

HUMANKIND'S RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS OF CREATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY IN THE VIEW OF JUDAISM

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1. Western Critique of Judaism

The Church Father Tertullian (160-225), like many others who wished to strengthen the orthodox faith of the Church, was concerned with currents in the emerging Church considered to be heretical, including the doctrine (effective at the time of Hadrian) of Marcion, who made a distinction between the Christ of the Gospels and "the one whom the Creator God destined for transferring Judaism into its last state and who will someday return." The Gnostic critique of the Creator God of the Hebrew Bible has a history of nearly two thousand years and lives on a Platonic motif, which in this tradition was read contrary to its original sense. In the *Timaeus*, in the speech of the dialogue participant with the same name, Plato develops an extensive cosmic speculation, in which a creator with the name of "demiurge" creates the cosmos in accordance with present examples or models, according to the discipline of a craftsman. Finding this originator and father of the universe would be just as difficult as making him known. Gnostic speculation later identified this demiurge with the Creator God of the Hebrew Bible, but also concluded from the experience of evil in the world that its creator must have been malicious. This idea-figure shaped all of Western history up to Martin Heidegger, who postulated a God who should liberate existing entities from the abuse of the machinations. Possibly, the identification of the Creator God and the merely technically-effective demiurge led to an anti-Judaic idea-figure in such a way that the God of the Hebrew Bible and those who professed him, the Jews, became the initiators of a process of domination, according to which human beings are the enemies of nature.

The young Hegel's critique of Judaism is along these lines. The positivity of (Jewish) religion, which Hegel, with thoroughly historical concepts, again and again calls "condition" (*Zustand*), assumes the characteristic of a super-historical, persisting condition in his analysis. The character of Judaism reveals itself from the beginning of its history, which Hegel, like the Jewish tradition itself, begins with Abraham. Abraham's struggles, defeats, and triumphs bear

witness to the history of an independence without love, of the will to an independence that seeks a new home, completely without resentment, without being insulted and expelled. Hegel attempts to find evidence in Abraham's life of a fundamental rejection of nature – in the details of his nomadic existence, in his alleged inability to cultivate and improve the appearance of the land on which he grazed, in his digging of wells and quarrels over pastures, in his unwillingness to bless the places where God appeared to him – an attitude for which Hegel also reproached historical Christianity, with its eradication of Germanic religion.¹ Abraham was “a stranger upon the earth,”² and if his character shaped the character of his nation, it is also true of the Jewish nation that its attitude toward the world is fundamentally one of alienation. Since Hegel, in selective reading of the Old Testament, lets the creation story begin only with the Flood, the world and nature become simply an opposing principle for Abraham, something “carried by a foreign God,”³ Abraham's will to independence and freedom, tied to an indifference towards nature as his place of origin and home, which results from the renunciation of love, leads to his subjugation of it, and leaves him with nothing more from this world than the means of subsistence, in order to let everything else become unimportant, and to place him in security with respect to it.⁴ Therefore, according to Hegel, nature becomes the infinite object and the relationship to it necessarily becomes one of “domination” (*Beherrschung*). Thus the young Hegel already conceived a “dialectic of enlightenment” as the domination of nature, and explained it in terms of the Jewish relationship to God.⁵ Hegel paid tribute here to a Romantic *Zeitgeist*. The rediscovery of nature as a moral principle, the growing critique of Kant's moralism, and the rejection of Jacobinism and its terrorist crowds let Hegel construe the biblical Abraham as a precursor of the “absolute freedom” that was criticized later in phenomenology. Abraham – that is the epitome of the renunciation of love! The discussion of the sacrifice of Isaac, which began with Kant and was repeated again and again from Kierkegaard to Derrida,⁶ finds a first high point with Hegel:

He could love nothing, even the only love that he had, for his son and his hope of posterity, the only way to extend his existence, the only kind of immortality that

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, “Frühe Schriften,” in Hegel, *Werke*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), Vol. I, p. 197.

² *Ibid.*, p. 278.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁵ C. Jamme, “Jedes Lieblose ist Gewalt: Der junge Hegel, Hölderlin und die Dialektik der Aufklärung,” in C. Jamme and H. Schneider, eds., *Der Weg zum System: Materialien zum jungen Hegel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), pp. 130-71.

⁶ S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); J. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. D. Willis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

he knew and hoped for, could force him, disturb his disposition of self-isolation from everything, and set it in unrest. This went so far one time that he also wanted to destroy this love and was reassured only through the awareness of the feeling that this love was only strong enough to allow him the ability to slaughter the beloved son with his own hand.⁷

Abraham's love, which the young Hegel understood to be the typical Jewish kind of love, is self-seeking, related only to the extension or preservation of one's own person. This selfishness terminates in contempt of the world and nature, in – one could say – a universalism of negation, which necessarily led to the conviction that one's own God was not only the nearest and favored God, but also the only God, and consequently that the Jews were the only people who had a God at all.

The autonomy based on self-seeking independence, with the renunciation of love, worked itself out further for Hegel in the liberation experience that should be characterized not only for the Western religions, but also for the freedom semantics of modernity, the Exodus story. Consistently with his presuppositions, however, Hegel can tell this story as nothing other than a failure. It will be obvious to anyone with a sense of history, however, that the fallacious interpretation of the Exodus as an unsuccessful emancipation story does justice neither to the biblical liberation experience nor to modern emancipation thinking. To be sure, if it is permissible to read the "Exodus" positively as a great story of modern liberation,⁸ it is also fundamentally legitimate to depict it as a story of unsuccessful emancipation. Accordingly, the legislation imposed by Moses on the Israelites was supported by a principle that permitted only a servile consciousness of reward and punishment to be taught.

