HUMANITY BEFORE GOD

CONTEMPORARY FACES OF JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND ISLAMIC ETHICS

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MINNEAPOLIS
the original state of creation through the *fitra*, that natural inclination toward obedience and doing good, the straight path.

In final analysis, the question this essay’s title raises — namely, whether God’s vicegerency is a blessing or a curse for humanity — is logically inconsistent with God’s overall plan, which is clearly stated in the Qur’an as the establishment of a divinely ordained system that institutes good and prevents evil. Why would God place someone on earth who, as the angels thought, would spread corruption and shed blood? It is unthinkable that God, being most merciful and most compassionate, would place someone prone to do evil as God’s representative and caretaker on earth. Despite an explicit recognition of human weaknesses that can be manipulated by Satan to undo God’s work, the very fact that God entrusted humanity with the exercise of God’s authority over the creation says a great deal about God’s confidence in God’s appointment. Hence, while it is true that people harm one another, their inherent social nature demands their commitment to interpersonal justice. In order to achieve the ideal of justice they need to act responsibly toward one another. This is the challenge of being God’s vicegerent. God has not repealed God’s decision in this matter as yet. Hence, we can assume that the authority is invested in humanity until the End of History. In the meantime, human beings are faced with a constant struggle to find ways of defeating tyranny and ignorance, the two deadliest enemies of humankind, and to prove to the angels that, despite the horrors of human destruction from time to time in history, God’s decision to make Adam God’s vicegerent and entrust him as the caretaker of God’s creation was wise.

Chapter 3

EMBODIYING GOD’S IMAGE
Created, Broken, and Redeemed

Lisa Sowel Cahill

I begin with a statement of theological conviction, a confession of biblical faith:

The book of Genesis proclaims the unity of the human race as God’s good creation. Humanity’s destiny is to represent God on earth through fellowship enacted in God’s image. Sinfulness mars this human vocation, bringing violence among humans, and between humans and the rest of creation. Yet God’s redeeming action in history will continue and heal the dynamic of creation. God brings all that is created into consummate union with the divine reality itself. Wherever justice and compassion heal suffering and create inclusive communities, there divine presence is discovered and the image of God restored.

Moreover, the realm of “natural embodied life” refers to everything human and especially to all moral relationships, not just to sex, gender, and procreation. Family, work, education, political cooperation, and religious practice all constitute our concrete “place” on earth and within creation, inhabited through the body. Our embodied existence is the forum within which reconciliation and salvation come to us.

In essence, this is a statement of classic Christian faith; yet I have framed it in terms designed to have ecumenical appeal, hoping that Jews and Muslims would agree to sign on. Its key elements are that the image of God in humanity resides in embodied relationships, not
in unique attributes; that the realm of “natural embodied life” includes every dimension of morality; that God’s image in us is restored through just and compassionate relationships; and that human relationships that image God engage the whole creation and are responsible for it.

One cannot, however, move quickly on to fine-tune the details of a faith statement such as this. Why not? My faith statement is, upon consideration, quite problematic. It is limited. It is provincial. Worst of all, it may not be true. And even if the interpretation I recommend is true to Genesis, Genesis may not be true to human existence as we find it, nor true to an authentic experience of the divine. My teacher at the University of Chicago was James Gustafson. While Gustafson grants that his theology may have transgressed the limits of orthodox Christianity, Gustafson insists in his later writings that religious believers confront history and the hard edges of their own experience, as well as the frightening reality of cosmic forces that bear down upon and destroy human beings as well as bear them up. Human aspirations to universal compassion and justice may go against the design of creation, or fly in the face of the fact that there is no “design” at all. In a 2003 book, aptly and characteristically titled *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt,* Gustafson challenges us with a favorite point:

Does any historical and other human evidence count against our teaching and preaching about a providential Deity who provides redemption and hope to those in despair, to the people of nations devastated by decades of strife in Asia, Africa, or Central America? If God is gracious, is God also impotent to actualize those gracious purposes in natural and human-generated catastrophes?

…Can I, who have suffered with the destitute vicariously more than actually, not wonder if God’s preference for the poor and the oppressed is only some kind of generous wish, and not a divine intention actualized in human events and actions?

…The Almighty has his own purposes.¹


The statement with which I began, and which I truly believe, represents a point of view— one not shared by Gustafson, for example. I am a Christian, Catholic, feminist theologian, a social ethicist, a white woman, a member of a North Atlantic, so-called democratic, and also capitalist society, a society with liberal political traditions. I am living at the beginning of the third millennium, I am a wife and mother, and a member of the academic establishment and socioeconomic upper class. None of my close relations has been killed in war, raped, or tortured; my children are safe, well fed, and educated. I can more easily than some others, perhaps, have confidence that justice and compassion, uniting all human beings and the entire creation, are stronger than hatred, violence, and death; they are available to us in trust and hope through the creative and reclaiming power of a transcendent, merciful God.

Let me point out some of the aspects of my opening statement about the image of God that reflect these particular circumstances. First of all, the very fact that I left any mention of Jesus Christ out of it reflects the ability of a twenty-first century North American Christian theologian to enter into ecumenical situations with Jews and Muslims. In a new millennium departure from our historic traditions, we are discussing the original and contemporary meanings, and the political impact, of “scripture” in a calm and dialogical way, seeking common understanding. In particular, as a Catholic Christian, I believe that God is found in all the world’s major religious traditions, and is discovered not only in explicitly religious endeavors, but wherever just communities are established. (Despite its flat-footed, tactless, and untimely assertion that Christianity is the superior religion, the essential message of the 2000 Vatican document, *Dominus Iesus,* was that all genuine religions mediate salvation from God.)

Moreover, as a modern-day heir of the Thomistic natural-law tradition, I believe that human moral experiences are shared in some fundamental way, that the contours of basic human flourishing can be discussed reasonably by cultures together, and can result in values to inform just societies. For that matter, with the modern papal social encyclicals, I believe that societies can become more just. Indeed, justice can, on the whole, increase for the peoples of the world if we come together in good will and good faith to discuss what justice demands
of us. Although that seems to be the essential premise on which this book is centered, it is in fact one of the most vulnerable assumptions for social reformers of any stripe today. Today’s newspaper headlines offer plenty of reasons to think that genocidal violence, economic exploitation, racism, crimes against children, the manipulation of religion for political ends, and degradation of the environment are in undiminished evidence among us.

As far as the image of God in humanity is concerned, I do not need to belabor the point that religious traditions supposedly adhering to this doctrine have been just as industrious as any others in disproving its force. Gustavo Gutiérrez quotes a sixteenth-century conqueror, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who had this to say in defense of the enslavement of the native peoples of the Americas:

...in prudence, invention, and every manner of virtue and human sentiment, they are as inferior to the Spaniards as children to adults, women to men, the cruel and inhumane to the gentle, those intemperate beyond all bounds to the continent and moderate...[and] finally, I might almost say, as monkeys to human beings.4

We Christians kept up this tradition well when we brought Africans here in bondage and exterminated six million “subhumans” during the Shoah. The Catholic feminist Margaret Farley, in commenting on the Christian tradition of women’s subordination, refers to “the devastating refusal by Christian theology to attribute the fullness of the imago Dei to women,”5 since major thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas hold women inferior to and subordinate to men in both body and soul. Mary Catherine Hilkert, another feminist theologian, has asked whether the symbol “image of God” has a future at all, pointing to “the history of human domination it has served to foster.”6 Historically, this metaphor has licensed humanity to exploit the rest of the natural world, and justified the oppression of huge categories of people who are judged to be less in God’s image than the dominating class — most universally, men over women.

And yet: Christians, Jews, and Muslims find continuing power in the metaphor of humanity as “God’s image.” It speaks to our hope for a less violent future, it draws out other themes in our respective traditions having to do with real experiences of grace and redemption, and, perhaps most importantly, it does resonate with “the real” as we experience it morally. That is to say, there is a commonality across cultures of forms of human need, vulnerability, opportunity, sustenance, and accomplishment. Hence, William Schweiker calls for a renewal of Christian humanism.7 Identifying one of the main theological tasks today as the negotiation of the space between the local and the global, Robert Schreiter notes that “denial of difference can lead to the colonization of a culture and its imagination,” but “denial of similarities promotes an anomic situation where no dialogue appears possible and only power will prevail.”8

The biblical symbol “image of God” reflects actual fellowship, healing, and redemption experienced on occasions when we do meet in understanding, overcome old hatreds, and begin to work together for shared goals. There a transcendent power is discovered that convinces us we are at last manifesting in our relationships God’s creative power. These experiences are fragmentary, fragile, and elusive. But they evoke the connection between the human and the divine that the biblical symbol captures. The full power of “image of God” lies in its judgment upon the broken connection, the violence toward humanity’s divine origin, which constitutes defection from the created fellowship for which we are meant. Judgment in light of the original vocation to be God’s

image thus names sin and enables convinced action toward a lost but still perceptible ideal.

