

## DISCUSSION OF THE RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE AND TECHNOLOGY IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

### Presentations:

MICHA BRUMLIK:	Humankind's Relationship with Nature and Participation in the Process of Creation through Technology in the View of Judaism
FRANCIS X. D'SA:	The World as Creation and Creation as a Cosmotheandric Reality in Christianity
ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER:	Humankind's Relationship with Nature and Participation in the Process of Creation by Technology from an Islamic Point of View
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### 1. Creation and Freedom

The Jewish religion does indeed assume that the world was created by God, but it nevertheless believes that human beings are free to act both rightly and wrongly. Thus, the idea of a Creator God does not imply determinism in Judaism. How is the relationship between freedom and creation seen in Indian Christianity? (BRUMLIK)

In the Indian tradition, it is not the question of human freedom that stands in the foreground, but the problem of blindness to reality (*maya*). In so far as human beings in their blindness reduce the reality of the world to an object, they are not free and are led by false interests. Therefore, in the Indian tradition, the ultimate goal of the human person is liberation from this blindness and the false interests that result from it (*mokṣa*). *Mokṣa* can succeed only through a self-opening to the secret of the world. In addition to the perceptible and the perceiving dimensions, this deep dimension must be recognized as the third dimension of reality. The "purity of heart" that contains the overcoming of false interests is the condition for such a vision of what goes beyond the boundaries of percep-

tion. It is also the opening of the self to the deep dimension that is understood as wholeness. But since human beings are in fact never disinterested, it is difficult to describe them as free. (D'SA)

## 2. The Abrahamic Religions, Creation, and Nature

There exists the thesis that the Abrahamic tradition, to which the three speakers belong, was conducive to the development of technology, because the relation of God to the world is interpreted as an act of making. Is there such a specific inclination of the Abrahamic tradition toward technology? Or are the differences between the three religions so large that we cannot talk about it in this respect as *one* tradition? (KOSLOWSKI)

What is called control of nature today has been shaped more by the development of modern man than by the Abrahamic tradition. Modern man essentially changed the biblical tradition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and broke from the ancient-Christian and ancient-Jewish understanding of the world. The early-modern development of autonomous subjectivity is the sufficient prerequisite for the control of nature.

Concerning the concept of "making," there is an important difference between understanding the creation of the world as a metaphor for the completion of a workpiece and interpreting it as a master's linguistic act. If creation is the completion of a workpiece, we can speak of a subject-object relationship. If the world was created through language, we cannot. (BRUMLIK)

BRUMLIK is correct in saying that the modern development of technology is to be attributed to modern thought, not to a biblical tradition. The question of the extent to which this thought can be separated from its roots, however, remains open. (D'SA)

Talking about the Abrahamic religions appears to conceal more than it clarifies. Concepts such as *maya* and *mokṣa*, which are of importance in Indian Christianity, have nothing to do with what can be called Abrahamic. (BRUMLIK)

*Mokṣa* seems to designate an extremely individual spiritual event. The Qur'an, on the contrary, attaches special importance to the community of believers. (ENGINEER)

Although there are many similarities in these three religions, in view of the fact that one cannot even speak of a unified Islam, one can hardly speak of *the* Abrahamic religions. (ENGINEER)

Is the concept of "making" really at the center of discussions of a Creator God? The question is much more what it means today to believe in such a God, and, therefore, is a hermeneutical question. Furthermore, a statement about the creation is not a rational proposition, but a dogmatic proposition, and must be treated as such. (D'SA)

### 3. The Bible and the Relationship between Humans and Nature

To what extent do other passages in the Bible, such as Genesis 1,28 (“Fill the earth and subdue it”) play a role for the relationship between humans and nature and the human understanding of technology? (KOSLOWSKI)

The prophetic texts and the Book of Proverbs can be referred to as possible sources. It can be derived from the prophetic texts that nature also suffers under human injustice. This can be seen already in the utopias and visions of Isaiah’s peace with animals. Although the creation is fundamentally good, it can be true that, as a consequence of human injustice, it lives non-peacefully and is not redeemed. This state of not being redeemed, however, is not fundamental, but only a consequence of unjust human actions. In the Book of Proverbs it is written that nature itself is pervaded by reason and for its part can teach humans the principles according to which they should live. (BRUMLIK)

### 4. The Relationship between Humans and Nature in Hinduism

Are there stronger approaches to a careful relationship with nature in the Hindu tradition than in the Christian tradition? (KOSLOWSKI)

In the Hindu tradition the human self-understanding is interpreted differently, and, therefore, the relationship of humans to nature is also different. Humans and nature cannot be separated from one another as they are in the biblical religions. Thus the human body is also regarded as a part of the cosmic being. (D’Sa)

