

JEWISH PROCESS THEOLOGY AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: THE CASES OF HANS JONAS AND BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON

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Introduction

The problem of evil is one of the greatest challenges to every theistic system. Is it possible to reconcile a belief in an all-powerful and all-good God with horrific manifestations of evil in the world? Can a theodicy—a vindication of both God’s goodness and providence in the face of evil—provide a satisfactory explanation to the reality of both natural evil—such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and fires—and moral evil—such as genocides and child abuse? And in what sense can a theological formulation help us deal with evil and to recover from tragedy?

One of the common ways of addressing the problem of evil and the apparent contradiction between God’s omnipotence and benevolence argues for the unintelligibility of God’s morality. This position is expressed already in the Bible, as we read in Isaiah 55:8: “For My plans are not your plans, nor are My ways your ways—declares the Lord.”¹ Such a position affirms the *morality* of God’s actions through denying the human ability to comprehend them.

Another possible way of addressing this problem would be to argue, perhaps radically, that God is not all-good. Whether God has an “evil side” or is simply amoral or beyond good and evil, this position asserts that God is not confined to human moral sensibilities. Again, one might trace the origins of this position back to the Bible. The God of the book of Job seems to be amoral, not to say capricious:

¹ All biblical translations to follow are from *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Text and the New JPS Translation*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

When Job seeks moral justification for his suffering, God only declares God's power and primordially.² Thus we read in God's reply to Job:

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?
Speak if you have understanding.
Do you know who fixed its dimensions
Or who measured it with a line?³

To this declaration of divine power and primordially, Job replies:

See, I am of small worth; what can I answer You?
I clap my hand to my mouth.
I have spoken once, and will not reply;
Twice, and will do so no more.⁴

Although Job does not argue further, God speaks once more. In God's second response to Job, God's words link together the two aforementioned approaches of dealing with the problem of evil. It seems that God's unintelligible moral superiority stems directly from God's absolute power:

Gird your loins like a man;
I will ask, and you will inform Me.
Would you impugn My justice?
Would you condemn Me that you may be right?
Have you an arm like God's?
Can you thunder with a voice like His?⁵

Once again, Job's response expresses his inability to comprehend God's power and justice:

I know that You can do everything,
That nothing you propose is impossible for You.
Who is this who obscures counsel without knowledge?

² See, in particular, Job 38-42.

³ *Ibid.*, 34:45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 40:4-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40:7-9.

Indeed, I spoke without understanding
Of things beyond me, which I did not know.⁶

...

I had heard You with my ears,
But now I see You with my eyes;
Therefore, I recant and relent,
Being but dust and ashes.⁷

Job, realizing he cannot comprehend God's power and justice, chooses to "recant and relent." A potential problem, however, of the two aforementioned approaches, is that it is not clear how one could establish a relationship with the God they describe.⁸ How is it possible to establish a relationship with an entity whose acts we cannot understand at all: an entity who does not share—and even disregards—our moral sensibilities? What is the meaning of praying to such a God? How can one have faith in such a God? What exactly does it mean to *trust* in an amoral God, to *love* God? As Carl Gustav Jung answered to Job:

One can submit to such a God only with fear and trembling and can try indirectly to propitiate the despot with unctuous praises and ostentatious obedience. But a relationship of trust seems completely out of the question to our modern way of thinking.⁹

The problems that stem from the notion of God's moral superiority and its unintelligibility to human beings are perhaps best captured in two well-known literary works. In Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Father Paneloux, reflecting on the death in agony of a little child, ex-

⁶ *Ibid.*, 42:2-4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 42:5-6.

⁸ On this point, see the interesting discussion by Nechama Verbin in her *Divinely Abused: A Philosophical Perspective on Job and His Kin* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011). For Verbin, the book of Job tells a story of a failed relationship, or in her words, "a relationship that subsists in brokenness" precisely because of the amoral and all-powerful image of God emerging from the book. See p. 142.

⁹ C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, trans. F.C. Hull (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), p. 35.

presses a version of this theological position as he remarks: "That sort of thing [the death in agony of a little child] is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand." To this remark, Camus' protagonist, Dr. Rieux, responds: "No, Father. I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture."¹⁰ Dr. Rieux simply refuses to accept Father Panloux's demand to love that which he cannot morally understand. For him, a God who does not share his moral sensibilities is not worthy of love.

A similar, yet more detailed argument is made by Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov. While Ivan accepts God, God's wisdom—and even the "eternal harmony" of eschatological times—he cannot accept *the world created by God*, a world in which children suffer.¹¹ For him, no divine plan, no eschatological bliss, could justify "the unexpiated blood of a little victim."¹² Precisely because Ivan does not expect to understand God, who created the world as God did, he rejects any notion of future harmony:

[T]oo high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten back to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket.¹³

Both Dostoyevsky and Camus point out through their protagonists the tension between God's omnipotence, benevolence, and intelligibility. For them, simply put, it is meaningless to speak of God's benevolence without affirming God's intelligibility. God's morality must, at the very least, conform with the most basic human moral sensibilities—for instance, regarding the absolute evil in children's suffering. For both, God's morality is the most crucial

¹⁰ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage International, 1991), p. 218.

