correlating causes and events, deficient in a true appreciation of the telos appropriate to man and cosmos, we are asked to give God the benefit of the doubt, so to speak. In the meantime, the apologist's tentative explanations will have to serve as a kind of down payment on the real thing.

The usual context for these arguments is the perennial debate over the truth of theism, construed as belief in an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent deity. The champion of theism may hope to inculcate or fortify belief in God. More often he is satisfied to demonstrate that the problem of evil is not an overwhelming objection to theism.⁶ Whether any of the theories commonly advanced for this purpose (or some combination of them) are satisfactory—whether, in other words, the case for philosophical theism is made more probable when conjoined to the propositions entailed by these theories—is not the subject of this essay. I am more interested in the interaction between theory and theist: how does the adoption of a particular mode of thinking affect the awareness, before God, of the individual thinker?

In our age, it seems to me, the search for, and insistence upon, an adequate theoretical theodicy gives rise to experiential manifestations so bizarrely at odds with one another that they are scarcely recognizable as expressions of the same religious spirit. Worthwhile fragments of moral, psychological and philosophical insight, are jumbled together in pleasant, eclectic heaps, and signify nothing. Writers and speakers on the subject frequently propagate absurdities bordering on cruelty and/or exhibit confusion with respect to fundamental Jewish tenets. Let us attempt a brief characterization of prevalent types of theodicy, in the hope that it will illuminate our contemporary bewilderment. Please note that we are less interested in the particular dicta proposed than in the overall spiritual mentality that animates them:

1. *Rationalist* theodicy offers a set of explanations for evil that the believer is expected to find acceptable. An excellent example was

reported to me by a friend who, when his high school lesson on the verse “Thou shalt not curse the deaf” was interrupted by the question, “Why does Hashem create deaf babies?” ventured to confess that we really don’t know. At this point a sympathetic student cheerfully volunteered that she had learnt no fewer than three reasons: One, to punish the parents for their sins; two, to inspire pity; the third reason she had (alas!) forgotten. One hopes that her opportunity to practice speculative philosophy remains limited to the classroom.

2. *Agnostic* doctrines of providence scoff at the very possibility that human beings are to discern a divinely bestowed significance in their suffering or be summoned by it to the spiritual regeneration mandated by Halakha. This attitude is exemplified by a high-powered intellectual, an observant Jew, who has recovered miraculously from a prolonged coma. Recalled to health, he looks incredulously at those who thought that prayer on his behalf, or changing his name, or having mass said on his behalf by a Catholic friend, in any way affected his destiny. He dismisses as hubris the conviction of less sophisticated Jews that the Almighty Himself may have devised the illness and recovery as an instrument of education or chastisement.

3. *Pious acceptance* is reflected in the following remarks by an early twentieth century Christian statesman, bereaved by the death of his eldest son:

In his suffering he was asking me to make him well. I could not

When he went the power and the glory of the Presidency went with him.

The ways of Providence are often beyond our understanding. It seemed to me that the world had need of the work that it was probable he could do.

I do not know why such a price was exacted for occupying the White House.

Sustained by the great outpouring of sympathy from all over the nation, my wife and I bowed to the Supreme Will and with such courage as we had went on in the discharge of our duties.⁸

Coolidge eschews the speculative excesses of rationalism and agnosticism. He does not reel off a glib list of lessons learnt from adversity; nor does he imagine specific sins for which he, his wife, or his boy, deserved punishment. At the same time, the recollection of his grief

leads the mourning father to reflect on the ultimate questions. He considers with humility the awful contrast between the ultimate power conferred upon him by his eminent position, and his helplessness in the face of his child’s mortal illness. He contemplates the work ethic that governs his life, and molded the education he gave his son, and resolutely continues in its practice. Lastly, and for reasons difficult for an outsider to fathom, the retired President signifies an obscure connection between his political eminence and the loss of Calvin Jr.⁹

Of the outlooks we have surveyed, President Coolidge’s seems most in consonance with the general tendency of normative Jewish thought: equally removed from the callous confabulations of those who, in the spirit of Job’s friends, know too much about God’s involvement in daily events, on the one hand, and the arrogant skepticism of those who are too confident of God’s indifference to their affairs, on the other hand. If you were to ask Coolidge for a theological justification of his family’s tragedy, he would answer simply that God’s ways are often incomprehensible to us, but that it is nevertheless incumbent upon us to search out the meaning of His acts for our lives, and to live accordingly.

What path, if any, offers escape from the disordered thought and feeling evidenced by the rationalistic and agnostic schools? Much of our predicament stems, in my opinion, from a mistaken way of framing the question of suffering. The conventional, forensic approach philosophizes about suffering from the standpoint of the theodicy problem. Confronted by the conundrum of a benevolent deity who condones evil, logical analysis gravitates towards clean, extreme, egregious solutions: either by peddling reasons, however incredible, to explain what happens, or by spinning God away from the proceedings altogether, effectively eliminating Him from the affairs of the individual. So long as the theodicy problem dominates reflection, it overshadows the work of theological-existential edification, rendering secondary and fortuitous the insight that would yield a realistic awareness of man’s relation to the Eternal, confronting us with the grandeur, mystery and humility of the human condition before God.

It will be impossible for us to experiment with a different way of thinking about suffering unless we succeed in loosening the grip of the conventional position. To this end I will attempt to uncover, and scrutinize, some presuppositions of the entrenched forensic approach. I do not intend to refute these ways of thinking—on the contrary, we will sedulously indicate those elements that survive our critique—but to weaken their power to obscure what I regard as more realistic alternatives. The critical section of the essay, however, will prepare us to entertain new ideas about the human experience of evil.

II

Teyve and the Coherence of Optimization

Teyve the Milkman, in the musical "Fiddler on the Roof," strives to understand the inscrutable ways of Providence. He prefers a world in which he would enjoy the status and prerogatives of a rich man; in the actual world he is poor. If his poverty were a necessary condition for the existence of a better world, he would have no grounds for complaint. The last assumption, however, is to Teyve counter-intuitive: it seems to him—and he invites God to dispute him—that no vast divine plan would be upset if he were a wealthy man.

Teyve is hardly alone in embracing that pillar of the standard approach to theodicy, often associated with Leibniz, which maintains that God must create the best of all possible worlds. Given that possible world W_1 is better than possible world W_2 , then God cannot bring into being the inferior world without falling short of our conception of Him as benevolent, omnipotent and so forth. The conventional response is that Teyve's intuition is erroneous, and that a world in which he were a rich man would in fact possess features, known to God even if unforeseen by us, that would make it inferior to the real world, in which he is fated to be poor.

Must Teyve's intuition be mistaken? Is religious belief compelled to accept the proposition that God must create the best? What if the very idea of the best possible world turns out to be incoherent? As this last suggestion no doubt strikes many readers as counter-intuitive, a brief explanation is in order.

Imagine the following thought-experiment: it is within your power to increase your share of some good, let us say longevity, as much as you wish. You determine your lifespan by standing at a specified distance from the wall and clicking a button: if you stand one foot from the wall, you will live another forty years; six inches from the wall, eighty years; three inches, one hundred and sixty; and so on. For purposes of the present discussion we may ignore the down side of long life: hence, the closer you position yourself to the wall, the better it is for you. Under the terms of this thought-experiment there are an infinite number of good enough solutions, guaranteeing a long and satisfactory life, but there is no optimal solution, for no matter how long a life you obtain, you could have done better. In cases like this, the concept of optimization becomes incoherent.¹⁰

The previous example is, of course, artificial. Yet it accentuates the more complex structure of normal human aspirations. If the very notion of the best possible world is incoherent, because, for any world, it is always possible to conceive of a better one, then it is no longer necessary to insist on the error of Teyve's intuition, in order to

disarm the force of his complaint. We may be living in a good enough world, though not *the* perfect one, because the best of all possible worlds cannot possibly exist.

Before moving on from this rather technical point, it is necessary to acknowledge what we have *not* established. We have shown that ordinary rational people will not expect God to provide them with the best of all possible worlds, and that they will be satisfied with some exemplar of a good enough world. We have not, however, given any reason to ignore the dissatisfaction of people who find themselves trapped in a world that is not, in their opinion, good enough.¹¹ To revert for a moment to the longevity example: although there is no optimal solution, there are plenty of choices that would have to be judged irrational, e.g. a person who decides to stand a mile away from the magic wall, thus assuring himself an exceptionally short life.¹² Likewise an individual experiencing an especially miserable sojourn on earth might not complain that his existence was imperfect, merely that he was stuck in a thoroughly nasty life.

Rambam, Rav Kook and Ontological Optimism

As we have already noted, the standard philosophical discussion of the problem of suffering proceeds from the expectation that God will provide a perfect world: any imperfection threatens that expectation and requires explanation. Whether human beings are pleased with their lives overall is secondary to the justification of specific occurrences for which the omnipotent God is held responsible.

Does the above describe the context in which most individuals raise the question of suffering in real life, when they are not busy imitating professional philosophers? Ordinarily, it seems to me, real people, who are neither philosophers nor saints, do not trouble to justify the ordinary suffering that accompanies quotidian life: the casual headache, the routine traffic jam, the bewilderment of frustrated intentions. The crisis of faith is generally provoked by an experience of acute disaster that overwhelms our ability to cope, and/or by a drastic upheaval that undermines our sense of life as a worthwhile enterprise. In a word, "normal" human beings seem predisposed to optimism, and this is a fact that our philosophy ought to take into account.

What is the source of man's perennial optimism? One possibility is that we consider the good of the world to outweigh the bad because our survey of the world has demonstrated this to be the case. According to Rambam, the preponderance of the good is questioned only by the ignorant populace and by mistaken philosophers like al-Ghazzali: "every fool imagines that all reality is for his sake, as if there were nothing other than he, and when something happens

contrary to his desire, infers that all reality is bad"¹³ The Maimonidean fool, depicted in this sentence, subscribes to the standard contemporary approach, and believes that every evil (or at least every evil that affects him) constitutes a challenge to the divine world order. Rambam goes on to argue that the truly bad things that happen to people are not God's fault, but, in the majority of cases, their own.