Those who suffer most from the personal and systemic violence that sin wreaks on the human body and spirit seem not to be those most in despair of using religious symbols like image of God to urge the restoration of just relationships. The African theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye (from Ghana) writes of the suffering of African women, mentioning lack of education, unemployment, sickness, ecological threats, natural disasters, female circumcision, patriarchal marriage, and widowhood rites. She depicts Africa today as a “hostile world” that “debas[es] one’s very humanity by the intention of race and racism,” that “places the onus of human survival on women but slight[s] them,” that “exploits the weak to enrich the strong,” and that “seems to know nothing of what it means to share community with God, the Beginner.”9 Yet Oduyoye still champions a “spirituality of resistance” and hopes for renewed community that can make “a concerted effort towards building up an empowering society that upholds and promotes the full humanity of every individual.”10

She concludes her essay with the following:

In the search for liberating hermeneutics, many women have claimed the biblical affirmation of our being created “in the image of God” both for the promotion of women’s self-worth and self-esteem and to protest dehumanization by others. Granted, this seems to be wearing thin, but without it the whole edifice of human relations seems to crumble and fall. If one is in the image of God, then one is expected to practice the hospitality, compassion, and justice that characterize God. The Akan say, “All human beings are the children of God.” What this calls for is mutuality in our relationships, seeking “one earth community,” one household of the God of life.11

Reversing the usual order of things, I have given you my conclusions first. Next I will expand and interpret the biblical evidence in favor of my statement of theological conviction, then turn to the grounds for its truth and realism. Ultimately, evidence of the truth of all that “image of God” symbolizes consists in collaborative action, in which the experiences of God in human life, and of human life in God’s image, are expanded and reconfirmed. Such collaboration must bring together intercultural, interreligious, interracial, and interclass “communities,” created and built up by “transversal” work among people whose starting points are different religious and moral traditions.12

“Image of God” in Genesis

The Image as Created

In both Genesis and the Qur’an, God creates the first human body from “the slime of the earth,” and breathes into it the human spirit, quickly following with the creation of a companion. Body, spirit, and companionship are all essential to being human. In interpretations of Genesis 1:27, there has been a tendency for theologians and ethicists to seek substantive and unique human attributes with which to associate the divine image in “man.” Intellect and free will, or the soul in general, have been favorites. Some commentators distinguish theologians who hang the image on certain attributes from another set who are said to have a more relational view of the image — especially Karl Barth, for whom the image consists primarily in our being called to “fellow-humanity,” to “freedom in fellowship.”14 According to Barth, “God created man in His own image in the fact that He did not create him alone but in this connexion and fellowship,” for God, like humanity, “is not solitary,” but properly “in connexion and fellowship.”15


In a work on “stewardship” commissioned by the National Council of Churches, Douglas John Hall contrasts a “substantialist” and a “relational” strand of historical interpretations of the image of God. In his view, whenever “ratiocination” is given a privileged place in conceptions of the image, and thus made “the chief good and end in life,” the inevitable result is that “every being — nonhuman and human — not manifesting this capacity, or manifesting it insufficiently, must be relegated to a lower category of existence and value.” Moreover, the substantialist strand, focused as it usually is on rationality, tends to overlook the implication of human reason in sin and evil. It also ignores the fact that human existence, and hence the image of God, involves the human body and human physicality as much as spirituality and reason. As he puts it, mentioning the Manhattan project and all that has followed from it, faith in “untrammeled reason — answerable to no gods, no holy writ, no moral law — [has] built a civitas terrena poised on the edge of oblivion.”

An alternative, more biblical, conception, in Hall’s view, links the image with relationality, especially humanity’s created capacity for love (agape, khesed). God intends humanity as a “being-in-relationship.” Humanity’s essential nature is not found in the abstract or in an isolated specimen defined by certain capacities, but “by considering human beings in the context of their many-dimensional relationships.” The distinctive “endowments” of human beings exist only for the purpose of entering into relationships with others and with God.

In Christian tradition, rationality and will have certainly been stressed as components of the image of God in “man.” But even if we consider premodern authors, we can see that the social and relational dimensions of the image of God in humanity are hardly absent. Augustine looks for the image in the “rational or intellectual soul of man,” but stresses that image refers to the soul’s power to understand and behold God (not to its innate characteristics as such), and that this power consists

25. Westermann, Creation, 36.
ypical. The author sensibly suggests (in the light of Gen. 5:1–2, in which
Adam’s son is said to be according to his image) that the image of God
implies that humans are created with the capacity for relationship with
God, but also as able to function analogously to God and on behalf of
God within created relationships. In fact, their relation to God is realized
and tested in and through their relations with others, and in the collect-
ive or social forms these relations take. Hence, it is the whole person
who is ultimately the image, rather than a distinct aspect, and the image
is fulfilled in community with God and others, not in the being of an
individual as such.26

The points that I especially want to develop are that the image of
God in humans is communal, and that community and all human rela-
tions are embodied. The norm of human community established by
the biblical symbol image of God is a social unity-in-difference. This
is revealed by the declaration of the first human being in recognizing his
counterpart: “This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”
(Gen. 2:23).

The paradoxical paradigm of humanity’s “different sameness” is the
creation of woman and man as “helpers” and partners for one another.
I here place the emphasis not on gender duality or sex, in their own
right or as somehow most definitive of what it is to be human, but
on the essential fact of human differences in general, differences that
are part of our being human. Human beings are always and every-
where differentiated (symbolized aptly in Genesis by sex differences,
since this is the most universally occurring difference in human embod-
iment). Yet humans, as constitutively different are also constitutively
destined for fellowship or union, and so are human collectivities or
societies.

I want to emphasize, as a Christian ethicist, that the sociality of
human beings, through which they image God, is made possible by and
expressed through human embodiment. In Genesis 2, it is specifically
their embodiment that distinguishes the woman and man as “different”
partners in relationship, and it is their embodiment that allows mutual
recognition (granting that the Yahwist tells the story from the man’s

point of view!). The human body establishes the most basic needs that
society serves for everyone in every culture: food, shelter, labor that pro-
vides these; reproduction of the species and the institutions that organize
and socialize reproduction, that is, marriage and family. The human
body makes it possible for us to communicate and to express our spiri-
tual capacities in art and religious practices. Above all, the human body
makes it possible to recognize and acknowledge other human beings as
like ourselves, with the same essential needs and vulnerabilities, and as
persons with whom we can enter into relationship. The exclamation of
the first man, when presented with the first human “other,” represents
the capacity for fellowship of all human beings, inherent in our embod-
ied connectedness and communicative capacity: “This at last is bone of
my bones, flesh of my flesh” (2:23). This declaration shows us a human
being recognizing, not just a woman, but a human counterpart, much
better than any other “living creature” that had been brought to him as
a remedy for his loneliness (2:18–20).

The imaginative device of depicting the woman as taken from the
rib of the man, while obviously counterfactual to the literal processes
of human reproduction, sex, or marriage, underscores the unity of two
differentiated creatures in a single embodied nature. It tells us that the
bond of woman and man can be just as strong as the bond of parent
and child, or kin and kin, and indicates that sexual unions that estab-
lish new households create bonds as strong or stronger than that of
the original kin groups of the partners (2:24). The embodied differences
of the first two, symbolized by nakedness, are not yet cause for suffering or
strife (2:25). The first instance and experience of human difference tell
us instead that human difference is always destined and called to union.
“Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh” fellowship is the moral ideal or
criterion that should structure all human relationships in the image of
God. From the beginning of their existence, God is in beneficent rela-
tion to humans; so to be in God’s image, humans are to be in similar
fellowship with each other. In Genesis, the two most fundamental of all
embodied social endeavors are family and work. Each is connected to
the creation of the human body in God’s image, because each constitutes
a basic form of relationship, in which bodily needs and capacities bring
people together cooperatively, in joint projects.

In Genesis, creation itself has a forward momentum, manifested in the command to "subdue the earth" and in the blessing of fertility (1:28), as well as in the idea that the humans are not only to "keep" and preserve the garden, but also to "till" or cultivate it (2:15). Humans are not placed in creation as a completed paradise made for their passive enjoyment. Work, as endowing human life with purpose and fulfillment, and as an activity that images God's own creative work, is a fundamental aspect of human existence. Throughout the book of Genesis, work on the land, tilling the land, and reaping the bounty of the land are part of God's promises. Humans are also to create and nurture the next generation, contributing "pro-creatively" to the open-ended future of all for which God is providing. Procreation establishes the family and kin groups that carry God's promises forward, in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The embodied work of procreation, parenthood, and contribution to the ongoing life of extended families blesses humans with their most fundamental and universal experiences of love, whose possibilities are also suggested by the polyvalent "one flesh" unity of the first couple (2:24).

The book of Genesis is, of course, a composite of many different oral and written traditions, accomplished by many editors over generations. The natures of God, of ideal humanity, and of faithful or heroic individual and community behavior, are presented in different ways. We see this already in the contrast of "the majestic deity of chapter 1, who creates by issuing executive decrees, with the earthly God of chapter 2, who sits in the mud and plays with clay." Nevertheless, biblical scholar Thomas Mann identifies two literary devices in the book of Genesis that serve to link originally diverse sources: the "generations" formula, which occurs eleven times in Genesis; and the divine "promises" of blessing, beginning immediately after the creation of male and female in God's image (1:28), and eventually extended to "all the families of the earth" through Abraham (12:3). The generations and promises themes work to extend the relation and calling of two first individuals into communal vocations.

The promises include children, land, and nationhood, but above all and beyond these, as their meaning and fulfillment, is relation in community to God. These devices of generational connection and faithful divine promise link the creation of humanity, man and woman, with a family history and a community under God.

