

occupied territories. His enduring importance as a contemporary Jewish thinker is associated with his radical theological conceptions and their implications for Judaism and Jewish nationhood. These, in turn, must be understood against a background of philosophic premises.

Human knowledge. Two distinct traditions affect Leibowitz's conception of the nature and limitations of knowledge. The first is the theology of Maimonides, with its emphasis on the absolute transcendence of God, who cannot be conceived by the human mind. He can be known only through his works, that is to say, through the natural order of things. The second tradition stems from the Kantian critique of theoretical reason and supplies an epistemological underpinning for this agnostic type of theology, but also radicalizes it. The domain of knowledge is restricted to that which can be a datum for experience. Not only must the transcendent remain unknown, but even its existence cannot be demonstrated. Critics of Leibowitz have taken this theological agnosticism for atheism without realizing that it is but a working out of the implications of a theology which, like that of Maimonides, insists on the total transcendence of the divine.

Knowledge, in the proper sense of the word, is the result of the application of the scientific method. This is the only way we have of obtaining reliable information about natural reality. But if reality is understood in terms of a system of functional relations, as it is by those utilizing this method, and not as a system of ends and materials, as it was in ancient and medieval times, the natural world is religiously indifferent. Hence it is absurd to regard revelation as a surrogate or supplement for natural knowledge. Whatever relation may exist between man and God must be of a normative character.

Radical decision. Leibowitz accepts Kant's dichotomy of factual and normative, but his interpretation of this dichotomy is more along positivistic lines. His discussion of the subject calls to mind Max Weber's. Ultimately, all normative obligations and value-imputations are dependent upon personal decision. A valuation may, of course, be justified in terms of already recognized values, but one's ultimate values cannot be validated by anything beyond them. They cannot be the subject of rational argument. Their validity for a person results from decision, not from recognition. Since Leibowitz regards religion as an exclusively normative domain and denies that Scripture was intended to be a body of information, this is as true of religious commitment as it is

of all other basic life-values. Factual knowledge may be forced upon us by experience. There is nothing to compel one into acceptance of any ultimate value-commitments, including that of religious faith.

This leads to a curious dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy. The religious value of an act consists in its being performed because it is a divine command. Yet the very idea of a divine commandment and acceptance of any specific system of norms as a body of divine prescriptions can only follow from an autonomous decision. The very ascription of normative force to a divine command is a matter for decision. Like many other weighty decisions, this one may be tacit rather than explicit. In the typical case, one is committed to halakhic practice as a result of socialization. Only in situations in which it cannot be taken for granted need the decision enter one's awareness. The tradition presents the decision to accept the Halakhah as a unique historical event which committed the future generations of Israel. However, if we follow out the logic of Leibowitz's position, it would appear that recognition of the validity of this commitment requires constant renewal of the basic decision. The heteronomous force of the Torah and its Mitzvoth is dependent upon continued autonomous commitment (either explicit or tacit) on both communal and personal level.

Decision is not merely a condition for entertaining value; it is constitutive of value. Only what is freely chosen—a goal to which one aspires or a property one seeks to embody in reality—is, properly speaking, a value. In Leibowitz's opinion, a need cannot possibly be a value since it is given, not chosen. Freedom of choice is not a value in its own right, but a condition of all valuation. It is something imposed, part of the human condition, not an end in itself. Autonomy does not commit one to any specified norms, not even to "the Moral Law." Hence there is nothing contradictory about the idea of autonomous commitment to a heteronomous system of rules.⁸

Religion and morality. Few of the author's contentions have been as confusing to his readers and audiences as the often reiterated statement that morality is an atheistic category. If so, how to account for the moral criticism to which much of his writings is devoted? To a certain extent, such statements may be attributed to his penchant for shocking formulations. It may reflect Leibowitz's failure to organize his ethical theorizing systematically. However, careful study of the contexts in which morality and religion are presented as conflicting should make

to society, or to the nation. Instead of serving God he would be utilizing God's Torah for his own benefit as an instrument for satisfying his needs.

Consequently, the idea of "reasons for the Mitzvoth" is a theological concept, not a concept of religious faith. The rationale of a Mitzvah is service of God, not a utilitarian interest. Were the significance of the Sabbath social or national, it would be entirely superfluous. It was not to perform this function that the *Shekhinah* [the divine presence] descended on Mount Sinai; certainly not to replace politicians and intelligence officers in charge of national security. If its meaning is not holiness, the Sabbath has no significance whatsoever. But holiness is a category which is meaningless in a humanitarian or anthropocentric context.