A detailed analysis of the Maimonidean fool's pessimism would reveal additional layers of motivation. One obvious truth: most of us like to put the blame elsewhere than on our own shoulders. At a more subtle level, pain and disorder call attention to themselves more urgently than pleasure and happiness, of which we tend to be oblivious. Consider for a moment the asymmetry between physical discomfort and gratification. We define and localize the former with ease: the temples that throb, the itching nostril, the sharp pain of an inflamed elbow. When, by contrast, I am pleased with a good meal, I would hardly refer to a pleasure in my stomach. Though the same spatial localization does not occur with generalized feelings like depression, it would nevertheless be safe to assume that an individual who devotes attention to the recording of his sensations and moods would more likely take note of the negative ones. Perhaps this perception, too, would come under Rambam's censure of the self-centered, self-conscious mentality.

Imaginative literature, which frequently offers reliable insight into various dimensions of the human condition, is liable to mislead us here. Not only does it sometimes reflect, and also encourage, the pre-occupations just noted; it favors pessimistic themes of its own. For the riveting story, more often than not, is the one with the tragic ending; the poignant lyric sings of unfulfilled love; sadness bears scars of authenticity unknown to commonplace happiness, and is more interesting too!¹⁴ What Graham Greene wrote of the peculiar sensibility he embraced in adolescence, and made distinctively his own, is symptomatic of much in our century's poetic conception: "religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there—perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again, and only the pendulum ensures that after all in the end justice is done."¹⁵

Greene's mention of religion reminds us that a disposition to make much of the world's evil is not confined to self-preoccupied fools and writers mining reality at its points of least resistance. Among the Rishonim, Rambam's view is not beyond dispute. Thus, for example, R. Saadyah Gaon contends that belief in reward after death is rationally necessary because all good in this world is mingled with bad,

and the sadness outweighs the joy!¹⁶ Only the prospect of future existence reassures us that after all in the end justice is done. One might plausibly suggest that it is precisely the religious believer, alive to the Creator's goodness, who is most prone to be unspeakably distressed by the world's imperfection and depravity. This appalling contrast is the basis of Newman's famous apprehension: "If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me, when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator," which prologues a page-long list of worldly evils, culminating in the affirmation of original sin, a fact about the world "as true as the fact of its existence," for "if there be a God, since there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity."¹⁷

At first blush, it would appear that Rambam's sober cheerfulness and R. Saadyah's somber diagnosis stand in straightforward contradiction, and that only a stubborn harmonizing piety would undertake to bridge the gap between them. They disagree overtly about the actual amount of evil in the world relative to the good. They differ implicitly about the fundamental principle of theodicy: Rambam points to the predominance of good in creation as a whole, and expects the wise individual to acknowledge the larger perspective; R. Saadyah, working in the Kalam tradition, is concerned with the justice meted out to each creature. Nonetheless, the dejection about the state of this world that we encounter in R. Saadyah is not altogether incomprehensible from Rambam's viewpoint.

The crucial point is that R. Saadyah does not claim that man looks upon creation and beholds, contrary to the seeming implication of God's judgment on the sixth day of creation, that it is more bad than good. The world that R. Saadyah investigates, and finds wanting, is *this* life when viewed in isolation from the reality of the world and the other one. Real life is the whole, comprising both this world and its joys and discontents; cannot fail to be affected by the perspective of eternity.

In order to forestall possible misunderstanding, let me clarify what is meant when I say that the standpoint of eternity suffuses our experience of this world. Eternity does not merely mean a period of time commencing on the date of postmortem reckoning and extending endlessly into the future. The contribution of eternity is not merely quantitative, a shower bath of reward that dilutes the evils of this world until they no longer signify. Ordinarily, when a religious person deliberates his or her course, and asks whether it is justified before the bar of eternity, the issue is not what we will think after we

are dead, but rather how the eternal God judges our course here and now. Eternity is our teacher: in its academy we discover new criteria for judging what is valuable; it transforms the very standard of significance. As when we wish to distinguish the living man from the cadaver, we look for signs of respiration, so the world we inhabit emerges from spiritual lifelessness precisely to the degree that it is inspired by the breath of eternity. The dialogue with eternal values is not only the vocation of the saint intoxicated with the vision of holiness. The ordinary person of worldly horizons, who wants no more than to follow his will, passively defined by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, whose conception of what his will ought to be does not go beyond the routine table of values set by an unreflective secular society, cannot extricate himself from the broader vistas that expand into eternity. God beheld the world as good, and we, for our part, can see it steadily and see it whole, to the extent that we submit our will to His, and learn to envision the living busy world in the light of its Creator. In short, the value of this world is contingent on the meaning incalculated by our vision of the world to come.¹⁸

By now the discussion of the present section has edged away from its original moorings. The Maimonidean thesis about the goodness of the world, from which we started out, purported to be an interpretation-free assessment of the universe. In the course of our analysis we have arrived at a criterion of goodness dependent on a certain kind of interpretive perspective, namely a religious outlook that bids us transcend transient individual perceptions, or constantly to bear in mind the dimension of eternity, and so forth. Human beings, in effect, are inclined to trust the goodness of the universe not only, or primarily, because the scales of empirical evidence tilt towards optimism, but on the basis of a profound, one might say ontological, instinct about reality.

It is difficult, and I hope unnecessary, to present a phenomenological account of the ontological bias in favor of being. A halakhic analogy derived from a lecture by Rav Kook may communicate something of what I mean. We all know that the thirty-nine categories of work (*melakhah*) forbidden on Shabbat are defined as creative acts; purely destructive behavior is not ordinarily included. A destructive act counts as *melakhah*, however, when it is intended as a prelude to an act of creation. Ripping a garment, for example, is work when the goal is its repair, likewise erasing in order to write; demolishing a house is *melakhah* when one wishes to erect new construction on the site. But there is a suggestive disparity between the examples. Tearing clothing with the intention of sewing it up as it was before (or the corresponding case of erasure and writing) is not an exercise in creativity; the final product is in no way an improvement over the

original; hence it does not exhibit the necessary forethought (*melakhei mahshaven*). Razing a building for the sake of future construction constitutes *melakhah*, however, even when the new structure merely duplicates the old. Apparently, infers Rav Kook, the act of construction (*biryan*) is deemed valuable in itself, even when it does not produce an object more valuable in itself. Insofar as *biryan* is a rabbinic metaphor for the divine act of creation, the halakhic reality contains the hint of an ontological truth: that the propagation of being bears inherent value, apart from any other consideration of the value of the thing produced.¹⁹

From the standpoint of forensic theology, the ontological intuition we have just sketched may well be inferior to the calculus of good and evil with which we began. Facts are facts; one man's profound ontological intuition is another's deep-seated, treacherous delusion. It is easy to imagine Schopenhauer, or one of his sociobiological heirs, conceding the power of Rav Kook's halakhic analogy, hailing enthusiastically his conviction that *biryan*, as an ontological category, is especially revealed in the operation of the procreative instinct, and yet refusing any inference from our feelings about being to the objective truth about reality. The irrational, absurd will to life, in all its boundless power, according to these views, may well be the muse by which a natural or metaphysical force, indifferent to our welfare or even malignant, perpetuates the cycle of existence, and it succeeds in fooling the religious optimists, along with everyone else.²⁰ My present purpose, however, is not to formulate an argument for theology, but rather to describe the source of our convictions as we actually hold them, on a day to day basis.²¹

"God in the Dock"²²

Inherent in the very enterprise of forensic theology is the idea that God stands accused of failing to govern the world rightly. The apologetic philosopher is, so to speak, the attorney for the defense. A successful theology is one that exonerates God. In this scenario someone must play the judge. That would have to be man, meaning, you and I. All this follows from the logic of the theology-problem.

So we arc to sit in judgment on the *Ribbono shel Olam!* But shouldn't it be the other way around? Not only is it supposed to be God who judges man, but any depiction of man's relation to God that omits this essential element of religious consciousness distorts reality beyond recognizability.

The conflict between forensic theology's audacious questioning of God, and man's humble state as a creature judged by Him, engenders explosive and irresolvable agony in the breast of the suffering *homo religiosus*, who knows in his own flesh the contradiction between the

abject, guilty truth of the human condition and the grandeur of God, on the one hand, and the accusatory stance towards the Creator, on the other hand: "There is not between us an umpire, who would stretch his hand over us both (Job 9:33)."

That such a paradoxical, tormented, and ultimately intolerable contradiction can be a component of authentic religious awareness is incontrovertibly illustrated by the soliloquies of Job. It is a matter of simple human honesty to acknowledge that, at times, man feels estranged and rejected by God, and that we cannot always even begin to make sense of the situation. The accusatory stance presupposed by forensic theodicy is thus borne out, it would appear, by human experience, as confirmed in Tanakh. Hence we ought not to be surprised that the accusatory position, so convenient to our vanity, is often taken as the paradigm for contemporary theological discussions of human suffering.

Yet however much we are to learn from the Jobian predicament, the notion that it is man's vocation to judge his Maker, and that the experience of judging God is a primary constituent of our relationship to Him, is false and pernicious. It is not a normative occupation that Job himself would care to make fashionable. Job's experience is an extreme one. Although the extreme often illuminates the ordinary, drastically different situations cannot uncritically be regarded as equivalent to one another. Moreover, as already noted, whatever truth is gained by the gesture of honest questioning is offset by the great falsehood consequent upon the bracketing of man's fundamental relation to God: the eternal truth that, before God, we are always to be judged. *Homo religiosus* is very much aware of this, and much of his anguish, when entangled in Job-like suffering, derives from the knowledge that piety turned accusatory undermines itself. It is therefore intellectually unstable and cannot supply the normative ground of inquiry.

Lastly, the putative isomorphism between Job's complaint and the outlook of forensic theodicy breaks down at one crucial point. Job is not an external observer of his troubles; he is thrown into them. He sticks his finger in the substance of his own life, and tastes the gall of his existence on his own parched lips. The philosopher of theodicy, by definition, is claiming a normative perspective. The insight of the first person is often categorically different from that of the third person, and this is nowhere more true than in assessing the nature of experience under extreme conditions. This, too, is a lesson informed by the misunderstanding between Job and his friends. Insofar as forensic approaches to theodicy lead us to look upon our relation to God, and our relation to our own suffering, in a third person context, when the reality of experience is better served by a first person per-

spective, we have one more reason to seek alternative ways of thinking about the meaning of suffering and misfortune.