To recapitulate, the image of God consists in human bonds and communal relations, which the biblical book of Genesis places in the midst of the whole creation, and focuses through the universal, embodied, and social experiences of family and work. Human relations that image God carry forward the dynamic of creation, uniting differences through fellowship, and fulfilling God's promise of a human future in which the human relation to God is embodied in family, social cooperation, and work, and productive stewardship of the environment.

The Image Broken by Sin

It is in humanity's whole history, through generations, that the image of God should be fulfilled in relationship to God, but in which the curse of sin is instead experienced. "Human beings are created 'in the image of God' to be vice-regents of the world (1:28), but they quickly and repeatedly attempt to be more than that, to 'become like God' by overcoming their limitations (3:5), to be superhuman rather than human, supernatural rather than natural, autonomous ('by one's own law') rather than responsible." They consequently violate the unity that structures their very existence by turning on one another as the first two humans do in Genesis 3. The same spheres of relationship in which God's image is manifest also present human beings with their opportunity to use deception, domination, and violence to cause great harm. Sin and redemption both work within the frame of historical action—focused on work and family—projected by the book of Genesis.

Sin is more than spiritual pride or intellectual arrogance. The full "human nature" of sin is displayed mythically in Genesis 2 and 3. As we have seen, the first man's and woman's shared humanity is signified in their bodily sharing of the first human's rib (2:21–22). They

27. Westermann, Creation, 80–82.
29. Ibid., 343.
30. Ibid., 347.
create community as “one flesh” (2:23), and inhabit a lush garden in harmony with other creatures. On the downside, they enact disobedience by mutual physical accomplishment in the eating of fruit (3:6), in unison become ashamed and even afraid of their differentiated embodiment (symbolically their “nakedness,” 3:7, 10), and hide from the view of the Lord (3:8).

The result of their crime is the breaking of relationships with God, one another, and even their physical environment. The earth now exacts toil before it feeds them (3:19). Even their own bodies mediate suffering, making pain part of human embodied being. Just as creation and image apply to humanity existing in community, so does sin. Not alone but together do human beings sin, and their sin affects their entire life in community, as well as their embodiment. Their own bodies mediate suffering, making pain intrinsic to human physicality; physical “labor” will henceforth be painful, for woman and for man alike, in productive and reproductive work, symbolized by agriculture and by childbirth (3:16; 3:9). Sin brings conflict with one’s own body, and with life borne within it, for the woman (representing not all women, but all human beings); and sin brings conflict between human bodily needs and capacities and the physical environment on which human sustenance is dependent, for the man (representing not all men, but all human beings) (Genesis 3).

Furthermore, bodily sexual differentiation becomes an excuse for domination of man over woman, prefiguring the exploitation of human physical differences to justify all kinds of oppression. In Genesis, Cain and Abel present the almost immediate and ultimate destruction of God-imaging relationship. In a corruption of the embodied “generations” trajectory of creation, which ought to be the basis and school of fellowship, Adam’s and Eve’s own children pull their parents’ embodied sexual and familial unity into the future in horrific ways. The brothers divide in conflict over the value and rights of their physical work on the land, and its social and religious significance. Their fraternal and human “one flesh” unity ends in fratricidal violence, causing further alienation from the earth itself, and exile from kindred and community (4:1–14). The later bestowal of blessing on Noah and his sons in Genesis 9, with its companion outlawing of murder, confirms that human life in the image of God especially excludes the killing of other human beings (9:6).

Fundamentally, sin consists in wanting to be like God, knowing good and evil, and also having control over the results of this knowledge. Humans and their communities sin when they, like Cain, make themselves and their particular projects the center of religion and morality, perversely validating their limited and particular goals with idolatrous rhetoric about their own transcendent worth and the ultimacy of their work.

The corruption of sin in and through our natural embodied existence is especially evident in the fact that human groups invariably define and stigmatize other groups by identifying physically different characteristics—real, imagined, or exaggerated. Sex differences provide the most basic and universal instance of this phenomenon in Genesis when, after the fall, the man rules over the woman. Racism, ethnic chauvinism, and nationalism likewise exaggerate and reify variations in physical appearance or distinctions of geographical residence or history, in order to give a material basis to spurious claims of supremacy and privilege. Oppression by means of sex differences begins the fateful process of defacing God’s image, breaking the created connection between human differentiation and unity. Racism and other forms of violence against stigmatized populations deface the image as destined to be fulfilled through God’s blessing on all the families of the earth.

Family is another key biblical framework for indicating the human capacity for and call to a “one flesh” unity-in-difference. “Family” designates biologically connected, intergenerational groups that are forward moving and have porous boundaries. Sex and procreation constitute both the embodied continuity of families and their inherent openness and amenability to change. Socially institutionalized and culturally ritualized procreative cooperation (“marriage”) brings families together to create new configurations and unities. Families are the primal human experience of social cooperation, and should serve as schools in which the virtues of compassion and altruism are nurtured.

Races, ethnic groups, peoples, and nations derive their identities from embodied similarities of physicality and place, on analogy to
extended family groupings. Racism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism violate the capacity of humans to image God by closing the boundaries of these groups, denying their adaptability, and severing their linkages to neighboring human families. The conjunction of racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism produces some of the most violent perversions of God's image imaginable; for example, the rape, torture, and killing of women in war, of women refugees, of women under colonization, of enslaved women, and of women in the sex trade. Commenting on the need to define rape as a form of genocide, the legal theorists Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin illustrate the nexus of embodiment, group identity, and social sin with the following examples:

In reviewing the indictments against the Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, a Trial Chamber of the ICTY invited the prosecution to broaden the scope of its characterization of genocide, suggesting that: “The systematic rape of women . . . is in some cases intended to transmit a new ethnic identity to the child. In other cases humiliation and terror serve to dismember the group.” This characterization is further supported by the phenomenon of forced detention of women, first for impregnation and subsequently to prevent abortion.

So too in Rwanda, it has been contended that rape and sexual brutality in Rwanda was not incidental to the genocide but was an integral part of the aim to eradicate the Tutsi. 33

It should be noted that neither the “embodied” distinctions between Serbs and Croats, nor between Tutsi and Hutu, are hard and fast demarcations or barriers. What we have are constellations of biological, geographical, historical, and cultural factors that together constitute an embodied “ethnic” identity that is manipulated to further the domination of one ethnic group by another.

Historically, the most pervasive form of sin is war, an institutionalization of murder, in which sin is wreaked in and through the human body, the bodies of other creatures, and the “body” of creation. Killing, maiming, torture, rape—whatever its theoretical justifications, war is inevitably an occasion on which all these are perpetrated, usually for the sake of laying exclusionary claims to territory and goods for which human “tribes” are in competition. Finally, we must not forget the types of “benign” violence that have equally lethal if less sensational effects, and that accompany colonization, neocolonization through economic globalization, and any imbalance of social power in which the resources of the many are conscripted by the few.

Genesis attributes suffering in human life primarily to human perversity. We suffer because we sin, rejecting through our bodies and on the bodies of fellow humanity the kinds of relationships that mirror God. Yet undeniably, Genesis also presents the intransigent ambiguity of human life as embodied and as “in place” in the physical universe, an ambiguity that seems to beset human decision making from the beginning. The trees of the garden presumably come from God, but also are the occasion of temptation (2:9; 3:22, 24); the serpent appears abruptly and suggests transgressive possibilities for no apparent reason (3:1–5). The absurdity of evil and an inexplicable pressure on humans to capitulate are vividly rendered in such details. Yet the ultimate effect of the contrast between sin and creation, image and brokenness, blessing and suffering, is to further the judgment of “what is” in light of “what should be.” Genesis ascribes responsibility to humans for the brokenness of their own situation. This assignment of responsibility is necessary if we are to be able to affirm a counterpart responsibility for transformation that also falls to humans. All is placed under God’s sovereignty and made contingent on God’s call, both the original imaging of God and the restoration of the image to broken humanity.

The Image Redeemed

Sin distorts the relations among human beings (bodies and souls), to God (here and hereafter), and to the rest of creation (both in what it yields to us and in what we wreak on it). Yet the book of Genesis as a whole displays God’s faithfulness to humanity, even if its family history, the feats of its heroes, and their forward movement into blessing remain fractured and fragmentary. The working out of sin and salvation through a family history and a promise of children and land inscribes creaturely
embodiment, material connection, and interdependence with transcendent meaning. The relationships in which humans either image God or deface God’s image are concrete and physical, specific to time and place, full of possibility, but still contingent in origin and limited in scope. The book of Genesis grounds salvation in the action of God within a historical process, calling human beings, especially faith communities, forward to a time when “shalom [and] ‘wholeness’ will be a reality among ‘all the families of the earth.’”34 What this implies concretely is recognition of human needs and capacities, the sharing of goods, respect for all persons irrespective of bodily and geographic differences (such as race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality), and commitment to the well-being of all in concrete communities of belonging (structured by work and family).