The varying – sometimes criticizing, sometimes praising – assessment of this idea of God does not permit the problematic nature of its basic structure to be forgotten:

The infinite object, the epitome of all truth and all relationships, thus actually the only infinite subject, since it can be called an object insofar as the human person with his given life is presupposed and is called the living, the absolute subject – the only synthesis and the antitheses, so to speak, are the Jewish people, on one hand, and the entire remainder of the human race and the world, on the other hand.⁹

Since Hegel took biblical creation theology seriously, the God worshiped as infinite becomes the infinite, living – and in addition the only – subject, in contrast to everything finite, and becomes at the same time void, something that is

⁷ Hegel, p. 279.

⁸ M. Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

⁹ Hegel, p. 283.

“without content and empty, without life, not even dead.”¹⁰ Hegel, therefore, attempts nothing less than a speculative derivation of the “soul of the Jewish nationality, of the *odium generis humani*.”¹¹ The identification of the Jews with the infinite, living God devalues the world and the human persons living in it and leaves them with no relationship to this environment other than that of physical dependence, which weakens its own life to the level of bestial existence. God’s guarantee of a secure life in the promised land does not go beyond it. The “eternal” values of honor, freedom, and beauty had to remain foreign to the Jews, because of their banishment by the infinite. Moses impressed his seal on this God relationship: “He brought the idea of himself before the servile spirit, the fear of physical power.”¹² Hegel does not grow weary of describing dependency and servitude as basic features of the Jewish relationship to God, the world, and human persons.

2. Judaism and Creation

It actually belongs to the liturgical obligations of devout Jews on Friday evenings to commemorate the creation of the world and the liberation from Egypt at the same time in blessings:

Blessed art thou, the Eternal, our God, King of the Universe, who hath sanctified us with his commandments, and found pleasure in us, and caused us to inherit his holy Sabbath in love and favor, as a memorial of the work of creation; for that day ranks first amongst the holy convocations in remembrance of the departure from Egypt....

The two events, creation and liberation, are related to one another and can be neither conceived nor understood apart from one another. Therefore, any perspective that would oppose the creation of the world and redemption or grace to one another is ruled out from the start. On the contrary, the liberation story sheds light on the creation, while the good of the creation willed by God attests the possibility of liberation.

Although thus – indisputably – God’s action in the Book of Genesis is portrayed according to the model of the productive craftsman, or even of the ruler enjoining through his commanding word, it can be seen that the relationship to the world and to nature developed there is not one of instrumental rationality. Appropriate critique has oriented itself above all to the command of God in Genesis 1,28 of a fruitful human race according to his will, translated by Luther

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 288.

thus: "And God blessed them and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subjugate it." (*"Und Gott segnete sie und sprach zu ihnen: Seid fruchtbar und mehrt euch und füllt die Erde und macht sie euch untertan."*) In the German translation by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, which is more faithful to the spirit of the Hebrew language, the same verse reads: "God blessed them, God said to them: Be fruitful and multiply and fill this earth and make it yours." (*"Gott segnete sie, Gott sprach zu ihnen: Fruchtet und mehr euch und füllt diese Erde und bemächtigt Euch ihrer."*) The Hebrew word for "subjugate" (German, *untertan machen*) is *kibschu*, which literally means "conquer." The "earth" spoken of here is characterized in the Hebrew as *haaretz*, which means "land" in contrast to "sky" and "ocean." Thus, translated literally, the humans are told to conquer the land and then, in the continuation of the verse, to expel fish and birds. Buber and Rosenzweig translate this as "Rule over the fish of the sea" (*"Schaltet über das Fischvolk des Meeres"*). The Greek-language Septuagint – originating in Alexandria in the second century B.C. – translates the Hebrew *kibschu* with *katakryieusate*, which means "subdue" (German, *unterwerfen*).

Thus it can be determined as a first result that the accusation of a technological seizure of the earth by the commission of the Creator God, recited from Luther until the civilization critique of the 1920s and 1930s, even widely until the end of the twentieth century, is to be attributed either to malicious misunderstanding or to mistranslation. The experiences of hydraulic, water-building societies of the Middle East in the first half of the first millennium B.C., particularly in Babylon, in which the Book of Genesis probably originated in the sixth century B.C., are fundamentally different from those of a Hellenistic – Egyptian large city, such as Alexandria in the second century. While *kibschu* names an extremely concrete process of settlement – for instance, taking land and building dikes along the North Sea – the Greek *katakryieusate* actually identifies a social relationship: after all, *kyrios* was the monarchical epithet not only of Zeus as king of a hierarchy of gods, but also as the lord of marriage, as well as the kingly sovereign over a territory. It must be admitted, of course, that the medieval Jewish exegesis, fed by Talmudic traditions, still followed the sovereignty model. Thus the commentator Raschi (1040-1105) of Worms, in relation to the Talmudic and midraschic sources, interpreted *kibschu*: "to teach you that the man rules over the wife, that she not always leaves the house; and furthermore to teach you that the man, whose role is to rule, not the wife, is obligated to reproduction."¹³

Terms of technological-poietic acts in the narrower sense are found in the Book of Genesis primarily in the story of the creation of the humans and the genealogical stories of Cain and his descendants.

¹³ Raschi, *Kommentar zum Pentateuch*, (Basel: Goldschmidt, 1975), p. 5.



<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4020-0188-8>

Nature and Technology in the World Religions

Koslowski, P. (Ed.)

2001, X, 155 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-0188-8