III

Identity, Spiritual Parasites and the Man of God

Not every instance of apparently undeserved misfortune precipitates, in real life, the conundrum of theodicy. We are not inclined to be affronted by suffering that we view as "normal," that is as the necessary, or predictable, fallout of the human condition. To take a trivial example: a man trapped in a burning building cannot escape by flying out the window; we do not hold God responsible for failing to provide him with wings. We understand that it is the nature of birds to fly, but that the human species is not so endowed. When the same man is smitten blind we are not shocked to hear questions about the justice of the universe, not only because the unfortunate effects of blindness are legion, but because being blind is considered a deviation from the norm, and therefore requires explanation. What violates our sense of the normal we usually denominate as "unfair," but it seems that we derive our concept of fairness from the order of normality, not the other way around. The death of an aged, beloved father, however sad, does not usually engender the sense of absurd ruin that we experience when a father intones the Kaddish for an adored child. One occurrence belongs to the order of "normality;" the other violates that order.

The metaphysical doctrine, corresponding to this common sense insight, is the principle of general providence (*basgagah ketait*). This approach maintains that the divine laws, governing what happens to various species, are wisely designed by the benevolent Creator. If general providence is the only kind there is, which is the view attributed by Rambam and other Jewish thinkers to Aristotle, then God cannot be blamed for the evil that results from the natural operation of His laws.

Judaism, of course, does not limit God's involvement in the world to *basgagah ketait*. "For certainly the belief in individual providence is a cornerstone of Judaism, both from the perspective of the Halakhah and from the perspective of philosophical inquiry. . . . The protagonist of the religious drama, according to Judaism, is the individual, responsible for his actions and deeds, and there can be no responsibility or accountability without providence."²³ As noted at the outset, all suffering obligates the individual to turn to God, to examine himself, to repent. The halakhically reinforced intuition that we, as individuals, pass before God's watching and concerned eye, is

expressed metaphysically in the doctrine of individual providence (*hasdgabah peratit*).

At a popular level, the idea of *hasdgabah peratit* is often inculcated through formulations that obliterate completely our instinctive belief that "the world follows its custom" (*olam ke-minhago nobog*), that *hasdgabah kelalit*, in other words, is a significant factor in the overall economy of divine governance. While the "hothouse *hasdgabah*" emphasis aims to instill a salutary sense of responsibility and the habit of perpetual remorse, its mechanical application leads directly to rationalist theories of particular evils, and indirectly to the jaded agnosticism that fancies itself the only sophisticated alternative. A real account of divine providence must do justice both to the awful uniqueness of God's concern for each individual, and to the evidence, drawing both on the traditional sources and on human experience, of the extent to which our fate in this world depends upon the laws governing the groups and species to which we belong.

A theoretical understanding of divine providence along the lines advocated here need not be limited to one specific position within Jewish thought²⁴. I will employ Rambam's discussion in the *Guide* as my point of reference both because it presents a systematic deliberation on the subject and because academic and popular writers on the *Guide* have created the image of Rambam as an adherent of *hasdgabah kelalit*, whose more orthodox pronouncements in the direction of *hasdgabah peratit*, whether in the *Guide* or in his halakhic works, need not be taken seriously. Following *maran ha-Rav* Joseph Soloveitchik זצ"ל, I will treat Rambam, not as a precursor of agnosticism, but as an important source for a realistic conception of *hasdgabah*.

The careful reader of Rambam's treatment of providence in Part III of the *Guide* is confronted by an apparent discrepancy between two successive chapters. In chapter 17 Rambam distinguishes between non-human species, who are governed by *hasdgabah kelalit*, and the human race, whose destiny is determined individually. In the very next chapter, however, Rambam reserves *hasdgabah peratit* for the individual engaged in the knowledge of God; other human beings, it would seem, are abandoned to the laws of nature adequate for the species as a whole.²⁵ Which statement reflects Rambam's true position: is man different from the animals, or is it only the philosopher whom God notices as an individual?

Rav Soloveitchik resolves the apparent contradiction by recognizing two aspects of man. The human being can be "species man," who expresses the universal essence of his species without becoming an individual. As species man, he is no more and no less than a member of a particular biological species:

Man, at times, exists solely by virtue of the species, by virtue of the fact that he was born a member of that species, and its general form is engraved upon him. He exists solely on account of his participation in the idea of the universal. He is just a member of the species "man," an image of the universal. He is just one more example of the species image in its ongoing morphological process (in the Aristotelian sense of the term). He himself, however, has never done anything that could serve to legitimate his existence as an individual. His soul, his spirit, his entire being, all are grounded in the realm of the universal. His roots lie deep in the soil of faceless mediocrity. He has no stature of his own, no original, individual, personal profile. He has never created anything, never brought into being anything new, never accomplished anything. He is receptive, passive, a spiritual parasite.²⁶

But man is also capable of becoming an individual and, as such, elevating himself or herself to a relationship with God that transcends his general membership in the human race:

But there is another man, one who does not require the assistance of others, who does not need the support of the species to legitimate his existence. Such a man is no longer the prisoner of time but is his own master. He exists not by virtue of the species, but solely on account of his own individual worth. His life is replete with creation and renewal, cognition and profound understanding. He lives not on account of his having been born but for the sake of life itself and so that he may merit thereby the life in the world to come. He recognizes the destiny that is his, his obligation and task in life. He understands full well the dualism running through his being and that choice which has been entrusted to him.²⁷

To the extent that a person is what the Rav calls a "spiritual parasite," he or she remains within the province of *hasdgabah kelalit*. To the extent that the person lives a life of spiritual significance and self-creation, he or she merits individual providence.

The existential theory of providence which the Rav has extracted from Rambam's medieval categories is more than a philosophical formula. It translates into a religious imperative. For insofar as a person does not merely instantiate the species man, he or she cannot interpret the events of life as no more than the impersonal operation of universal forces. And insofar as the person fulfills the halakhic obligation to turn to God in moments of trouble and does not dismiss suffering as a random occurrence, he or she chooses a place among those who are counted as individuals, and who are so judged by the Creator.

The fundamental of providence is here transformed into a concrete commandment, an obligation incumbent upon man. Man is obliged to broaden the scope and strengthen the intensity of the individual providence that watches over him. Everything is dependent on him; it is all in his hands. When a person creates himself, ceases to be a mere species man, and becomes a man of God, then he has fulfilled that commandment which is implicit in the principle of providence.²⁸

Limits of Individualism and the Need for Dialectic

The story we have told so far extols the individual (the *ish ha-Elokim*) and reproaches man's identification with the species. Such a reading is faithful to Rambam's approach in chapters 17-18. More importantly, it accurately reflects the moral thrust of Judaism, which calls upon the individual to be worthy of particular providence. To the extent that one refuses to respond to suffering in the halakhically mandated manner, one turns away from the opportunity "to broaden the scope and strengthen the intensity of the individual providence that watches over him." If only the individual dimension of human existence is authentic, and man's submersion in the universal is untruth, then the intuition with which we opened this section of our discussion is nothing but a manifestation of bad faith. Easing the pain of misfortune by treating it as the normal way of the world is, from this point of view, an act of spiritual evasion.

Our vocation of increasing the degree of individual providence is no reason, however, to ignore the very real role played in our lives by *hasbaghaba ketalit*. However much we desire to benefit from direct personal providence—and in moments of spiritual ennui that desire cannot be taken for granted; wishing for the right desire may be all we are up to—we delude ourselves no less than others when we fancy ourselves consistently worthy of God's personal concern. Reflection on our distance from God, the sense of being abandoned to the vicissitudes of the world, and our unworthiness to be judged as authentic individuals, may itself be an important aspect of self-examination and a spur to repentance.

Metaphysically, the sharp rhetorical either/or, separating species man from the man of God in the Rav's formulation, breaks down in the face of a thorough analysis of individuality. No individual is an island. The individual draws his sustenance and creativity, in large part, from his communal identity. When the Rav celebrates "one who does not require the assistance of others, who does not need the support of the species to legitimate his existence," he surely is not positing an abstract atomic individual who creates himself *ex nihilo*, standing before God in isolation from his fellows. As pertains to ethi-

cal creativity, the individual may precede the group; but in terms of ontological identity, the individual is unimaginable without his social context. The concrete individual, no matter how courageous and stunning of conformity, is significantly constituted by his connection to the larger community, to which he is bound by ties of commitment and affection.²⁹

Moreover, there are circumstances in which the courageous, creative, masterly individual is called upon to sacrifice some aspect of his uniqueness and to serve God by identifying with the collective. Rav Kook, in a recently published sermon, utilizes an enigmatic talmudic statement as a vehicle for this idea. The Psalmist praises God, who saves "man and beast" (*adam u-behemah*), and the Talmud applies the phrase to "men who are intelligent to the utmost (*arminin be-dar*) yet make themselves like beasts." R. Kook, following the tradition of the Rambam, regards the acquisition of creative intelligence as the characteristic that makes an individual worthy of individual providence. Hence those who are "*arminin be-dar*" receive providence by virtue of themselves, as a consequence of their individual perfection. Yet they make themselves like beasts because they make themselves subservient (*meztelhim*) to the *kehal*, as if they had no individual *telev* at all. This is the commandment of peace and its principal manifestation.³⁰

But recognition, and appreciation, of the communal component in human identity has implications that go beyond the honesty required for self-knowledge and the ethical-religious values that sometimes compel the *ish ha-Elokim* to submerge his own providential destiny in that of the group. One-sided attention to individual providence can be psychologically debilitating as well. We have already remarked on Rambam's allegation that fools exaggerate their own importance within the divine economy and are consequently vexed excessively by the evils that befall them. Now some of the fool's irritation can no doubt be attributed to his refusal to consider his own responsibility for his misfortunes. But Rambam is clearly blaming him for expecting too great a measure of *hasbaghaba peratit*. Elsewhere in the section on evil and providence Rambam further insults man's self-centeredness by denying that the human race is the goal of creation.³¹ Contrary to the pious spirit of "hothouse *hasbaghaba*" theology, Rambam fears the vanity, the spiritual self-indulgence, and the sullen self-justification attendant upon its invocation.