Pope John Paul II believed that a crucial precondition of social justice is the reawakening among peoples of the sort of religious consciousness that finds in human interdependence a mandate for compassion and cooperation:

Solidarity helps us to see the “other” — whether a person, people, or nation — not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our “neighbor,” a “helper” (cf. Gen. 2:18–20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God.35

Redemption unfurling within history, at least in the perspective of Genesis, is a dynamic process, not a return to a prelapsarian time. This trajectory has a strong future orientation, and even a universalizing one. Paul Santmire, a biblical scholar who has long been concerned about human degradation of the natural environment,36 asserts that there are practical and ethical reasons that require our traditions to move the dynamic of the divine image in our humanity forward. “In this global age when the universal questions of justice and ecology ring from every

mountain and wetland, from every tumultuous city and sequestered village, our churches can no longer afford to stay at home with the particularistic theology of yesterday.”37 Thomas Mann is even more specific in naming the need for a forward-moving dynamic of redemption. It is alarming that he made the following comment in 1991, not 2003 (or for many years thereafter):

[Recently] a…coalition, dominated by the United States, completed a war against Iraq, making all too evident the irresolution of the promise of the blessing to “all the families of the earth,” and especially to those “families” in the Middle East so closely connected to the families of the Book of Genesis. This relatively recent situation reminds us…why the poignant resolutions within the family of Abraham are presented by the biblical authors as pointing beyond themselves ultimately to an international horizon.38

The image of God in humanity takes its meaning from a theology of deliverance and restored relationship within which the image symbolizes humanity’s end point as well as its origin. The image of God is about the coexistence of creatures under God in a corporate as well as corporeal world. Even in speaking about redemption it is important to recognize that we are placed in a world that is contingent and finite. Conflict in and through the body, in respect of bodily needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities is not only a part of the historical record but inevitable, since our space, resources, and capacity for relationship are abundant but not endless.

According to Santmire, humans are divinely called “to care for the earth,” as well as “to find sustenance for their bodies and establish a rich and just communal life.” Yet this implies limits. “Since humans are earth-creatures, not gods, they must live with, and indeed can only flourish within, limits of knowledge, capacity, and place (niche). Hence

38. Mann, “All the Families…,” 352.
humility and restraint before all the creatures of the earth are virtues willed by God.”

Right relationship as God’s image in humanity is one way to define “justice.” Justice is the norm and goal of all human relations and societies, and essential to the earthly beginning of redemption. In our present condition of finitude and sin, humans require a conversion to the compassionate attitudes necessary to motivate beneficent action toward others, as well as restraint of our own self-interest. Without a fundamental renewal of our bonds of fellowship-in-difference, the historical juggernaut of violence and sin will be impossible to reverse. While mutual recognition and the pull to unity are “natural” to Adam and Eve, it is our obligation in our sinful condition to restore and cultivate these responses. Compassion is the ability to feel with and for other human beings, and to adopt their sufferings and aspirations as our own. According to the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, compassion is the ability to consider the suffering of another as significant to our own goals and happiness, so that we make ourselves vulnerable in the person of the other. Another philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, sets compassion at the foundation of morality when he envisions the ability to see “oneself as another” as key to the “ethical intention” as “aiming at the ‘good life’ with and for others, in just institutions.”

Religious symbols and identity have a crucial moral role. They can enhance compassion as a personal and social virtue, by immersing believers in narratives and practices that hold it up as an ideal, and particularly by idealizing empathy and sacrifice for those to whom we feel no “natural” attraction or bond. Compassion for and mercy on those in broken situations, even when they are blameworthy, can be assimilated to the divine image, becoming a model for humans. Consider God’s action toward the hiding and naked guilty parties, whom God was poised to throw out of their paradise: “The Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife and clothed them” (3:21).


43. Ibid., 233.

Interreligious Dialogue, Community, and Action

Cates notes that compassion requires some sense of the particularity of others, which is of course enhanced by actual association, and especially by collaborative undertakings. Sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis explains that dialogue — not the simple fact of having been oppressed — is the basis of knowledge about what justice is and how it can be achieved. She explains that the term transversalism originated with an Italian feminist project to bring together members of conflicting national groups, “like the Serbs and Croats, but especially Palestinian
and Israeli Jewish women.” Charlesworth and Chinkin use the term transversalism to refer to a variety of feminist approaches that come together in a similar interest in international, intercultural, and interreligious dialogue to enable moral judgment and shared action around values, but without “homogenization,” arrogance, or moral imperialism. Transversalism is a good model for our dialogue about the ethical ramifications of our shared religious symbol, the image of God.

Ethical collaboration can be a starting point for religious cooperation around shared religious meaning, such as we are seeking now in the image of God. Ethical collaboration can enhance and even validate fundamental experiences of God and God’s will. In the beginning, I introduced as a serious question James Gustafson’s doubt that an honest reading of humanity’s real experience of the powers that encompass us would bear up an optimistic, hopeful account of God’s reconciling action in history, working for our good, to restore God’s broken image. The challenge for interreligious dialogue and ethics is to embody, not merely to talk about, a different reading of divine power. A more hopeful reading must be verified as authentic by bearing fruit in mutual understanding and collaboration, in “one flesh” fellowship, and in a mutually strengthened trust in divine blessing.

Paul Knitter proposes that interreligious truths are disclosed in what he calls “basic interreligious communities.” These communities begin with the practical, not with the theologically abstract, nor even with the scripturally authoritative. Real interreligious community begins, according to Knitter, at the most practical level: with compassion, with shared feelings of “sorrow, horror, and consternation” at situations of suffering, scarring humanity and the earth. These feelings lead to conversion, as simply “a call to do something.” The surprising, miraculous result can be that unanticipated bridges over difference materialize or are suddenly recognized for what they always were. Collaboration or actual praxis confronting problems brings “new bondings,” and can even succeed in creating “religious brothers and sisters among those who may know little about each other’s religions.” Then the time is ripe for genuine communication, as dialogue partners and collaborators witness to each other about how their own religious traditions “nourish” and guide their ethical practices. Communion, in Knitter’s terms, is the consummate interreligious outcome. Communion is an experience of clarity about the shared experience of the transcendent that was already present in the first steps of compassion, in the original recognition of suffering that became a call to action for everyone.

Conclusion

Conversion to live peaceably in a global society can only occur in “global” — that is, intercultural and interreligious — contexts. We must rediscover the embodied fellowship for which we were created. Redemption of our created yet broken corporate existence can be symbolized as the restoration of God’s image in human relationships. The image has always had a future orientation. The future to which humans are called is God’s corporate and corporeal blessing: human fecundity and family relationship, the generosity of the land, cooperative work to meet human needs and create cultures, and the flourishing of all through peaceful negotiation of shares in the earth’s abundant but finite resources. Let “image of God” be for us a sign of compassion, on the way to conversion, collaboration, and communion. Let us hope that our work together, bridging differences, can authenticate the truth and faithfulness of God’s blessing.

47. Ibid., 13–17.
Chapter 4
THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE HUMAN IDEAL
Reflections from the Varieties of Judaism
Michael Fishbane

As heirs of the great and complex traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, we have inherited numerous images of the human being as a creature of God—images that have been of foundational importance, both for the theological anthropology they describe, as well as for the spiritual ideals they project for human perfection or fulfillment. In some instances, these images have been of very great religious and moral consequence in cultivating certain aspects of the distinctiveness of human beings; but in other cases, certain formulations have variously limited or constrained a certain sense of human flourishing. Times change, and so do the values and hierarchies of moral worth. Thus the challenge to reflect upon our inherited images of personhood, and to reformulate them anew, is a task given to each generation as it comes to understand its theological and ethical tasks within the framework of its received traditions. Our time is no different; and for this reason see my present concern as penetrating the resources of the Jewish tradition for models of moral and theological worth as we grope forward in this age. Accordingly, I shall be less interested here in cataloging or summarizing the vast range of teachings on the distinctive nature of the human being as a creature of God in Jewish philosophy and religious thought, as in attempting to use the texts of the vast rabbinic tradition as an armature for contemporary reflection. In the process I shall try to be faithful to historical Judaism and its range of creative expressions, but seek to do so in my own voice and in accordance with my own theological perspective.

In order to speak within a broad hermeneutical framework shared variously by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, I shall choose topics for phenomenological reflection that are either indicated directly in the initial chapters of the book of Genesis, or are features entailed in their theological and literary presentation. Four topics impose themselves for consideration. I shall mention them summarily at the outset, and discuss each one separately and at greater length, even adding matters drawn from rabbinic tradition. In this way, the issues I first raise from the perspective of a philosophical anthropology regarding distinctive aspects of human life are subsequently given a certain Jewish resonance and theological character.

The major topics I now wish to present, guided by issues and concerns found in Genesis 1–2, are the following:

1. that human life is one expression of a vast and varied phenomenon of life that is not grounded in itself, but is rather the product of a source transcendent to itself and designated as God, and that, within this framework, the human species is marked as the most distinctive realization of the divine source of life, and is marked as such through the designation of it being in the “image of God”;

2. that this human species alone has a task of value or responsibility, which marks it off as different from the other life-forms, and that this distinctive task is denominated as having a particular sovereignty or dominion over those other life-forms—a task further denominated by the duty “to cultivate and protect” the habitat of the world in which such life develops and proliferates;

3. that the life-forms are variously marked as “good” by the divine source of life, and that this designation of value spans the entire spectrum of the creation (also called, altogether, “very good”)—albeit the human life-form is of a particularly lordly and Divine-like status; and

4. that all this information is formulated in a highly stylized literary accounts, these marking creative human expressions or renditions
of the nature of the natural world and of its supernatural source in God — hence the image of the world we inhabit is not simply given, as some necessary epistemic a priori, but is rather a particular product of the distinctive human imagination and the values that may or may not guide it.