### 5. Human Cloning, Mind and Body, God and the World

Where in the individual religions are the greatest problem zones of technology seen? (KOSLOWSKI)

Human cloning clearly crosses a limit for Jewish ethics. Making a new human being and, therefore, the renunciation of the way of reproduction prescribed in Genesis contradicts God’s will. Since at the moment it cannot be known to what extent cloning serves the saving of life, it cannot be legitimated by this highest principle of Jewish bioethics. (BRUMLIK)

Cloning is not creation from nothing – only God is in a position to do that – but creation from something and, therefore, from something that was in turn created by God. The human person uses materials and intelligence that are given by God. Anything that the human mind creates only shows God’s creativity. It is too early to reach a verdict about cloning. Every kind of technology can be misused. The question is: *For what purpose* is technology used, not whether

cloning is intrinsically morally good or bad. Only the objective toward which technology is employed is ethically relevant. (ENGINEER)

Catholicism teaches that God creates every individual soul from nothing. Only the body is created by the act of procreation, not the soul. From that it would follow either that we cannot possibly clone human beings or, if it is possible, that we must reconsider the Catholic teaching. (KOSLOWSKI)

A splitting of mind and body in this sense does not originate from the Bible, but instead from the Platonic tradition. The Bible thinks much more integrally here. (BRUMLIK)

Cloning, along with many other technological developments, is a result of a certain world view, in which the world is reduced to an object. This objectification can be understood as original sin. Since the world is more than an object, however, the separation of humankind and the world reveals a false understanding of this world. Such an attitude is unacceptable for a religious person. This is also true of the separation of God and the world, as it takes place in the Abrahamic religions. (D'SA)

R. BALASUBRAMANIAN emphasized in the First Discourse of the World Religions that a distinction between Brahman ("World Soul," God) can be found increasingly today even in Indian thought. (KOSLOWSKI)

Brahman and the world cannot be separated from one another, in so far as the inspired person is described in the *Bhagavad-Gita* as the person who discovers his own being in the being of everything. The individual indeed has limits, but the person can be enlarged by entering into relationships with other persons. (D'SA)

A precise distinction between God and world seems, however, to be a step forward. The Abrahamic religions place a great amount of emphasis on the statement that God is *not* the world. (KOSLOWSKI)

In the Vedānta there is a clear distinction, but no separation, between God and the world. "I am not different from God," understood in Christian terms, does not mean "I am God," but "I am God's." (D'SA)

## 6. Technology, Human Persons, God

D'SA had emphasized that technological progress has not benefited the poor and the elderly. This fact appears, however, to be more of a problem of politics than one of technology itself. (Remark from the audience)

The effects of technology are *actually* directed against the poor. Therefore, the question must be asked whether the development and use of this kind of technology is not a fundamental mistake. Is it possible to conceive of a kind of technology that functions comprehensively? (D'SA)

The concept of a comprehensive species of technology is a contradiction in

itself, since technology is based on a subject-object relationship. The comprehensive use of technology appears, on the contrary, to be possible. (BRUMLIK)

In the developing nations, not everyone has access to technology? That is based on an economic problem. Precisely the poor, however, could profit from a new kind of technology. (ALBRECHT)

It is unambiguous that the biblical world view is open to anthropocentrism. How can we overcome this anthropocentrism? (question from HORUZHLY to D'SA)

The anthropocentric interpretation of the Bible is not established by the Bible itself. The Bible is more comprehensive than it appears to its interpreters. (D'SA)

The Bible describes God and his actions as anthropocentric. The very concept of action is anthropocentric, since nature does not act. Consequently, an acting God has characteristics of a person. If one were to remove this concept of action from God, the entire concept "God" would break apart, since a God that does not act is not God. (BRUMLIK)

In Islam there are two species of conceptions of God. The "Hanbalites" advocate the thesis that God's essence remains inaccessible and that it is impossible to speak about God. The theologian al-Ash'arī, for example, defends the opposing position that a certain analogy between God and the world exists and, consequently, that concrete statements about him can be made. (ENGINEER)

D'SA said in his presentation that the human person is more than Logos. We read in John 1,1, however, that Christ is Logos and nothing more than Logos. Is the human person more than Christ? Such a restricted – postmodern – understanding would not be a Christian position. (HORUZHLY)

The contemporary use of "Logos" is characterized by a rational understanding. If we were to return to the original meaning of the concept, this would be correct. (D'SA)

In response to a question from the audience, about whether suffering from technocracy is a necessary phase, through which God lets man attain a new discovery of himself, BRUMLIK answered that the technologizing of the world does indeed give humans new ways to become aware of their creatureliness, but that God surely does not intervene in history in this way.



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