Rav Kook is a more teleological thinker than Rambam, yet he is similarly inclined to discern a heuristic advantage in the tension between a strong awareness of divine intervention in human affairs, on the one hand, and an obliviousness to God's involvement on the other hand. He knows of "the fear of punishment that enters the bones; to the point of pervasive cringing, prevents the spread of the

holy light of love and reverence toward the sublime, and this causes spiritual and physical sicknesses, to the community and to the individual." Such emotions can have a debilitating effect on both individual and community. The individual soul and the collective soul must be purified of this dross, and this purification is accomplished because "the poison of vulgar heresy (*kefirah gassab*), which wrecks the world, was first established as a poison against that dross of punishment fear."³² In other words, Rav Kook is prepared to grant *kefirah gassab* its useful role in the divine historical economy as a providential corrective to the unwholesome manifestations of hothouse *hasdugah*.

Let us review our attempt to integrate, in the light of Rambam's discussion, the two poles of divine providence. Each one of us must view himself, or herself, as a member of the human race and other collective identities, who is judged by God, not as a distinct, unique individual, but as an instance of the general categories to which he belongs. Each person, at the same time, is capable of realizing a singular, creative, authentic destiny, which makes him, or her, a species of one, worthy of individual providence. The truth about each individual is the dialectic between the two poles.

Let us return to an example we brought forward earlier: a case of blindness. From the viewpoint of *hasdugah kelaiti*, the blind man is regarded as a defective human being; for normal members of the human species enjoy the faculty of sight.³³ *Hasdugah kelaiti* can explain the defect by referring to the random operation of natural law: from a statistical outlook, the general providence that enables most people to see is compatible with the variety of physiological malfunctions that cause blindness. No particular, personal story is needed to explain each specific deviation from the universal human norm. The unlucky individual is free to accept his situation as the unfortunate by product of a world that ordinarily works well, or to resent the mischance that has saddled him with what he cannot help defining as a deficient organism.

Hasdugah peraiti has a very different tale to tell. The individual cannot be explained exhaustively by comparison to the universal. He or she is unique, and therefore fulfills a destiny incommensurable with that of any other. Given his own choice, the person might have chosen a different course of life, but not having been consulted about the concrete situation in which he now finds himself, it is his vocation to make the best of it: to act rather than behave; to respond rather than react. Insofar as he becomes a man of God "he lives not on account of his having been born but for the sake of life itself and so that he may merit thereby the life in the world to come."³⁴

We have already encountered the custom of changing the name of a sick person, which is often taken to fancy the Angel of Death as if

he were a befuddled policeman, easily confounded by an alias. But the earnest import of the changed name is the message of renewal and rebirth, the hope that a person can be altered momentarily, and for the better. This message too, when interpreted superficially, can be misleading. For if Yosef's destiny can be redeemed by renaming him Hayyim, then being Yosef is apparently a matter of little importance. This false conclusion is gainsaid by the Hasidic dictum with which we prefaced this essay: To appropriate thoroughly the doctrine of individual providence is to bear perpetually in mind the importance of being this specific Yosef, with a unique potential to pursue a worthwhile life and to actualize the personal providence ordained for him.³⁵

Whatever our condition of existence, we surely need sustenance. Sometimes we have none other than that of our name, that which makes us unique, sets us off from the crowd, and which the world, which always judges on the basis of the universal, more often than not regards as an affliction. If the "name" is uprooted, as it were, and the person, estranged from his individuality, is condemned to make do with egalitarian categories distributed by the universal, then he may well be without that which would sustain his vitality. This is true of the blind person, stripped of his unique destiny by a society that knows him as a member of a class.³⁶ Each reader can substitute his, or her, trials and tribulations. Each of us is charged to discover, by self-examination, prayer and study, the true meaning of our "name."³⁶

Before examining some implications of the dialectic we have sketched, it may be instructive to uncover its traces in the interpretation of God's speeches to Job. Taken as a statement about God's governance of man's affairs, the content of the speeches tilts conspicuously in the direction of *hasdugah kelaiti*. Man, whether as species or as individual, is virtually absent from these chapters.³⁷ God portrays many instances of His general providence for a variety of species and natural phenomena, with special attention to those more readily described as sublime, or grotesque, than beautiful or attractive.³⁸ Job is given to understand, from the opening verses, that his inadequacy in the face of these phenomena disqualifies him from judging his Maker: "Where were you (*efo hayita*) when I established the earth?" (Job 38:4) From the viewpoint of the biblical text, the only element of personal providence is the fact that God has chosen to address Job. There is nothing about Job's individual standing in the universe, and God scrupulously withholds from the protagonist the information that we readers have known all along, the dialogue with the Satan that precipitated his afflictions, and that presumably would offer him a measure of enigmatic enlightenment. All this is, of course, consonant with Rambam's claim that Job was not a wise man,³⁹ and that God's refusal to render an

account of his individual fate was a way of communicating to him God's endorsement of Rambam's hard words about the self-centered fool.

In terms of our approach, God's treatment of Job is one-sided. However effective it may be in conveying the sublimity of creation, and thus educating Job towards reconciliation and repentance, God's speeches confirm only one pole of the dialectic. If, as I contend, a complete theory of providence must do justice to both the general and the individual moments of the dialectic, it would not be surprising to find Hazal introducing the individualistic theme in an effort to fill out the dialectical lacuna in the biblical version.

The anticipated completion occurs in a remarkable midrash. It is based on the notion of an ideal primordial man (*Adam kadmon*): every individual human being has his "place," so to speak, as part of the great human body. Resh Lakish employs this idea to reinterpret God's initial challenge to Job: "Where were you (*efo hayyita*) when I established the earth?" According to Resh Lakish, God is not questioning Job's knowledge of the cosmic order. The effect of such a question, as we have seen, would be to accentuate Job's ignorance and his insignificance within the divine economy. On the midrashic interpretation the word *efo* is read *efa*, the measure of a man's individual character:

You seek to contend with Me... Tell me, Job, in what place did your *efa* [=your existential source⁴⁰] depend? On his head, his forehead, or some other limb? If you know the place of your *efa* you may contend with Me.⁴¹

Resh Lakish brings Job, as an individual with a unique, mysterious destiny, into the heart of God's speech. Job can only achieve reconciliation and repentance when he is forced to consider his suffering in connection with that destiny, and to confess the ineluctable opacity of his own incomparable spirit. His ignorance is not limited to the secrets of cosmology, zoology and the art of taming Leviathan. He is equally in need of enlightenment about his own "name," his own individual place and vocation in the world.

IV

Shadow and Insight: R. Yohanan and Us

In the absence of explicit prophetic revelation only the fool would feign unambiguous knowledge of his, or anyone else's, precise standing before God. This is so, not only because man's understanding is

finite, and inadequate to the secrets of the human self. If the account presented in the preceding section is true, then the mystery of man is wrapped up in his dialectical consciousness. The very attempt to fix his position vis-à-vis the poles of general and individual providence redefines his spirit; the work of honest self-examination or self-deception itself alters the quality of his repentance. Hence every self-confident, absolute assertion a man makes about the nature of his relationship to God, every complacent repose upon formula, entails the peril of bad faith.⁴²

Therefore, one cannot help asking, would it not be better to abjure entirely any talk about man's status in relation to God, since speculative exuberance is sure to end in delusion? Would it not be healthier and more honest if we stuck to the critical scrutiny of our actions, an enterprise which, however daunting, offers a chance of arriving at some useful truth? The answer is that we need not abstain from investigating those features of our relation to God that go beyond the diagnosis of sin, *provided* that we can work around the problem of self-deception. How can we avoid lying to ourselves and misleading others? Only if we maintain respect for the mystery of the dialectic, if we steer clear of naming unambiguously what hovers indeterminately between the metaphysical poles, if we recognize for what it is the creative mixture of insight and shadow, without imposing upon the latter our rigid illusion of transparency.

Models for this kind of self-knowledge are available in our classical texts. Hazal recognize categories of suffering that are not punishment for sin.⁴³ When strenuous self-scrutiny fails to discern the act responsible for the suffering, the Amoraim propose the possibility that it is *yissurin shel abava* (afflictions of love), whose goal is to increase the individual's spiritual level in a manner that presumably could not have been attained by other means. It is beyond the scope of this essay to probe the depths of this theme in Rabbinic literature and its medieval and modern interpretations.⁴⁴ Here I would like to focus on the application of the *yissurin shel abava* model to individual events. How do the Amoraim, in the course of their own self-examination, keep the *yissurin shel abava* formula from turning into a cliché?

Most obviously, the Talmudic discussion preserves the authenticity of *yissurin shel abava* by means of theoretical limitations that guarantee its sparing application. *Yissurin shel abava* can be invoked only when rigorous self-searching has failed to yield a more conventional cause; according to some views, suffering that prevents prayer and/or Torah study cannot qualify as *yissurin shel abava*. But there is a more subtle and far-reaching safeguard against the misuse of *yissurin shel abava* as an explanatory resolution.

Consider the death of R. Yohanan's children. In trying to determine R. Yohanan's view on whether loss of children can be ascribed to *yissurin shel abava*, the Talmud observes that R. Yohanan himself was in the habit of comforting the bereaved by exhibiting a bone of his tenth son. The unstated assumption is that R. Yohanan's afflictions must be accounted *yissurin shel abava*. Why? Rashi posits that the affliction of an important individual like R. Yohanan is presumably *yissurin shel abava*; Tosafot infer from the fact that R. Yohanan used the bone of his tenth son to console others that he did not view his suffering as punishment.