The foregoing considerations apply equally to the ethical importance the secularists attribute to the Torah and its commandments. Ethics, when regarded as unconditionally asserting its own validity, is an atheistic category *par excellence*. A person who is ethical in this sense regards man as the supreme end and value, that is, deifies man. A person who perceives man as one among God's creatures and keeps in mind the verse, "I have set God always before me," cannot accept ethics as the overriding norm or criterion. Being moral, from the standpoint of a secular ethic, can have only either of two meanings; directing man's will in accordance with man's knowledge of reality—the ethics of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans and especially the Stoics, and among the later philosophers Spinoza; or directing man's will in accordance with man's recognition of his duty—the ethics of Kant and the German idealists. Among the passages of the Shema we find the words: "that you seek not after your own hearts and your own eyes": "after your own hearts" is the negation of Kantian ethics; "after your own eyes" is the negation of Socrates'. The admonition: "I am the Lord your God" follows shortly thereafter. The Torah does not recognize moral imperatives stemming from knowledge of natural reality or from awareness of man's duty to his fellow man. All it recognizes are Mitzvoth, divine imperatives. The Torah and the prophets never appeal to the human conscience, which harbors idolatrous tendencies. No equivalent of the term "conscience" appears in Scripture. The counsel of conscience is not a religious concept. The "God in one's heart" which humanist moralists sometimes invoke is a "strange god."

Halakhah as a religious institution cannot admit the category of the ethical. Needless to say, it cannot admit the utilitarian justification, whether it be for the good of individuals, of society, or of the nation. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" is the great rule in the Torah not because it is a precept transcending the formalism of law and above the Mitzvoth but precisely because it appears as one of the 613 Mitzvoth. As a guide rule, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" is not specific to Judaism. Similar precepts were laid down in writing by thinkers who were not influenced by Judaism and were not even acquainted with it, by the wise men of China, India, and Greece. Moreover, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" does not, as such, occur in the Torah. The reading is: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am God."

The duty of love toward one's neighbor is not a corollary of man's position as such but of his position before God. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" without the continuation "I am God" is the great rule of the atheist Kant. The novelty and grandeur of this rule in the Torah consists in the framework within which the Torah places it. That context includes Mitzvoth as various as those occurring in the Ten Commandments, laws concerned with sacrificial rites, others regarding property rights or rights of a worker to prompt payment of his wages, prohibition of interbreeding species of animals and plants, and so on, all within the span of twenty verses (Lev. 15). "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" ceases thereby to be mere good counsel, a noble aspiration or sublime ideal. It becomes clothed in the reality of law, something one is compelled to take seriously as one must take police ordinances seriously. There is nothing deprecatory about this simile. None other than Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai upon his deathbed blessed his disciples: "May your fear of Heaven be no less than your fear of human authority."²⁵ As misleading as the truncated quotation regarding love of neighbor is the distorted injunction, "And you shall do the good and right." The verse reads: "And you shall do the good and right in the eyes of God"! (Deut. 6:18).

What does the religious person achieve by observing the Mitzvoth? The last chapter of the prophetic books says: "Then you shall return and see the difference between him that serves God and him that does not serve him" (Mal. 3:18). Halakhic praxis is the active way in which man may serve God. It is the only way for man to acknowledge the

not a datum of human nature. It is not bestowed upon man from above in virtue of his humanity. Rather, each individual must achieve it by his own endeavor, that is, through the perfection of his rational power and of all the "powers of the soul" related to it (since "the soul of man is one"!) and through a supreme effort in exercising his capacities for this purpose. The notion of "individual providence" has no meaning except in reference to the truly wise person, who is also the veritably righteous man—he who makes the supreme effort and is always in the "proximity of God"; "he is with God and God is with him." He who is not close to God is beyond the scope of individual providence, and is subject only to general providence—"is like the beasts who perish" (Ps. 49:21). God knows man only insofar as man knows Him, "for God knows the ways of the righteous" (Ps. 1:6).

The full religious depth of this conception can be comprehended only if one discerns that individual providence is not a result of the adherence to God or a reward for cleaving to Him. Individual providence is *identical* with this adherence. The sublime summary of Maimonides' various discussions of providence, both by way of allusion and explicitly, is to be found in *Guide* III 52.

Man does not sit, move, and occupy himself when he is alone in his house as he sits, moves, and occupies himself when he is in the presence of a great king; nor does he speak and rejoice while he is with his family and relatives, as he speaks in the king's council. Therefore he who chooses to achieve human perfection and to be in true reality *a man of God* must give heed and know that the great king who always accompanies him and cleaves to him is greater than any human individual, even if the latter be *David* and *Solomon*. This king who cleaves to him and accompanies him is the intellect that overflows towards us and is the bond between us and Him, may He be exalted. Just as we apprehend Him by means of that light which He caused to overflow towards us—as it says, "In thy light do we see light" (Ps. 36:10)—so does He *by means of this selfsame light* examine us; and because of it, He, may He be exalted, is constantly with us, examining from on high: *Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?* (Jer. 23:24). *Understand this well!*⁸