Let me now develop these matters with more extended reflection. I believe that, in different ways, they each address or sponsor vital dimensions of the distinctiveness of the human self, and may thus contribute to an emergent theology and social ethics for our time — both grounded in Scripture and in tune with an independent philosophical anthropology. To appreciate this last point, let me turn first to the anthropological aspects of these features, independent of Scripture. Only thereafter, in the course of reflection, shall I make reference to our Genesis text; and then I shall further develop my reflections through certain texts drawn from the rabbinic tradition. In this way we shall work upwards from the ground of natural and anthropological reflections to their biblical adumbration, and thence to rabbinic materials that variously elaborate certain considerations and bring the inquiry forward to a cultural hermeneutics of a particular theological character. In my case, this theological dimension is thoroughly Jewish, though my formulation of it vibrates with all the books I have read from outside the particular Jewish orbit of ideas and values. This done, I shall return in the end to Genesis 1–2 in order to give these reflections an entirely personal character, while also refocusing my insights around a passage from Scripture — this text being a common core, quite apart from the vast differences of exegetical and canonical extension that distinguish Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This final hermeneutical turn will be the most overtly theological of the successive levels of reflection in which I here engage.

The Will to Life

I turn first to the topic of the phenomenon of life as the natural ground of our subject. A broad spectrum of life-forms fills our world, as the simplest observation attests; but despite their diversity and bounty, one impulse pervades them all: the impulse to life or vitality. This impulse characterizes all living things, each according to its kind, and is variously expressed by modalities of proliferation, self-preservation, and tropisms (reflecting different orientations, depending on what best supports the specific life-form). To speak of this drive to life or vitality as an impulse is to attempt to be as neutral as possible; but it is the fact that, as the various species and kinds differentiate and become more complex, this impulse is not just some blind force or directionality, but is linked to “will” of some sort. We thus see, increasingly, something of the order of a “will to life” among the life-forms in the natural world — though this is of different degrees of magnitude, and certainly never cut off from various autonomic impulses. At the highest end of these forms is the human species, whose “will to life” is the most distinctive — not solely by virtue of the very nature of human nature, but by virtue of a certain reflexivity that is aware of the will to life in itself and throughout the realm of nature. This reflexivity is marked by a sense of value and responsibility for the diverse phenomenon of life per se, which includes both the specific life-forms themselves as well as the sacred center of all life: the ineradicable core of vitality that is both the transcendent mystery of all life as well as the many manifestations or images of its imageless reality. As the highest manifestation of this source of life on earth, and with a sense of care for the life world, noted in Scripture by the phrase le-ovedah ule-shamerah (“to cultivate and protect”), the human being is the fullest earthly expression of the transnatural or divine “will for life” with responsibilities for the sustenance of the natural realm. It is in this sense, I would say, that the human person is distinctly designated in Scripture as being in the “divine image.”

The sense of duty to cultivate and protect the life-forms of the world is the natural ground of ethics, and takes on different tasks of innovation or restraint in accordance with the different life-forms themselves, at different times and places. One may even say that this sense of duty is the ground of culture itself, and is manifest in law and value — most particularly in the cultural expressions of that highest of all legal and social

1. These thoughts are related to the thinking of Hans Jonas, and his consideration of the ongoing “metabolic” intensity and identity of organisms; see, for example, the concise consideration in his Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz, ed. Lawrence Vogel (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1996), chapter 1, “Evolution and Freedom: On the Continuity among Life-Forms.”
values: the duty to protect and honor the human species as a whole. I have suggested that this notion is grounded in Scripture, or at least adumbrated in its language; and this factor gives my first reflection a certain scriptural adumbration, however inchoate or allusive. Withal, I now wish to exemplify from a uniquely Jewish point of view my argument that a distinctive task devolving upon the human species as the most reflective and powerful of life-forms on earth, and also as the most aware of the fragility of these forms and its capacity to impact them for good or ill, is the task to safeguard the earthly habitat of vital forms — and human life and culture most especially.

The text I wish to adduce is formulated in an ancient Mishna found in the tractate of Sanhedrin, a document dealing with certain features of ancient Jewish law and legal process. More specifically, this text, deriving from the oldest strata of classical rabbinic legal culture in the first centuries of our era, treats the admonition of witnesses before they are to give testimony before a court of judges duly constituted to try a capital case. For rabbinic law, there is no graver social responsibility than the duty to testify with absolute care and honesty to what one has seen or heard directly — for on this testimony a human life, that of the accused, hangs in the balance. Accordingly, justice is never abstract, but always deals with persons, and thus the admonition of witnesses in capital cases centers on inculcating a consciousness of the value of life in those whose words will shape the court’s decision. I now quote from chapter 4 of the tractate, the fifth Mishna. After warning the witness to consider the nature of their evidence, and to make sure that it is not based on presumption, or inference, or on any second-hand accounts, the judges sharpen their language, and say:

Know ye that criminal cases are not like capital cases [diney nefashot]; for in criminal cases [if a person gives false testimony] he gives money [for restitution] and it [namely, his crime] is thereby atoned for, whereas in capital cases the blood [of the person killed because of the testimony], and the blood of all that person’s subsequent progeny devolve upon the witness [as his responsibility] until the end of the world. Just such a situation is specified with respect to Cain, who killed his brother; as it says [in Scripture],

“your brother’s bloods [demey akhika] cry out” (Gen. 4:10). Note that Scripture does not say “your brother’s blood” [dem akhika] but “your brother’s bloods” — which is to indicate both his blood and the blood of [all] his progeny. ... Therefore [moreover] the first person [Adam] was created alone, in order to teach you that whoever causes the death of any person, Scripture regards him as if he destroyed an entire world; and whoever sustains the life of any person, is regarded as one who maintains an entire world.

Certainly, this is a remarkable admonition delivered by the court, and indicates something of the high seriousness attributed in classical rabbinic law to the value of human life and the task of culture to cultivate and protect it by every possible means. The fact that the admonition leans on the biblical text for support, and derives that support through an exegetical construction in each of the cases, suggests that the sages did not wish simply to assert the importance of life as a natural fact, but wished to link their words to the authority of Scripture. In this way, we may say, the unique distinction of the human person to think about the world and its sustenance is deepened by the fact that the culture-bearing responsibility of the person is not just to assert values but also to provide reasons and justifications for them in the realm of reason and discourse. Hence, what I earlier referred to as the “will to life” is not just a blind drive, but one that involves (in the human instance, at least) the cultivation of reflective thoughtfulness, and one that must be transmitted and even inculcated in one’s fellow person in order for the duty to cultivate and protect life to be a common human enterprise. The remarkable assertion that each person must be regarded as a stream of life extending throughout the time of the world, and that extinguishing a life is to destroy a virtual life-world, aligns the human project of care for human life with one’s care for the world and its survival; the more religious justification given, that links this imperative to the fact that Adam was created “alone,” means that care for persons is care for the divine
image in the world — even care for its flourishing and survival. From this perspective, judicial ethics is a special mode of theological attentiveness, one uniquely and distinctively given to human beings.

The Will to Good

But human care for the world is not only expressed through a commitment to human life and its protection; it is also expressed through an attentive regard for the cultivation and protection of all the life-forms of nature in the earthly habitat — a commitment to their particularity, each according to its kind, and to the peculiar goodness that each bears in its nature and contributes to the natural whole of which it is a part. Another distinctive feature of the human being, therefore, is the capacity to reflect upon the variety of life-forms as an ensemble of parts, both in relationship to the character of human life and apart from it. This extends the “will to life” that is distinctively a feature of the human being to a readiness and willingness to “will the good” of each and every element as a matter of principle, and to try and serve that principle to the best of one’s ability. In my view, a commitment to the “good” of each life-form includes a commitment to an order that extends beyond human beings and may or may not specifically benefit their self-interest — this being, in other terms, a commitment to an ethics of the whole, as expressions of the life-source that informs it. It is this multiple and diverse reality of earthly life that is affirmed in Genesis 1 when it speaks of God seeing that this or that element of the creation is “good,” and it is this very same reality which we humans may acknowledge and serve. To acknowledge the good of each creation, and thus the totality as a complex of goods, is to acknowledge the thick biosphere and ecosphere within which human life is cultivated and protected, and to will its good is to accept the principle that all life and action is not centered around human beings and human society — although this latter sphere is a distinctive realm for “willing the good,” even as the capacity or readiness to will the good of both part and whole is a distinctive human capacity. This does not mean that one may know the universal good in truth, or that one’s intention to will the good will always be right and just, or even pure and selfless; it only means that the human cultivation and protection of life involves a unique attentiveness to and responsibility for the value of all forms of existence — even if and when priorities have to be made under the low ceiling of human knowledge. Human regency in the world should therefore be guided by a “will to empower,” precisely because of the human capacity for power that changes the balance of each life-form in relationship to itself and to the whole.

Different aspects of the Jewish tradition help set this philosophical anthropology into a wider theological matrix. Particularly important to me in this regard are some thoughts of Rabbi Moses Cordovero, one of the greatest exponents of Jewish mysticism and mystical ethics, who lived in the Galilee in the city of Safed in the sixteenth century. Among his many writings is the remarkable handbook of ethics and spirituality known as the Tosef Devarah (or Palm Tree of Deborah). It sets the tasks of human will and ethics within a cosmic framework, one that actually imagines the flow of creative life and energy as a Cosmic Anthropos. Indeed, this anthropoidal structure of all being provides the model for the true flow of life and energy at all levels of reality.