But is the Talmud indeed committed to the view that R. Yohanan buried his children because of *yissurin shel abava*? More important, is there any evidence that R. Yohanan himself subscribed, unambiguously, to the thesis that he was, in this matter, afflicted with *yissurin shel abava*? The alternative is that R. Yohanan did not hold any settled opinion about the cause of his suffering, and that if he did, he had no reason to communicate it to others. An acquaintance of R. Yohanan's, even a close friend, one who had accompanied him to houses of sorrow on many occasions, might be unable to state with certainty how R. Yohanan regarded his own situation. He knows what Tosafot observe, that had R. Yohanan believed that he was being punished for his sins, he would not have displayed the bone of his tenth son to other mourners. Hence, R. Yohanan is committed to the *possibility* that his affliction has a non-punitive explanation, that it constitutes *yissurin shel abava*, and because he is open to the *yissurin shel abava* interpretation, he can present his own life as an example to others. Therefore the Gemara can infer that R. Yohanan accepts the possibility, in principle, that loss of children qualifies as *yissurin shel abava*. What R. Yohanan thought in his heart, whether, as he prayed and studied before God, he arrived at any final, constant position, belongs to the intimate world of his soul, over which descends the sacred curtain of eternal silence.⁴⁵

A similar terminological modesty is characteristic of two major discussions of suffering in our own century. We have already noted the thrust of Rav Soloveitchik's "*Kol Do'ot Do'ek*," forcefully shifting our attention from the metaphysics of reward and punishment to the halakic imperative of self-examination and repentance. Repentance implies that there is something to repent, and the Rav demonstrates that even Job, whose Creator testifies that he is "upright and righteous, God-fearing and shunning evil," must mend his ways. Yet the rhythm and logic of the Rav's position, replacing the imputation of sin as axiom with the quest for moral self-knowledge as imperative, is very much that found in the *stigma* of *yissurin shel abava*, which likewise begins with the commandment to examine thoroughly one's

actions. As a response to the massive destruction of European Jewry, the Rav's Halakhah-centered theology deliberately sets out to circumvent rationalist explanations of the catastrophe, to rebut the sterile forensic assumption that God's involvement in this horrible part of our history is best interpreted as the infliction of punishment for specific iniquities. Nonetheless, despite the Rav's evident desire to sever the simplistic nexus between suffering as effect and sin as cause, he refrains from appealing to the concept of *yissurin shel abava*.

Interestingly, the modern clergyman, who has generally shied away from rationalist solutions to the problem of theology, has received less solace from the Rav's formulations than one might have expected. The reason, I believe, is that the Rav's primary motivation is ethical and dialectical, aiming at an understanding of the human condition and God's demands upon it. He does not evade the reality of human sinfulness, though he does not treat the sin-punishment nexus as the entire story. The modernist, by contrast, is driven by the need to apologize, to exculpate, at all costs to flatter his audience. Where the Rav's dialectic brings man closer to God, the modernist's soothing palaver seeks a conception of God inoffensive to people. The predominance of the therapeutic goal makes it impossible to establish a comprehensive Jewish theology that would appropriate the full range of categories found in the traditional sources. Hence, a paradox: the modernist who, in his fear of braving the harsher realities, confines himself to themes of comfort, is unable to preach those principles with genuine conviction, either on his part or on the part of his hearers, and thus squanders, as it were, their power to console.

Among examinations of suffering stemming from the Musar movement, far from the insular preoccupations of the modernist mentality, the remarkable series of discussions by the saintly martyr Rav Abraham Grodzinski, last *masgiah* of the Slobodka Yeshiva, stands out.⁴⁶ The *Torat Avraham* sought to define those features of *yissurin* that have value over and beyond their punitive function. Contrary to our expectations, however, his texts have nothing, not one word, to say on the subject of *yissurin shel abava*. The closest he comes is a discussion of accepting suffering with joy.⁴⁷ The latter phenomenon, however, is very different from the former: accepting suffering with joy is a subjective mood indicating a profound reconciliation of the sufferer with his fate, and a conviction that it is for the best; *yissurin shel abava* denotes a hypothesis about the cause and purpose of the suffering. An individual professing to accept suffering with joy might be ridiculously vain to make the claim, or might be attesting to the honest psychological truth about himself. An individual who announced that he was experiencing *yissurin shel abava* would strike us as singularly arrogant.

The dialectical nature of our relationship to God and, for that matter to ourselves, can be a cause of intellectual paralysis. We do not know how to apply properly the conceptual categories bequeathed to us by our sources, and all our labors to construct a dialectical framework for our understanding of divine providence seemed only to underline the futility of the venture. What we can gain from our teachers, from the talmudic sages down to the great spirits of our age, is not only a list of arguments and doctrines, but also a practical prototype for their use in making sense of our lives. One lesson we can learn is that sometimes less is more: the self-discipline that enabled the Rav and the *Torat Avraham* to illuminate the experience of suffering without deploying explicitly one of the most attractive and relevant concepts in the rabbinic corpus manifests a greater wisdom than the cleverness that feeds upon its own sparkle.⁴⁸

V

The Remorseful Sinner

Many readers will have noticed a curious reticence, in an essay devoted to the question of human self-awareness and confrontation with the evils and disappointments of life, and purporting to discuss the question in the light of daily experience. For the religious individual, the greatest evil is not physical pain or professional failure, but sin; the greatest unhappiness is to know oneself a sinner, estranged from God. The fear of sin is, or should be, a ubiquitous presence in our daily lives. Within the intellectual discourse of forensic theodicy, the primary issue is the responsibility of God for evil. If sin is to be blamed on human beings (and God is *not* saddled with the indirect responsibility for creating sin-prone beings), or if it is a necessary by-product of a greater good (as in the free will defence) then the evil entailed by sin is less problematic than is the existence of natural evil. But if, as I have proposed, our task is to concentrate on the proper response to evil, in the light of man's dual nature, as species man and man of God, then the dialectic of sin and atonement requires special attention.

I have deferred this reflection until now for considerations theological and psychological. To look in the mirror and see a face estranged from God, to behold this apparition and fully comprehend what it portends, is a terror so overwhelming that it obliterates any other sensation of discomfort or satisfaction. On those occasions when our reclamation of *honen ba-daat* ("He who bestows understanding") breaks in, and even the bland and spiritually repressed among us is visited by the insight that in the end only one thing

counts, we are gripped by so intimidating an apprehension of iniquity that we can hardly look to anything beyond the entreaties of *bashmienu* ("restore us to Your Torah") and *selah lanu Avinu* ("forgive us our Father"), desperate pleas for repentance and forgiveness. All that remains is to rest one's head between one's knees like R. Elazar b. Durdaya, and weep until death redeems with silence the endless foothill of spiritual failure. . . .⁴⁹

To many of us, no doubt—particularly for those not inclined to amnesia—the experience I have just described is as familiar as their own flesh. Yet Judaism has not recommended R. Elazar b. Durdaya's response as the norm. Our prayers, and our lives, proceed from the plea for forgiveness to other national, communal and personal petitions of a more mundane nature. As Rav Kook observed, the strenuous and potentially debilitating penitence of the solemn season culminating in Yom Kippur is followed by prosaic days of preparation for the joyful recuperation of Sukkot.⁵⁰ *Homo religiosus* must live with the enormous responsibility that is part of being an individual, but must not be crushed by the burden.

The dialectic of expiation and atonement addresses itself to man as an individual. From the perspective of general providence a sinful individual is simply a spiritually defective human being, who falls short of the norm as surely as the blind man fails to meet the normal physical standard. As Rav Soloveitchik has taught us, repentance is a radical creative enterprise, in which man remakes himself. Species man cannot undo the actions he has already done; only the individual can rewrite the past so that it can be retread in the light of the new life he is committed to living.⁵¹ However mortifying the experience of radical guilt may be to the religious individual, it can be comprehended within the same dialectical framework of general and individual providence that we applied to other manifestations of evil. The movement from species man to man of God is part of the work of becoming a self. As Kierkegaard puts it:

The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, a task which can be performed only by means of a relationship to God. But to become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete means neither to become finite nor infinite, for that which is to become concrete is a synthesis.⁵²

One can fail to become concrete in two ways: either by becoming imprisoned in the finite or by becoming volatilized in the infinite. Each expression of bad faith corresponds to a mistaken understanding of the dialectic of providence, inasmuch as it entails a distorted

conception of man's responsibility. When man takes the external facts of his situation as an objective definition of his identity and potential, he imprisons himself in the finite: he is what he is, he is what nature has made him, he is what providence has ordained, no more and no less. Or alternatively, dazzled by the imagination of infinite possibilities, he finds it possible to ignore the intimate and undeniable ligatures that bind past and present.

Obviously a one-sided conception of the finite, paralleling the agnostic view of providence, is incompatible with Judaism's commitment to free will and individual providence. Our pious rhetoric is less injured against the siren song of the fantastical, "which so carries a man out into the infinite that it merely carries him away from himself and therewith prevents him from returning to himself."⁵³ The lack of determination to be a concrete, particular self robs the person both of his identity as a member of the species and of the invitation to become an individual working out his destiny before God. If nothing we do in any way constrains our identity as individuals, then the fantastic self is there to be fashioned and refashioned as if it were no more substantial than the persona of an American politician.

In Chekhov's novella "My Life," the hero's wife, who has quickly tired of their dream of farming her land and redeeming the peasants, goes to America, and she tells him, in asking for her freedom: "King David had a ring with the inscription 'All things pass.' Whenever I feel sad those words cheer me up, but when I'm cheerful they make me sad." On which the husband reflects: "If I had wanted a ring I would have chosen the following inscription for it: 'Nothing passes.' I believe that nothing actually disappears without trace and that the slightest step we take has some meaning for the present and future."⁵⁴ Moral reality endorses the view of the husband: the road to *hashtabah peraitit* runs through repentance, and repentance begins in the dreadful consciousness of remorse, in the irremovable shame and guilt we feel in contemplating what we have done or left undone. Only in the soil of moral realism can the seed of individual providence grow, only when we have recognized that our actions have consequences can we endeavor to wrest creative meaning from the ruins of our iniquities.

VI

Limits of Comprehension

Our analysis has proceeded from certain assumptions about the real psychology of ordinary people, individuals who are predisposed to take an optimistic view on life. What are we to say about people

whose calamities are so severe that all talk of dialectic, creativity and self-transcendence is beside the point?