The "light" wherein man apprehends God is the very light by which God examines him and sees him. It is in this sense that man is under the guidance of providence—"his God is within him," and "he whose God is within him will not be touched by evil at all." Many have failed

to see the point of these statements of Maimonides, including some of his important interpreters, who took it for granted that he is referring here to concrete events in a person's life. Thus they were perplexed as to how these views of Maimonides can be reconciled with what is common knowledge regarding human fate and the nature of things, and with the cries of protest by the pure and the holy in face of "a righteous man who suffers." But Maimonides did not wish to contend that the person who achieves personal providence, that is, the person who knows God and cleaves to Him, is protected from the sway of the forces that represent general providence. Natural things do happen, and at times cause harm. The apprehension of God and the adherence to Him are not means toward the attainment of a "good"; rather, they are "good" itself, compared to which all the necessary evil encountered in experience is as nought, as though it did not exist. Providence, as far as man is concerned, is essential rather than functional.⁹ The presentation of the good not as a reward for man's righteousness but as identical with his righteousness is also the gist of Maimonides' clarification of Job's predicament.¹⁰

Maimonides' faith in providence is the faith of the first believer, who "believed in God" and went with his son to the Aqedah. It is the faith of the divine poet Assaf, "And I am continually with you" (Ps. 73) (*not* "you are continually with me"!), and this trust is "holding me by my right hand." Assaf does not demand or expect that because of his cleaving unto God he will benefit in any concrete fashion. On the contrary, he knows that perhaps "his flesh and his heart fail" from grief and suffering, "but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." "But it is good for me to draw near to God." The Psalmist does not say that "because I draw near to God I benefit." The proximity of God itself is the good.

Hence the lesson for the approaching Day of Judgment. Man passes sentence on himself with respect to closeness to God or remoteness from Him. That is the "secret" Maimonides alludes to in his commentary on the Mishnah of the Day of Judgment (see above).¹¹ The genuine aspiration to be "under the governance of providence" is to be found in the prayers for awakening man's awe in the presence of God, in those which express a worshipful attitude and recognition of God's majesty. It is not expressed in man's concern for his welfare which is found in the U'Netaneh Toqef prayer and in "and on Rosh Hashanah

in history books or in scientific texts; rather, it is necessary to redefine the distinction between holy and profane. From the standpoint of religious faith, the Torah and the entirety of Holy Scripture must be conceived as a demand which transcends the range of human cognition—the demand to know God and serve Him—a demand conveyed in various forms of human expression: prescriptions, vision, poetry, prayer, thought, and narrative. The first verse of the Torah does not communicate information concerning what came to pass, since the reader is unable to derive from it any factual data which his mind is capable of grasping. If the reader were to try to impute to it a meaning, he would willy-nilly become involved in the ancient metaphysical problem of the beginning of time, a problem fraught with antinomies and paralogisms.² The second word, as well, cannot be rendered by any term which might indicate an act, or an event, or a process which the reader is capable of cognizing.³ What I learn from these verses is the great principle of faith, that the world is not God—the negation of atheism and pantheism. Likewise, when we read, “God descended upon Mount Sinai”—five words in simple Hebrew—we teach a seven-year-old studying the Pentateuch to appreciate that God does not dwell up on high or descend therefrom; in other words, the human language in which the Torah is written may not be construed literally.

If the Holy Scriptures were sources of information, it would be difficult to see where their sacredness resided. Any information which satisfies the need of man for knowledge if profane. Information is obtained from historical, philological, physical, chemical, or biological inquiry. I convey information to my students within the framework of these disciplines. The idea that the Shekhinah descended on Mount Sinai (in any sense which may be accorded these words) in order to compete with the professor who teaches history or physics is ludicrous, if not blasphemous.

The writings of the medieval philosopher Ibn Ezra show a discernible tendency to detach religion from science.⁴ In the preface to his commentary on the Torah, he criticizes the kind of exegesis which would introduce scientific matters into the meaning of the text as loading upon Scripture more than it can bear. More surprising is that more than a hint of this attitude can be found in the writing of Maimonides. What he has to say penetrates to the very foundations of faith, since it refers not only to scientific knowledge but also to metaphysics. At first

reading the *Guide of the Perplexed* appears to be primarily an attempt to lay bare the metaphysical content embodied in Scripture. Yet when Maimonides interprets the Book of Job, his approach seems to undergo a radical change. He points out that in God's answer to Job's plaints “there is no going beyond the description of natural matters—namely, description of the elements or description of the meteorological phenomena, or description of the nature of the various species of animals, but of nothing else”—without any explanation of these “natural matters.”⁵ Yet his answer satisfies Job, because he came to understand that “the notion of His providence is not the same as the notion of our providence; nor is the notion of His governance of the things created by Him the same as the notion of our governance of that which we govern . . . so that you should not fall into error and seek to affirm in your imagination that His knowledge is like our knowledge, or that His purpose and His Providence and His governance are like our purpose and our providence and our governance.”⁶ When a man attains knowledge of this truth, which is the essence of faith, he ceases to expect from God information relevant to metaphysical problems, “whether He does or does not know and whether He exercises providence or manifests neglect.” The quest for information is succeeded by “love.” At the end of his Code Maimonides goes so far as to dismiss the significance of knowledge concerning messianic redemption, since it promotes neither fear of God nor love of Him. Religion, which is concerned with “fear” and “love,” regards scientific knowledge, whether of nature or of history, with indifference.