What this means from a theological perspective is that the creative charge of life is imagined to erupt as a spark of will, and that it is empowered by a ceaseless and gratuitous will for the good of all things — even if and when this flow of life is diverted or perverted in the course of its earthly realization, whether because of some ill-will among persons or some corruption in the overall chain of being. God, Cordovero says, does not cease to emanate God’s creative energy or cease to will the good under such circumstances — and just that is God’s great goodness and humility. The human being, who is in the image of this gracious Being, is called upon to imitate and replicate this ceaseless and gracious will for the good, no matter how incomplete or even perverted this will may be bent in the world of nature and society. For Cordovero, this act of will is the deep ground of ethics, and is in fact grounded in an imitatio Dei — God being imagined as nothing less than a Power that emanates the powers and potentials of all life in a maximal and ceaseless will for the reality and realization of the whole. This is the ultimate care for being, for the cultivation of the all; and its gesture of maximal gratuity is the ultimate humility, for it gives without any prior or
The Will to Imagine

Let me now turn to a final matter entailed in the narrative of Genesis 1, and seek to understand it first as a feature of philosophical anthropology, that is, as a constitutive feature of the human being per se, and then to put it into a wider theological framework by means of a text from the Jewish tradition that treats the same subject. This is the way that we have proceeded with respect to the “will to life” and the “will to the good”; and this is the way we shall now proceed with respect to the fact that our accounts of the world and of life within it are narrative constructs, derived from tradition and from the individual imagination. We are always accounting for our place in the world and the nature of things through such creative constructs, and allowing these to guide us, give us orientation, and to provide a framework of value—at least until some crisis introduces a dissonance that requires a revision or reinterpretation or reconfiguration of the implicit or explicit narrative account we have of things. Surely the text of Genesis 1, by virtue of its structure and emphases, is such a tendentious cultural accounting, serving implied and explicit theological and pedagogical purposes. Indeed, just this perception was stressed by two of the great French Jewish commentators of the high Middle Ages, Rashi (Rabbi Shelomo Yitzhaki) and his grandson Rashbam (Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir), for they variously stressed that Genesis 1 can hardly be regarded as a complete or literal account of the origins of things, insofar as it deletes certain details and emphasizes others in a highly stylized manner, all in order to provide a pedagogical focus for the account (for Rashbam this was the Sabbath and its observance). 3

Theological narratives thus construct images of the world, from the fabric of traditional wisdom and the creative imagination, in order to further tradition and to adapt it to its purposes. The human being is thus constituted by a creative impulse or “will to imagine,” and this quality is certainly a distinctive feature of this species and distinctive among the species of life. The world is thus not a de facto given, but an

image of what is imagined and imaginable. To share these constructions, and to benefit from the world-images imagined by others, opens a wider horizon of possibilities for the self. To deny this pluralism of perspectives is to constrain oneself to a particular angle of cultural vision. Similarly, the possibility of imagining new structures within one’s cultural tradition is the potency of that specific application of the “will to imagine” that we know of as cultural and textual hermeneutics. Exegesis may thus imagine new images of the world and of value beyond the original formulations and meanings of the received canonical texts — if not also in and through the formulations themselves.

The power and possibility of hermeneutics or creative interpretation to construct new worlds of meaning is given a very striking and explicit articulation in a passage found in the book of Zohar, that singularly great compendium of Jewish mystical exegesis of Scripture that appeared in Castile in the latter half of the thirteenth century. And if this passage puts the power of interpretation into a cosmic setting far beyond our own epistemological reach and capacity for cognitive assent, one can hardly deny that it gives bold expression to the sense that, through creative interpretation, one can transform one’s cultural canon and even construct new epistemic worlds for habitation and value. Commenting on the eschatological passage in Isaiah 51:15, in which God says to the prophet, “I have put my word in your mouth... to plant heavens and to establish [the] earth,” Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai states: “One should expend great effort in studying Torah day and night, because the Holy One, blessed be He, listens to the voice of those who study Torah, and every new interpretation of the Torah that is originated by someone who studies Torah makes a firmament” (I.4b-5a). The teacher goes on to portray in dramatic fashion how each particular “[i]nterpretation moves, ascends and descends, and becomes a firmament.”

This formulation should not be dismissed as a mere trope or metaphor for the mystagogue; it is, rather, a strong ontological assertion and belief that human interpretation of Torah is of a creative and world-building nature. And if we are to understand the teaching correctly, and even find some meaning of it for ourselves, it is necessary to observe that Rabbi Simeon’s theological comment is in fact a sermonic response to Genesis 1:1, the sponsoring Pentateuchal passage in the Zohar. What this means,

I would suggest, is that the sage presents the human acts of creative interpretation, or theological exegesis, as a continuation of God’s initial act of creation and revelation; and that just as the primordial Torah is the blueprint for our world, so is the interpretation of the historical Torah the matrix for its renewal and remaking. Similarly, the divine act of creation is extended and vitalized by humans created in God’s image — such that the distinctive imitation Dei is presented as the creative act of constructing worlds through speech and interpretation. To be sure, this is an inner-cultural act of a specific type; but its reach goes beyond this sphere; for by sharing interpretative possibilities with other persons, beyond our immediate social setting, we engage in an inter-cultural act whereby new ways of being human may be shared, with consequences for the enrichment and transformation of our own cultural sphere. By linking our “will to imagine” to our creative potential, and also imagining this as related to God’s own creativity, Rabbi Simeon thus opens us to an unexpected theological horizon wherein the human imagination is our distinctive capacity as creatures in the image of God, and further, as I would now propose, that it is this very imagination which forms the core of our capacity to “will the good” and to “cultivate and protect” the streams of life in our world. Truly, this is our distinctive human way of being before and with God.

Conclusion

I wish to conclude these various reflections by making a theological statement that builds on my attempt to think through the notion of humanity before God from the ground up: starting with reflections of a distinctive anthropological nature, and giving this a Jewish dimension through insights from its textual tradition, both biblical and rabbinic — all with the goal of constructing a model that allows for a vibrant religious and epistemological pluralism, simultaneously alive to the human and non-human other while assertive of one’s particular values and perspectives.

ince the core issues of my discussion were inspired by features of the pening chapters of the book of Genesis, I now wish to return to that source as a foundation for the following brief statement. It is a personal ormulation of where I now stand on the matters about which I have been brooding here.

As I understand it, Genesis 1–2 may provide the theological model of a world filled with the power and variety of life, which finds its source in the vitality of the Divine Being. This vitality fills our world and proliferates into the diversity of earthly life. All life-forms manifest this image of God, and the human being most distinctively — and particularly in the human capacity to reflect on the deep will to life that pulses in our world, and to develop values that seek to enhance and serve the good of all beings, as well as to imagine new images of the possible — thereby replicating the divine nature and its ceaseless creative vitality. Finding images of the Divine in all things, the human may find a divine imperative in the task of cultivating and protecting these images through appropriate acts of innovation and restraint. And by recognizing the distinctive divine image in all other humans, each person may imitate God’s own purpose — so that each human life be seen as a good in its own right. Only this comprehensive regard for all beings, of every order and variety, each according to its kind, is the blessing that we now, at this most perilous hour, may give the created order, and thus serve the divine bounty that throbs in the veins of nature.

Chapter 5

DISTINCTIVE LOVE

Gratitude for Life and Theological Humanism

William Schweiker

Upheaval after upheaval has reminded us that modern man is traveling along a road called hate. Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, the command to love one’s enemy is an absolute necessity for our survival.

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Love encumbers us with life. Love binds up the sorrowful and cradles those lost, making them present anew in the bonds of memory. Love ignites hope and grasps for what we can never reach but ennobles our fleeting days. Lovers crave each other’s touch, the embrace of one life with another. We are even told that love can triumph over estrangement, the hostility of enemies that sever the bonds of life. It is said that while faith, hope, and love abide, love is the greatest of these (1 Cor. 13:13). If one subtracts love from a human life while adding as much power or knowledge as one likes, is that life worth living? Only the most ardent Stoic bent on escaping the entanglements of life to enjoy self-sufficiency would seek to exile love and its passions from human existence. As John Wesley noted, “For, how far is love, even with many wrong opinions,

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Chapter 8

The Humanistic Ethic

Jewish Reflections

Paul Mendes-Flohr

"Religion without power is mere philosophy."1 This sapient observation by the Indian Muslim poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) boldly thrusts all discussion of religion and ethical humanism in critical perspective. It is a perspective that informs this essay. Modern Jewish thought, the exposition of which is my bread and butter — or, if you wish, bagel and cream cheese — abounds in philosophical and theological constructions of a Jewish ethic in support of a humanistic vision. The reflections that follow are prompted by a parenthetical remark of a colleague, who, in the midst of an impassioned conversation in the corridors of the University of Chicago’s Divinity School, paused and with a deeply pensive gaze, looked at me — or perhaps she was actually looking at the angels above us — and with a soft, almost remorseful voice mused: “As a Catholic, indeed, as a passionate and devoted member of my church, I belong to a community that lays claim to privileged knowledge. Can I be a believing member of my faith community without being exclusive? Can I truly [her emphasis] embrace the Other as a fellow human being without compromising my conception of God’s Word? Can I truly reach out to the Other without vitiating the values and institutions of the religious tradition that nourish my soul and furnish the fabric of my family life?”