That such intense physical and psychological pain occurs, we have no reason to doubt. Anyone who has spent a long summer afternoon doubled up with the kidney stone, or has shaken with the bone-breaking ague of malaria or undulant fever, aware only that the eventual cycle of respite is followed by one of recurrence, anyone for whom grief has blotted out the sky, who has stood dishevelled at the open grave, all tomorrows murdered at his feet, and leaped blindly into the pit—whoever knows of these matters will not doubt the overwhelming violence of pain and suffering. And however vivid the experience at the time, our recollections invariably take something off the full intensity. The indescribable pain of a winter night's toothache or an urgent attack of asthma become a distant nightmare by morning. When devastating grief has subsided to the hard, chronic ache of absence, we wonder how we could have lost self-control and all sense of proportion: "For who when healthy can become a fool?"⁵⁵ What, then, can our philosophizing say to people for whom such experiences are not passing episodes but the substance of daily life?

It is impossible to say. On the one hand, our inability to enter into the state of mind of people in limit situations, or even to recall, with precision, our own responses to acute illness and grave sorrow, would lead us to dismiss the relevance of any reflection based on ordinary life. On the other hand, the discontinuity between extreme conditions and ordinary situations may not be quite as sharp as we have depicted it.

The discontinuity-thesis appears to rest upon the assumption that extreme suffering can be so defined on the basis of objective criteria. Up to a certain level of pain a headache is an everyday event, and can be discussed in terms of our earlier analysis, as the occasion for an appropriate human response. Beyond that pain threshold it is impossible for the sufferer to respond as a dignified individual, but only to howl like a wounded animal. Now when it comes to psychological pain, this is certainly *not* the case. The same loss that utterly shatters one person, let us say the destruction of one's family, provides another with the occasion for a dignified religious response (remember R. Yohanan's tragic history). It is possible to imagine comparable possibilities of individual response with respect to physical pain as well. In fact, we do encounter heroic responses to extreme pain and personal distress; even individuals who appear hopelessly submerged beneath their burden of pain, suffering, and vacancy, often disclose sudden glimpses of an active spiritual life.⁵⁶ Although, from our comfortable vantage point, it is impossible to bestow upon those

in extreme situations the ample reflective space we experience as our own, yet we have no right to regard them as mere victims who cannot benefit from, or draw upon, the spiritual reserves available to ordinary people.

Vicious Resentment

We have examined, as best as we could, the situation of extreme affliction as it affects the sufferer. Many intellectuals who cannot themselves stake a claim to extreme affliction make the fate of the extreme victim their own. If Rambam accused the pessimist of self-centeredness, these individuals would counter that their resentment is founded upon a resolve to take the part of the unfortunate against an indifferent heaven. It is doubtful whether this attitude, whose most memorable philosophical incarnation is Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, is typical of ordinary human beings.⁵⁷ Should it affect our earlier analysis, and if so, how?

It seems to me that the kind of strong sympathy that would cause an individual to identify so zealously with the victims of divine providence, can be understood in terms of two moral impulses, or as their combination:

1. One element in sympathy for the unfortunate involves an emotional expansion of the self. It is a common occurrence that people are more affected by the tribulations of those near and dear to them than they are by their own suffering; it would be absurd to wonder at the fact that a healthy adult is liable to be distraught by the serious illness of a child, more than by her own sickness. By the same token we may imagine saintly individuals who respond to the sufferings of total strangers as if to those of their own offspring.

2. The sympathetic individual may feel the wrongness of injustice and evil as a spur to rectifying the situation. This kind of response is very much of a piece with that recommended by Halakha, as interpreted by Rav Soloveitchik. The individual who experiences the evil visited upon others with whom he, or she, sympathizes, will examine himself with the goal of increasing his, or her, commitment to the fulfillment of God's will, and if the suffering of his fellow man is indeed uppermost in his mind, that response will involve greater dedication to the welfare of the sufferers.

Both of these impulses are consonant with the analysis developed throughout this essay. Forensic theology, however, entails a different outlook. Here the philosopher, who is himself satisfied with his own lot, is concerned to weigh the good and evil in the universe. His judgment about the evil suffered by certain individuals, or groups of individuals, is so drastic that he returns a negative verdict on God's governance of the world.

From an analytic point of view, this line of debate is like any other attempt to rebut the usual presumption in favor of the goodness of creation. Rambam, for example, would have no compunction against accusing his philosophical antagonist of furthering a self-centered conception, by assigning to the human race an importance that it does not rate within the divine economy as a whole. But because its champions don the altruistic mantle of attorneys for the doomed, this particular argument carries an atmosphere of its own. At a psychological level, its credibility depends, to a greater degree than is customary, on the authenticity of its proponents. Are they the trouble-making existential tourists they sometimes appear to be, or are they the righteous fighters for truth they present themselves as being?

The attempt to answer this question implicates us in all the mysteries of the human heart, the treacherous business of inferring motivations and generalizing about them. Whatever we said earlier about Job's judgment of God applies to Job's vicarious prosecution lawyers. In particular, let us remember that the adoption of a third person perspective often falsifies existential realities, and that a congealed, philosophical compassion with the victim often bespeaks a cloying, condescension towards the objects of pity. In the end, we find ourselves in the kind of psychological world which only a Dostoevsky can hope to illuminate.

Aesthetic Complacency

We have not repined from posing hard questions about the motivations behind vicarious resentment. Similar problems can be raised about the general position advanced in this essay. Our entire framework of thought is premised on the idea that we are speaking about ordinary psychological realities, as opposed to the routine professional preoccupations of philosophers. In truth, the very fact that we (=you and I) can articulate and debate theories about suffering is a source of comfort, delight and catharsis, and sets us apart from the mass of suffering mankind. It is possible that the insights we have proposed here bear fruit in the souls of those "mute inglorious Miltons" who are incapable of formulating them, but it is also possible that their power and plausibility vanish with the intellectual satisfaction the philosophical occupation provides.

The line of thought pursued in this essay may also give false comfort to readers who misconceive the idea of individuality correlated to the particular providence of the man of God. For Rav Soloveitchik, and most certainly for Rambam, being an individual is connected to having independent worth; it is not a matter of having some characteristic that nobody else possesses. *A's* mastery of *Bava Batra*, for example, is in no way diminished by the fact that *B* has attained the

same grasp. Individual worth is an essential property of the individual's spirit; it pertains to the way he chooses himself before God.

Too many of us are tempted to identify our individuality and uniqueness, in the spiritually significant sense, with an accidental property. Most often we gain a belief in our importance from some talent with which we are blessed, rather than from the spirit with which we employ the talents we have been given. Most of us, having been admired for our skills at reading, writing or politicking, are enticed, at some time or other, by the idea that these gifts make us uniquely precious to God, and therefore more worthy of *hashgafah peratit* than other mortals. This is to confuse the aesthetic, which glories in the accidental, with the ethical and religious, which are founded on the inner integrity of the self. Another odd phenomenon is the competition between individuals and groups who are anxious to demonstrate that they have suffered more than others, as if this confers upon them some ultimate prestige. The undignified race for the crown of thorns becomes a parody of the religious conception of the man of God, as blasphemous as it is vulgar.

VII

What do human beings want out of life? The spiritual orientation which I have presented in this essay is predicated upon a firm belief in the absolute claim of the God-relationship, a conviction strong enough to withstand pain, grief, all sorts of failure and disappointment within and without, the terrible moments when God seems unbearably distant from the believer, and the impenetrable moments when the divine presence seems intolerably commanding and intrusive. The human being who yearns to stand before God is thus possessed of an unwavering integrity of commitment together with the unflinching honesty that can absorb hard truths about the world and oneself. Such an individual longs to make his own the joyous affirmation with which the Psalmist concludes his meditation on the mystery of evil: "As for me, the nearness of God, that is my good!"⁹

Where does that leave the rest of us? Does the vision of the nearness of God transfigure our existence? Is the service of God the omnipresent star by which we unalterably fix our compass? For the vast majority of us, the one thing that really matters in life is not paramount, most of the time, in our day to day living. Check the contents of your mind at random moments and, among the many preoccupations jostling for your attention, the desire for the nearness of God, although it be ever before our eyes, is rarely the most prominent. When illness threatens, the first worry is for one's physical health and

that of one's family. Chronically anxious about our choices for the future, we are equally insecure about our attainments in the present: in youth, these concerns are often self-directed; later on, we tend to find more and more time to fret vicariously about the situations of persons to whom we are devoted, and to lie awake bemoaning our intellectual help. We hope to be better understood by those we love than we are, and wish that we could succeed in understanding them. We may dread the disrespect, humiliation and failure to which we are subjected on the job and we may dread the prospect of returning to the misunderstanding and disharmony of an unhappy household. We recall with rage the helplessness, uselessness, loneliness and pain that marked us in childhood and anticipate with fear and anxiety the helplessness, uselessness, loneliness and pain that await our old age. Along with all this, we are strangely fixated upon peculiar, undignified longings and vexed with frustrations so petty that we can hardly confess to them lest we be exposed to mockery. Even at the verge of committing ourselves to the hand of God, we cling to the safety net of worldly affirmation, to the satisfactions and comforts we fancy ourselves unable to do without. We plead for the purgation of our sins, but "not through suffering and bad sicknesses."⁹

We have suggested again and again, in the course of this essay, that ordinary people, whose dream is not one of exceptional saintliness, are usually satisfied with a life that is not perfect, a life that is good enough, as the world measures these things. Except for those rare individuals whose every breath is governed by particular providence, a good enough life is what people hope to get: a life that oscillates between the impersonal, uncaring benevolence of general providence and the invitation to transcend one's species identity and be judged according to one's individual worth. Man's ambiguous position, his inability to estimate properly the nature of his relation to God, is a healthy phenomenon. An antidote to self-centeredness, it frees him of the clamminess of hothouse *hashgafah*, and motivates the spiritual striving that brings him nearer to the pole of individual providence. In this respect, the "good enough *hashgafah*" is not unlike Winnicott's "good enough mother."

The human reality that concerns me is neither that of the obsessive philosopher nor that of the burnished saint. The former, inspired by the categories of forensic theodicy, expects of life nothing less than perfection, and cannot endure the shadows and conflicts that plague the journey of *homo viator*. The latter, by contrast, having entered the dwelling place of the holy where "the nearness of God, that is my good," happily devote their lives to gratitude and divine service. In addressing again the ordinary individual, this closing part of our discussion shifts the focus of the essay: from the ambiguity in interpret-

ing God's providence for us as individuals, to the ambiguity of the choices that we, as individuals, make for ourselves.

When we look in the mirror we see neither the unique man of God, "replete with creation and renewal," nor a species man, the "spiritual parasite," subject to general providence, a "faceless mediocrity" excluded from the sacred adventure of the Psalmist. We meet a creature mysteriously, and sometimes humorously, suspended between the categories. The ordinary person I have described does not exhibit the vocation of the saintly individual, but his or her preoccupations contain the raw material from which we can build bridges from "where all the ladders start"⁶⁰ to where all the ladders must lead.

Many of the aspirations and aversions that define the spiritual landscape of the ordinary unheroic religious believer represent legitimate, worthy values. I fear, for example, becoming a dull, embittered old man, in which eventuality my friends are liable to be less devoted to me than I would like, and than they would otherwise be willing to be. With that goal in mind I persist in various enjoyable activities, some of which, like Torah study, are religiously mandated, while others merely fulfill the desire to cultivate one's God-given talents and to delight one's friends. I hope that these efforts will make me a cheerful and interesting companion to them and help ease the misery of old age. Is this mere worldliness rationalizing the pursuit of pleasure, comfort and security, or is it also a passionate manifestation of *ahavat haberyot*, love of one's fellow man, a fulfillment of the divine call to master the world, and hence part of the quest that brings one closer to the "nearness of God, that is my good?" And once having glimpsed the higher, God-oriented, dimension of my motivation, it becomes impossible to remain satisfied with "species man's" torpid, bloodless passivity in the face of the divine summons. Thus a more than good enough life is not an unreachable elitism to which the ordinary believer has no attachment, but the proper outgrowth of our natural experience. Our conception of human felicity cannot remain static. There is more to heaven and to earth than happiness, as the world defines it.

Witgenstein's dying words: "Tell them I've had a wonderful life."⁶¹ Not a perfect life, nor even a very good one, for as one of the "them" to whom the cancer-riddled philosopher dedicated his last mysterious utterance, observed: "When I think of his profound pessimism, the intensity of his mental and moral suffering, the relentless way in which he drove his intellect, his need for love together with the harshness that repelled love, I am inclined to believe that his life was fiercely unhappy."⁶²

In the face of the deep unhappiness that may befall even the blandest among us, and in the absence of the perfection to which we have no right, a "good enough" life is not really good enough. The

aesthetic personality, at its most clear-eyed and heroic, can look into the abyss, admire its own talent, and summon up the dedication of Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "Am I concerned with *happiness*? I am concerned with my *work*."⁶³ The ethical view, having seen through the vacuity at the heart of the brilliant aesthetic kaleidoscope, accepts the universal yoke of Heaven, and recites the conclusion of Kohelet: "In the end, when all is heard, fear God, and keep His commandments, for that is all of man." Both of these paths seek to supply the passion and the courage that are absent from the outlook of species man. For when all is said and done our hearts and minds are made for more than a good enough life. Yet beyond the self-dramatizing, self-annihilating vanity of aesthetic man and the passive acceptance of the burden of duty that occasionally strips ethical personalities of their unique individuality, we look to the *Ribono shel Olam*. His rod and His reliance⁶⁴ We ache for eternity, and yearn for the purity of wonder, and know that in the end there is only one thing that counts. The passionate heart turns from the resignation of Kohelet to the enigmatic climax of *Shir ha-Shirim*, to the love that outstrips ordinary human calculations and ambitions, to the love as fierce as death.

Notes

1. Cited by his disciple R. Hayyim of Tchernowitz, *Be'er Hayim Hayyim* (Jerusalem, 1992), Genesis, p. 101.
2. *The Power and the Glory* (New York, 1962), 284.
3. Rambam, *Altsnash Torah, Hil. Taranpat* 1:1. My interpretation of the halakha is of course, indebted to the discussion by *mishnah ha-Rav* Joseph B. Soloveitchik 277, in his "Kol Doei Dogeik."
4. Rambam, *Torat ha-Adam*, in *Kitzei Rambam*, ed. C.D. Chavel (Jerusalem 1963), II, 281.
5. The term originates with Leibniz. See, for example, Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (Cambridge, 1995), 7-21, specifically p. 18, n.1.
6. C.S. Lewis, in *The Problem of Pain* (New York, 1962), maintains that theology is an attempt to make the best of a difficulty for decision. The strength of the theistic case lies elsewhere; hence the apologist for evil is justified in calling upon stop-gap arguments that would not, in themselves, impress anyone not disposed on other grounds, to be a theist.
7. See the handbook *Pe'er Bamish: Birkat Holim* (Jerusalem, 1985), 38-39, for details on changing the name of a sick person.
8. Calvin Coolidge, *The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge* (New York, 1929), 190-91.
9. One cannot help wondering, in the light of these deliberate, laconic comments, whether Coolidge's choice not to run for reelection in 1928 had anything to do with tears for his remaining children.
10. This example is derived from Michael Stone, *Beyond Optimizing: A Study of Rational Choice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).
11. To utilize economic terminology, we may not demand of God that He optimize, but we still expect Him to suffice.
12. Compare II Kings 13:14-19, where each arrow shot by the king of Israel assures one victory over Amm. When he desists after three shots, Elisha becomes angry

- with him for abandoning the task before completion.
13. *Guide* 3:12.
 14. "I sometimes wonder if not having a taste for a dark or tragic view isn't a mark of superficiality. Yet cannot very different temperaments be equally valid?" See Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life* (New York, 1989), 24.
 15. Giatim Greene, "The Lost Childehood," in *Collected Essays* (New York, 1969), 18.
 16. *Emunot ve-De'ot* 9:1. See also Shubert Spero, "Is Judaism an Optimistic Religion?" *Tradition* 4:1 (Fall 1961):21-35. Professor Michael A. Simidman points out that Rambam himself was hardly oblivious to the miseries of this world. See *Hil. Yasset Bi'atz* 13; *Iggeret Teman*, in *Rambam la-Yam: Iggerot* (Jerusalem, 1960), 114ff.
 17. John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London and New York, 1895), ch. 5, pp. 241-43.
 18. R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto, *Mesilat Yesharim*, chapter 1, supplements his Saadiah-like skepticism about the benefits of this world with a detailed argument to the effect that this world cannot be all there is, because it cannot afford proper scope for the full development of man's spiritual potential. As Asher Friedman has pointed out, this approach goes a long way towards bridging the gap between Rambam's optimism about this world and the perennial, pessimistically tinged, conviction that this world is not man's true home. (For a discussion of Luzzatto's theology, using *Da'at Terumat* and other systematic works, and placing Rambal in the context of 18th century Leibnizian theories, see Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto's Thought against the Background of Theodicy Literature," in *Justice and Righteousness* [Sheffield, 1992], ed. H. Revendow and Y. Hoffman, pp. 173-99). In a similar vein, Bernard Stahl notes passages in which Rav Kook exhibits a keen awareness of this world's evils, without which we would not be adequately motivated to transcend the limited good of the present towards the future that redeems it; see, for example, *Affirm ha-Neger* (originally published in *Ha-Peles* [1903], 655-63, 714-22; now available in Moshe Tsvetk, *Ozerot ha-Royalit* 2 [Sha'alim, 1988], 733-42). R. Kook's primary disciple, R. David Cohen (the Nazir) connects Jewish metaphysics, exemplified by second-generation Hasidai, to "a pessimistic, pure, distilled ethic." The suffering of love (*yisurim shel ahava*) transforms the bitterness and pessimism into a "supreme joy (*shevat* *teyovah*). See his *Kol ha-Ne'udah: ha-Higgeyon ha-Tori ha-Sheni* (Jerusalem, 1970), 26.
 19. R. Abraham Isaac Kook, "Seder Hosen—ha-Bayit she-Nehenas ki-Basis li-Bayit Hardash," *Tekumin* 2 (1981):239-41. Yehuda Gelman, "Ha-Ra ve-Zidduko be-Mishnat ha-Rav Kook," *Da'at* 19 (Summer 1987):145-56, distinguishes two primary directions in Rav Kook's thought. One regards evil as the absence of good; the other justifies evil teleologically. The text here examined appears to transcend both categories.
 20. Schopenhauer's pessimism is most fully presented in his *World as Will and Representation*. It is analyzed, as a philosophical position, in John Atwell, *Schopenhauer: The Human Character* (Philadelphia, 1990), 143-210 who discusses the secondary literature, and, more recently, in Mark Milgrom, "Schopenhauer's Pessimism and the Unconditioned Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33:4 (1995):643-60. Rav Kook found certain elements in Schopenhauer congenial; see *Orot ha-Kodesh* 2 (Jerusalem, 5724), 482-84; Shalom Rosenzweig, "Rav Kook and the Blind Sea Monster," in *B'Orot*, ed. H. Harnel (Jerusalem, 1986), 317-52. R. David Cohen (*Kol ha-Ne'udah*, pp. 26-31) delineates broader affinities between Jewish philosophy and Schopenhauer. The decisive difference is that Schopenhauer's will is passive, while Hebrew philosophy grasps the will as active. Note the similarity to Rav Solovitchik's stress on the crucial role of human creativity, which will dominate much of our discussion below.
 21. William James' lecture on "The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness," in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, offers a vigorous account of the psychological sources underlying natural optimism, which is valid independent of the pantheistic, proto-New Ager examples that fill the last pages of the chapter. Here, and in the following lecture on "The Sick Soul," James argues convincingly that both psychological elements can, and indeed, must, coexist in the realistic religious consciousness.
 22. The phrase comes from the title of an essay in C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, 1970) 240-44.
 23. R. Joseph B. Solovitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia, 1983), 123-24.
 24. We might, for example, have appealed to Rambam as a *Rabbon* committed to particular providence who, at the same time, acknowledges natural and non-individual factors in the operations of Providence. See David Berger, "Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides," in Isadore Twersky, ed., *Rabbi Meir Nechemias (Rambam): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity* (Cambridge, 1983), 107-28. Among modern critical-philosophical treatises, R. Yosef Eliezer Blech's *Shnei Da'at* 1 (Jerusalem, 1976), part I, chapter 7, exemplifies a balancing of direct and indirect principles in the account of divine governance.
 25. The textual situation is complicated by the pious remarks in chapter 51 which promise miraculous providence for those who merit it. The meaning of this chapter, and its place in Rambam's theory of providence, aroused the curiosity of Rambam's translator and subsequent medieval readers of the *Guide*, but need not detain us here. See Zvi Diesendruck, "Samuel and Moses Ibn Tibbon on Maimonides' Theory of Providence," *HECJ* 11 (1936):341-66.
 26. *Halakhic Man*, pp. 126-27.
 27. *Ibid.* pp. 127-28.
 28. *Ibid.* p. 128.
 29. If proof is needed for the Rav's assent to these affirmations, it is amply provided in "The Lonely Man of Faith," "U-Bikkashtem mi-Sham" and many other texts. The Rav's most explicit discussion of theology, in "Kol Dofei Dorok," reaches its climax in the observation that Job is restored only when he finds it in himself to pray on behalf of his friends.
 30. *Me'orat ha-Royalit* on Slavoun (Jerusalem 5754), 12-13, citing Psalms 36:7 and *Hullin* 5b. See also Maharam, *Hidushei Aggadot* to *Hullin*, *ad loc.*
 31. *Guide* 3:13. Rambam's position in this chapter assails not only man's self-centeredness as an individual, but that of the species as a whole. From the cosmic perspective the particular species is as insignificant as the individual in relation to the species.
 32. *Orot ha-Kodesh* 4 (Jerusalem, 1990), 32-33; 421-22.
 33. That blind people, or those who enjoy healthy interaction with them, adopt this point of view is, of course, contrary to my central theological thesis, according to which the destiny molded by each individual is more significant than his or her subsumption under collective categories. How blind people typically experience their handicap is explored in a valuable exchange of letters between the philosophers Brian Magee and Martin Milligan, *On Blindness* (Oxford, 1995). While the original focus of the correspondence was the epistemology of perception, the existential question forces its way into the book, with Milligan, who was blind from infancy, explaining to the initially incredulous Magee that many blind people do not feel they are missing anything essential, and that the joys and worries that fill their lives usually have little to do with their blindness. He connects, however, that people who lose their sight later in life are liable to suffer much more, and that for them blindness may indeed be a catastrophic event.
 34. Rabbeinu Bahiyah cites a midrash according to which each individual has three names: the first is given him by his parents, the second he calls himself, the last is named in the book. Of these, the name one bears at the end of life is the most significant. See *Kad ha-Kemah*, s.v. *amei*, #1, in C. Chavel, ed., *Kinot Rabbeinu Bahiyah* (Jerusalem, 1970), 47. See also Chavel's nn. 98-99 for other versions of this midrash.
 35. The egalitarian euphemisms that recategorize crippled people as "differently