As a Jew, I have analogous concerns. I, too, am torn by an anxiety that my particularistic fidelities are at odds with the humanistic ethic

to which I am beholden with a passion equal to that of my love of my people and its traditions. Sigmund Freud once observed that a Jew is a person who has more than one passport. In fact, I have two passports with an option for a third. But Freud also meant that a Jew—surely the modern Jew—inhabits many cultures and travels between different cognitive landscapes. Indeed, this is a condition—I dare say, privilege—of many denizens of the modern world, Jews and non-Jewish alike. The ethical implications of our multiple cultural citizenship were perhaps best captured by Jean-Paul Sartre. Modernity, the French philosopher noted, has transformed our notion of fraternity; we now sense a solidarity with persons “whose face we do not recognize.” We identify with others whom we do not recognize as belonging to our circle of acquaintances; we are bound morally to persons who inhabit neither the same communal nor cultural space we do. Indeed, the bonds of human solidarity stretch beyond the limits of our group, religion, nation, or universe of discourse. Unleashing centrifugal forces, modernity has expanded not only the boundaries of knowledge but also our sense of community.

I am a Jew, but my moral, and a fortiori political, community is not confined to my fellow Jews. The modern, indeed, humanistic configuration of the multiple, overlapping communities of intellect, imagination, and moral sentiment gained terse but vigorous expression in a cri de coeur of the Bulgarian-Jewish writer Elias Canetti. Writing in the midst of the horrific events that so brutally sought to sever the Jews from their fellow human beings—the events we now call the Holocaust—this Nobel laureate for literature exclaimed: “Should I harden myself against the Russians because [they persecute the] Jews, against the Chinese because they are far away, against the Germans because they are possessed by the devil? Can’t I still belong to all of them, as before, and nevertheless be a Jew?”

As a citizen of the State of Israel I am witness to an ever-increasing shrinkage of the cosmopolitan and humanistic horizons of my fellow Jews. To be sure, when one’s community is under siege, it is difficult to reach out to the Other across the barriers of enmity. It is thus not surprising that in the grips of a fierce and seemingly intractable political and territorial conflict with our neighbors, many of my fellow Jews in Israel yield to base emotions and subscribe to political views that hardly conform to a humanistic ethic of embracing and confirming the Other. National conflicts, especially when inflamed by the savagery of tanks and suicide bombers, are inherently Manichaean, casting one’s adversaries as incorrigible beasts, embodying all evil. War polarizes and dehumanizes the Other. This is tragic, indeed. What is disturbing, however, is that the rabbis—as the Imams—are seemingly incapable of transcending this Manichaean divide. Sadly, they are often at the frontline leading the forces that seek to deepen the divide. They do so by a studied conflation of religious teachings with national interests, rendering faith in effect a vehicle of patriotism and myopic nationalism. To be sure, most of the rabbis—as the majority of Imams—are disinclined to join the ranks of their patriotic colleagues, and prefer to stand silently on the sidelines. By their silence they countenance outrages that theireds should condemn as reprehensible transgressions of God’s law.


The Danger of Sacro Egoismo

Of course, one may retort that these rabbis misinterpret the teachings of the tradition. Or one may point to the political-sociology of the State of Israel, and argue that the rabbis feel themselves obliged to vie with the secular authorities and forces in society to gain sway over the “soul” of the people, and thus calculatedly wed religious values and doctrines to the nation’s political agenda. This analysis would only underscore our misgivings about the failure of the rabbis to assume a transcendent perspective illuminating a horizon beyond the fray. Moreover, by identifying the tenets of Torah with a politically circumscribed (perhaps more correctly “circumcised”) understanding of Jewry’s collective interests, no matter how one assesses those interests in strict secular and political terms, they, the rabbis, lend a given policy a seal of sanctity. Their theological endorsement of patriotic politics thereby exacerbates

3. There are notable exceptions, such as Rabbis for Human Rights, an Israeli organization concerned specifically with giving a voice to the Jewish tradition of respect for human rights within the context of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories.
the danger of a “sacro egoismo” — that is, a sacred egoism — that is inherent in all expressions of patriotism, certainly in its more febrile articulations. While a nation’s egoistic regard for its own interests is natural and, in certain circumstances, surely by any moral standard, in order, patriotism, especially in its more hyperbolic manifestations, tends to view those interests as sacrosanct and hence as ethically self-justifying and nonnegotiable.

By exalting the nation’s interests to be sacred, sacro egoismo not only negates the legitimacy of the interests of the nation’s adversaries, but also serves to blind the nation to the human reality of its adversaries. Even more lamentable, sacro egoismo also allows — nay, enjoins — a nation to commit acts that one would otherwise regard as morally reprehensible. Under the command of sacro egoismo, the citizens of a state (or any political community, however constituted), who in their personal lives may be utterly decent and upright, kill and plunder. When blessed by the custodians of divinely revealed truths, the state — which, after all, is a human, hence a fallible, institution — becomes a veritable Moloch. As Martin Buber noted, “in the realm of Moloch honest men lie and compassionate men torture. And they really and truly believe that brother-murder will prepare the way for brotherhood!” This is a bizarre and frightening dialectic. The perverse fantasy of “redemptive sin” informs the political judgment, alas, not only of Oriental nations, but all nations, even those privileged to dwell in the enlightened West, that regard themselves as charged with a divinely appointed task to cleanse the world of evil, the alleged agents of who are, after all, their fellow human beings.

One may conclude, as a good old-fashioned liberal I surely do, that religion should at all cost be kept apart from the corridors of political power. But then we are confronted once again with Muhammed Iqbal’s dictum that “religion without power is mere philosophy.” If I understand Iqbal correctly, a religion’s quest for power in and of itself is not a vice. Indeed, he would argue that the pursuit of political power is, in fact, a theological duty. After all, biblical faith is born of a vision of the common good, a vision that, when inflected with the remonstrations of the prophets, demands social and political justice. But this vision, as I have suggested, becomes blurred and profoundly distorted when it is associated with the political, and thus parochial, interests of a particular polity, nation, or community of faith.

The Challenge of Secular Humanism

There is yet another dimension to the religious quest for political power that Iqbal seems to have had in mind. The possession of power is a test of the efficacy of a particular faith’s teachings; only by passing through the fire of such a test can these teachings be authenticated. Sermons, theological disquisitions, systematic or constructed, remain, indeed, but mere philosophy when relegated to the precincts of our houses of worship and learning and solely enshrined in our hearts. While concurring with Iqbal that religion must embrace the quotidian realm of public life and thus perform requires power, one may question whether this power need be political. I shall return presently to consider alternative modalities of power that religious faith may assume.

The failure of the rabbis of the State of Israel to distinguish what type of power may be appropriate to their calling and to provide the state with moral leadership is often ascribed to the fact that most of them have yet to experience the purgatory of the Enlightenment and a Western education. The apologia is telling, for it implicitly acknowledges that the religious humanism that we wish to celebrate is a construct born of a response to secular humanism. My colleague’s anguished concerns cited at the beginning of my reflections — namely, how one can be a believing Christian without being supersessionist and exclusive — reflects the fact


5. Cf. “I think it is a mistake to suppose that the idea of state is more dominant and rules all other ideas embodied in the [religio-political] system of Islam. In Islam the spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains. . . . In Islam it is the same reality that appears as Church looked at from one point of view and the State from another. . . . The truth, however, is that matter is spirit in space-time reference. The unity called man is body when you look at it as acting in regard to what we call the external world, it is mind or soul when you look at it as acting in regard to the ultimate aim and ideal of such acting. . . . The state, from the Islamic standpoint, is an endeavor to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization. . . . The ultimate reality, according to the Quran, is spiritual, and its life consists in its temporal activity. The spirit finds its opportunities in the natural, the material, the secular.” Muhammed Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 146f.
that her faith commitments, as are mine, are challenged by a source from without our respective religious communities and traditions. Our faith commitments are challenged by secular humanism, especially as elaborated by its so-called postmodern articulations calling upon us to honor alterity and affirm the integrity of the “otherness of the Other,” while reaching out to her or him as a fellow human being.

To be sure, the secular humanist vision has its roots in the biblical affirmation of the oneness of God as the presupposition of the unity of the human family. The great hymn of secular humanism, Beethoven’s jubilant “Ode to Joy” as sung by the chorus of his Ninth Symphony, evokes the divine source of the universal fraternity to be forged by secular wisdom and ethical reflexes:

Freude, schöner Götterfunken
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmelsle, dein Heiligum!
Deine Zauber binden wieder
Was die Mode streng geteilt.
Alle Menschen werden Brüder,
wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Joy, lovely divine spark,
Daughter of Elysium,
Drunk with fire, we enter,
Heavenly one, your shrine!
Your magic spells reunite
What convention has rough sundered;
All men will become brothers
At the gentle touch of your wing.