- abled", and the like, miss the mark for several reasons. To begin with, the bureaucratic jargon, in the very comprehensiveness of its cundescension, calls attention to, and manages to exploit, the deficiency it pretends to ignore, arousing a self-admiring self-righteousness in its philanthropic practitioners, matched only by the embarrassment it causes everybody else. The real problem with such language is that it misconstrues an existential, religious choice of self as an issue amenable to superficial social engineering. At the most fundamental level, the blind man's relation to his situation is integral to his being a human self, implicated in the dialectic of providence outlined in the text: To what extent his blindness is essential or accidental to his existence, to what degree it is a challenge or a burden, is an aspect of his spiritual being, not a subject for adjudication and confirmation by social workers.
36. See my "Destiny, Freedom and the Logic of Petition," *Tradition* 24:2 (Winter 1989):17-37.
37. The one exception is the beginning of the second speech (40: 9-15) where Job is sarcastically invited to humble the wicked. But note that the wicked are treated here, not as members, or representatives of the human race, but almost as if they constituted a force of nature. The passage serves as a prelude to the powerful, grotesque beasts—Behemoth and Leviathan.
38. It is impossible to offer a full exegesis, within the scope of this essay, of these wonderful passages. See preliminary remarks in S. Carmy and David Shatz, "The Bible as a Source of Jewish Philosophical Reflection," in *The Routledge History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. D. Frank and O. Leaman (London, 1996), 13-57.
39. *Guide* 3:22-23.
40. I prefer this phrase to Soncino's "essential source. . . ."
41. *Shemot Rabbah* 40:3. Cf. *Bereishit Rabbah* 13:8. The Midrash comments on Genesis 2:5, which implies that rain did not fall until the advent of man. The Midrash goes on to reinterpret Job 38:26, which speaks of God causing rain to fall upon a land without people. (See traditional commentaries on the Midrash and Theodor-Albeck edition Jerusalem, 1965), 117. I am inclined to think that the Midrash connects verse 26 with the following verse, bracketing the fact that man is absent from verse 27 as well.)
42. Rambam, as we have seen, offers a variety of proposals and postulates about the operation of divine providence, including topics such as matter and form, evil as privation, human responsibility for most evil, teleology, species and the individual. Nonetheless, in his concluding remarks on the question (*Guide* 3, end of chapter 23), where his ostensible subject is God's response to Job, he affirms, in typical Maimonidean fashion, that we can no more understand His providence and governance of the world as coming under our human conceptions than we can grasp any other aspect of God in anthropomorphic terms. Consciousness of this truth enables afflicted man to devote himself to his proper task: not the cultivation of skepticism but the enhancement of love. The significance of this passage, and its confluence with our present discussion, was brought to my attention by Uri Eligson.
43. Non-punitive explanations for suffering in rabbinic literature have been most thoroughly investigated from literary, historical and theological perspectives in a series of articles by Yaakov Elman. See also David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (New York, 1993).
44. The talmudic *sigya* on *yissurin shel abraham* (*Bereishit* 5a-b) does not offer a clear explanation of the value assigned to such suffering. I have discussed Rav Kook and his predecessors in an unpublished lecture to the Association for Jewish Studies, and have gained much from discussions of Rabbi Yitzchak Blau's work in progress on Raa and others. On Rav Soloveitchik and Rabbi Avraham Grodzinski, see below.
45. In the following section, several Palestinian Amora'im discuss their afflictions. Though the context, the lack of reference to sin, and the implication that the suf-

- ferring under discussion has value only if accepted willingly, suggest *yissurin shel abraham*. It is noteworthy, for the reason we have just given, that the Amora'im refrain from describing their situation with this specific theological label. The venue of the *sigya* then shifts to Babylonia with the story of R. Huna's soured wine. When his colleagues summon him to self-examination, his response ("Am I suspect in your eyes?") implies a presumption of innocence, but he does not invoke a theological formula that would close further discussion.
46. *Torat Avraham* (Brunei Berak 5738), 27-56.
47. *Ibid.* p. 35, commenting on *Bava Mezi'a* 81b-85a.
48. The avoidance of formulaic explanations of suffering is already found in the book of Job; Job's ordeal is never described as a trial (*Yissurim*), although the root *v-s-b* appears in crucially misleading contexts (e.g. Eliphaz's opening speech at 4:2). The Bible thus prevents us from responding to Job's plight as an instance of a familiar theological phenomenon.
49. The allusions in this paragraph are to the fourth, fifth and sixth benedictions of the weekday prayer, for the story about the repentance of R. Elazar b. Durdaiya, see *Yevotub Zamb* 17a.
50. *Olai Re'yeb* 2 (Jerusalem, 1962), 367-68, and *Orot ha-Teshuvah* (Jerusalem, 1988), 9:10. Cf. similar ideas in *Sigat Emer* (Jerusalem, 1971), Sukkot 564f and *Pele Yo'az* (cited by R. Zevi Yehudah Kook in his notes to the passage in *Olai Re'yeb*).
51. *Hakabbah Alan*, pp. 110-17. See also Yitzchak Blau, "Creative Repentance: On R. Soloveitchik's Concept of *Teshuva*," *Tradition* 28:2 (Winter 1994):11-18. For a congenial analysis of the foreknowledge/free will conundrum in Rav Kook, see my "On Optimism and Freedom," in *Essays on the Thought and Philosophy of Rabbi Kook*, ed. Ezra Gidman (New York, 1991), 114-20. Both Hermann Cohen, in his *Religion of Reason and Kierkegaard*, in *Concepts of Axiel*; require the category of the individual in order to explicate repentance.
52. S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness into Death*, Part I, III, in *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness into Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, 1953), 162.
53. Kierkegaard, p. 164.
54. Anton Chekhov, *The Party and Other Stories*, trans. R. Wilks (New York, 1985), 179, 186.
55. W.H. Auden, "Surgical Ward," in *Selected Poetry* (New York, 1958), 46.
56. See, for example, Oliver Sacks' report on Jimmy, "The Lost Mariner," in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (New York, 1985), 23-42, who is able to pray attentively despite the fact that all his memories for the past several decades had been obliterated by Korsakoff's Syndrome. Jimmy has "a soul," despite the absence of the most rudimentary faculty of short-term memory.
57. Ivan's claim, that a case of horrible injustice in this world would justify him in asking God to "return his ticket," even if the evil is fully reconciled from the perspective of eternity, has a Jewish parallel in one of the interpretations of the term *olam ha-ba* proposed by Mahaval in *Gur Aiyeb*, Genesis 18:25. Rashi's commentary on the verse requires further analysis.
58. Psalms 73:28. This chapter is frequently cited as the quintessence of biblical theology. See, for example, Ramban's introduction to the commentary on Job, in *Kitze Ramban*, Vol. 1, pp. 20-21, and R. Yosef Albo, *Siger ha-Ikkarim* 4:14.
59. R. Kook (*Olai Re'yeb* 2, pp. 356-58) interprets this entry ideologically. We want the type of repentance that is motivated by love rather than the kind that is extracted from the unwilling penitent by suffering and adversity. However appealing his approach, it does not, in my opinion, cancel the simple meaning of the prayer.
60. W. B. Eers, "The Circus Animals' Desertion."
61. Quoted by Rav Monk, *Leidung Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York, 1990), 579.
62. Norman Malcolm, *Leidung Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London, 1967), 100.

63. *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1954), 439. Kierkegaard's Judge William provides the crucial distinction between the ethical stage, and the cultivation of a talent, which belongs to the aesthetic. See *Either/Or*, trans. Walter Lowrie, 2 (Princeton, 1971), 187ff, 295ff.
64. See Psalms 23:4 as interpreted by Rashi.