The Ode to Joy became the veritable anthem of secular humanism. As the novelist Robert Musil describes its impact, “millions sank ... awestruck in the dust; hostile boundaries shattered; the gospel of world harmony reconciled and unified the sundered.” The Ode to Joy attained a delightful simplicity but compelling poignancy, highlighting its universal message, in its Yiddish rendition by the poet Y. L. Peretz:

Alle Menschen zeinen brider:
bräune, gelbe, schwarte un weisse....
Alle Menschen zeinen brider,
fon ein Taten, fon ein Mamen.

All human beings are brothers and sisters:
brown, yellow, black and white....
We are all brothers and sisters,
from one papa, from one mama.

Despite the religious resonance of the secular humanist vision, it challenges theistic faith precisely because it is secular and thus not dependent on a privileged access to saving truths. To be sure, the humanistic ethos could be amplified and perhaps even strengthened by theological insights and doctrines, but nonetheless one must acknowledge that the challenge to our respective faiths to affirm humanism has come in good measure from the secular vision. I underscore this as a caveat against theological arrogance, against theistic superciliousness. Religious faiths have not brought healing to a world lacerated by the antagonisms engendered by human differences, by diverse cultures, religions, traditions, memories, axiological and political systems. The secularists, of course, have also failed miserably, although they have often tried gallantly to liberate the human family from some of its more invidious divisions. The ignominious collapse of communism and the full realization that under its proletarian banner humanism was rendered a tyrannical creed has left secular humanists bewildered and in nigh-utter disarray.

Into the resulting vacuum, the purveyors of a new ecumenical gospel have rushed in to proclaim the salvific gifts of cybernetic and consumer globalization. The floundering vision of a world united by moral solidarity has been replaced by the promise of one happy human family bonded by the shared fantasy of a market economy providing one and all an abundance of consumer goods and electronic wizardry. One should not, of course, gainsay the blessings of economic well-being and its attendant educational, technological, and medical benefits. Moreover, it would be profoundly hypocritical of us who live in well-heated homes, graced with the latest amenities provided by the market economy, not to speak of access to fine educational and health facilities, to deny to our dispossessed neighbors, distant and far, the same possibilities. What is questioned is whether the transformation of the world into one massive conglomerate of shopping malls and fast-food eateries will usher in the eschaton in which poverty and misery will be abolished from the face of the earth. Forgive me if I cite Buber once again, albeit by paraphrase. Should poverty be abolished, and material need no longer blight our global village, and all have ample cash in their pockets to buy computers, DVDs, and consume more food than our physicians tell us is necessary or healthy, the real ethical task will still remain — indeed, “would become wholly visible for the first time.”

The vast majority of our fellow human beings are, of course, still abysmally poor and deprived. The disinheritence is not only in distant lands; they are within blocks of many of us, or even closer. Our ethical task is still defined by the exigent need to clothe the naked and feed the hungry, although we are cognizant that moral solicitude does not cease with that action. We all know that the divisions that fracture the human family will not be healed by economic abundance and opportunity alone. Genuine moral solidarity goes deeper than the reaches of a McDonald’s hamburger or a Macintosh computer.

Biblical faith speaks of love, and the limits of love are not only set by a commitment to alleviate the material want of the stranger and one’s neighbor. Love includes such concerns, but much more. Secular and religious humanists alike are bound by the knowledge that love of the stranger and one’s neighbor requires a caring attentiveness to all that constitutes their spiritual — as well as psychic and cultural — reality, indeed, all that makes them human. Duly alarmed at the superficial and ultimately chimerical promises of globalization and the gospel of the market economy may lead us to complacency and stupefy our moral judgment, and terrified by the ever-mounting threat of Moloch subverting the rule of God the Creator, religious and secular humanists should resolve to join forces and revalorize the humanistic vision of a moral solidarity grounded in love.

Love, of course, cannot be taught, at least not catechetically. Like the humanistic ethos, which it is to animate, love is a sensibility that must be cultivated; it is an attitude, nay, a spiritual orientation, that must be nurtured. Focusing on a notion that has shaped both religious and secular Jewish ethical sensibility, I conclude my thoughts by illustrating what constitutes the humanistic ethos. Christians and Muslims will undoubtedly recognize analogies in their own traditions.

Doing a Mitzvah

In Yiddish one speaks of “doing a mitzvah.” The term defies easy and fast definition; its semantic fullness can only be spelt out by illustration, and ultimately by its performative reality. “Doing a mitzvah” means, roughly, to perform a good deed, but it signifies eminently more than that. It entails being alert to the needs of others and acting upon one’s apprehension of those needs. Performing a mitzvah takes one beyond mere compassion. As the Swiss Jewish writer Margrett Susmann averred, “compassion is empty and vain as long as I have not taken upon myself the other’s suffering and made it my own.” In a similar vein, a Hasidic master told of a conversation he overheard in a tavern between two slightly inebriated peasants. With a glass of vodka in his hand, one peasant turned to other, and asked, “Tell me, do you love me?” “Sure, I love you.” “No,” retorted the first peasant. “Yes, I do love you,” protested the second peasant. Whereupon, the first peasant imbibed his vodka and, looking his drinking partner in the eyes, declared, “If you really loved me, you would know what pains me.”

In her masterful essay “Regarding the Pain of Others,” the late Susan Sontag concluded that “compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers.” And she continues to pose the question regarding what one “is to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated. If one feels that there is nothing ‘we’ can — but who is that ‘we’ — and nothing ‘they’ can do either — then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic.”

Sontag’s understandable misgivings about the limits of compassion are unintelligible for one borne by the consciousness beseeching him or her to perform a mitzvah, for the mitzvah is not assigned to a “we” or a “they” to perform. The performative axis of mitzvah is the individual deed and resolve to reach out to those in need. We may regard mitzvah performance as proactive humanism.

One familiar with Hebrew and the lexicon of traditional Judaism will readily recognize that the concept of mitzvah performance has religious origins. The precpects of the Torah are mitzvot, the plural of mitzvah. Indeed, the term mitzvah is derived from the Hebrew for command: Ha-Shem mitzvah mitzvot: God commands mitzvoth. But to perform a mitzvah — I emphasize the Yiddish inflection in order to highlight the difference of nuance — is a commandment not legislated directly or

licitly by God. It is a supererogatory deed one performs in anticipa-
tion of God's commandment or, rather, God's love. To perform a mitzvah
if you will, a form of imitatio Dei. In performing mitzvot religious
discerning Jews meet, and share in a proactive humanism. It is in the
livery of this ethos, I submit, that religion is to seek its true power.
One must acknowledge, of course, that the parameters of such a
active humanism may be limited to one's family, tribe, or polis. Any
thropologist would be quick to remind us of this. Anthropologists
acknowledge of "familial moralism," of the fact that the members of a par-
cular group may treat another with remarkable humanity, but
have toward those who dwell beyond the walls of the community
ith moral indifferenc, if not contempt. Cognizant of the danger that
the's ethical and religious principles may very well be delimited to tribal
filiation, Franz Rosenzweig once quipped, "God created the world,
at religion." With this theological obiter dictum he sought to point to
founded belief of biblical faith and humanism alike: reflecting
eness of God, creation marks the oneness of life and the human
ve. Creation is inclusive; religion is, alas, all too often exclusive. God
ated the World, and "saw all that He had made, and found it very
god" (Gen. 1:31) — if, and only if, we share in the work of Creation.13

12. Rosenzweig, "The New Thinking," in N. N. Glazier, ed., The Life and Thought of
Franz Rosenzweig, 3rd ed., with new foreword by Paul Mendes-Flohr (Indianapolis: Hackett,
1998), 201.

13. Cf. "There was a time when the various religions and the many schools of thought filled
the world with the noise of their disputes. Today, in the light of the common danger of dest
and the total decline of humanism, the time has come that the religions of the world will
seek that which is common to them all. [The work of Creation]. . . . [laughter]. . . . You ha
created us that we might meet you," says St. Augustine. A humanism that turns to be true humanism... must
cessarily be a believing humanism, based on the covenant between God and man. From this,
new perspective on the human is derived. Man is called upon to participate in Creation,
bring to consummation, as it were, the process of creation on earth that has not yet been
pleted. Man is called upon to be a partner of God," Samuel Hugo Bergman, The Quality
"FH: Essays on Judaism and Morality, trans. from the Hebrew by Y. Hanegbi (Jerusalem:

Chapter 9

COMMON MORALITY,
PREMORAL GOODS, AND RELIGION

Kevin Jung

The idea of a universal morality and the civilization to be built on
this idea are often attributed to the Enlightenment project. But, for
quite some time now, this idea has been under increasing philosophical
scrutiny and suspicion. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to char-
terize the current climate in moral philosophy as that of uneasy attitude
ward any claims to universality. Certainly, the increasing recognition
of moral and cultural diversity has added weight to such suspicion. In
what is called the "Information Age," peoples from different cultures
have become more acutely aware of differences among their moral beliefs
and cultural practices than ever. In contrast, ironically, there is a growing
sensitivity to violations of human rights. The idea of human rights
is invoked not only in law but also in many other spheres of society
such as politics, medicine, and religion. So pervasive and powerful this
idea has become, that many are now even willing to accept some measure
of humanitarian intervention into nations to prevent human rights
atrocities from occurring, as witnessed in places such as Kosovo and
East Timor, which would have been seen as an illegal infringement of
national sovereignty not many decades ago.

For many moral philosophers, this raises an interesting question: How
can we talk about common morality, much less human rights, if we
admit the plurality of values and value-systems? For our purposes, this

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