¹¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 213.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹³ *Ibid.*.

aspect of the concept of God, for if God is amoral, let alone immoral, it is impossible to worship God out of love and good will. Harold Kushner summarizes this stance nicely in a spirit akin to the earlier quote from C. G. Jung:

A God of power extorts obedience, but cannot command love. A God who could spare the life of a dying child, who could prevent the earthquake but chooses not to, may inspire our fear and our calculated obedience, but does not deserve our love.¹⁴

One of the most well-known statements to share this same sensibility was made by John Stuart Mill:

Whatever power such a being [God] may have over me, there is one thing which he shall not do; he shall not compel me to worship him. I will call no being good who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go.¹⁵

In this paper I present another way of addressing the problem of evil, namely from the perspective of Jewish process theology. Process theology is a theological movement based on the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and the theology of Charles Hartshorne, John B. Cobb, David R. Griffin, and others.¹⁶ Process theology

¹⁴ Harold Kushner, "Would an All-Powerful God Be Worthy of Worship?" in Sandra B. Lubarsky and David Ray Griffin (eds.), *Jewish Theology and Process Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 90.

¹⁵ John Stuart Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* (London: Longmans Green, 1865), p. 131.

¹⁶ A. N. Whitehead (1861, Kent, UK-1947, Cambridge, MA) was a mathematician and philosopher. His philosophical work *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929) introduced the foundations of what came to be known as process philosophy. Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000),

approaches the problem of evil from a different direction, for it abandons some of the classical assumptions of theism—such as God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and immutability—and suggests the concept of a limited God. Over the last century, a growing number of Jewish thinkers and theologians, mostly in America, were inspired by process theology and attempted to translate its insights into their Jewish tradition. This paper discusses the ways in which two Jewish thinkers—Hans Jonas and Bradley Shavit Artson—use process theology as they attempt to articulate a response to the problem of evil.

Hans Jonas

For Hans Jonas (born in 1903 in Mönchengladbach, died in 1993 in New York), the twentieth-century was a century of trauma, destruction, and dislocation. As a German Jewish philosopher who escaped Germany in 1933 and lost his mother in Auschwitz, Jonas had both a philosophical and a personal motivation to address the question of human morality and the problem of evil. Jonas’ doctoral dissertation, *Der Begriff der Gnosis* (1928),¹⁷ written under the supervision of Martin Heidegger at the University of Marburg, deals with Gnosticism in ancient Christianity. His later philosophical oeuvre can be summarized as an attempt to formulate a new, alternative ethics for the nihilistic modern world. Later in life, Jonas observed that both Gnosticism and Heideggerian existentialism resulted in nihilism, for both reject the idea of the cosmos as a harmonious divine order, a whole that provides meaning to its individuals.¹⁸ However, Jonas deemed the modern nihilism of existentialism much more radical and desperate than the gnostic one:

John B. Cobb Jr. (b. 1925), and David R. Griffin (b. 1939) are some of the preeminent American philosophers and theologians who associate themselves with process thought.

¹⁷ Later published in German as *Gnosis Und Spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934), and in English as *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

¹⁸ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001), pp. 211–234.

That nature does not care, one way or another, is the true abyss. That only man cares, in his finitude facing nothing but death, alone with his contingency and the objective meaningless of his projecting meanings, is a truly unprecedented situation.¹⁹

For Jonas, it is particularly existentialism à la Heidegger that legitimates radical nihilism. Its indifferent nature is considered by Jonas to be worse than Gnosticism's demonic nature, for it can provide no "direction" to meaningful existence. As the product of an indifferent nature, human beings must be indifferent as well; that is to say, they must reject the very possibility of the existence of any values or supreme meaning to their existence. In Jonas' words, "[t]he disruption between man and total reality is at the bottom of nihilism."²⁰

Yet Jonas was not a theologian and did not call for a return to religion. On the contrary, religion alone could not solve modern ethical problems for him. Instead, Jonas set for himself the goal of formulating "ethics no longer founded on divine authority," but on "a principle discoverable in the nature of things."²¹ In other words, he sought the objective reality of value—no less than the good in and of itself.²²

Jonas sought to suggest here what he termed "a 'gnostic' reading of Existentialism" as opposed to, and as complementary to, his former "existential" reading of Gnosticism.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

²² Given his "universal" philosophical focus, my choice to write on Jonas as a primarily Jewish thinker is not an obvious one. However, several scholars have already highlighted the "Jewish dimensions" of Jonas' work and their importance to understanding his work as a whole. See, for instance, Hava Tirosh-Samuels and Christian Wiese (eds.), *The Legacy of Hans Jonas: Judaism and the Phenomenon of Life* (Leiden; Boston: Brill,) 2008; and Christian Wiese, *The Life and Thought of Hans Jonas: Jewish Dimensions* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2007). I share this view and seek in this paper to highlight the potential contribution of Jonas' thought to Jewish philosophy and theology. In

Nevertheless, Jonas did experiment with theological writing, especially toward the end of his life. Occasionally, Jonas turned to what he called “speculative theology” precisely because he considered theological speculation—particularly in the mode of myth, which, he argues, has the ability to express truths that cannot be ex-

this sense, this paper is an attempt to respond to Wiese’s call to bring Jonas “into dialogue with other representative and currents of modern Jewish thought,” (Wiese, *The Life and Thought of Hans Jonas*, p. 163). For a critical account of this view, see Eric Lawee, “Hans Jonas and Classical Jewish Sources,” *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 23:1 (2015), pp. 75–125. While Lawee admits that “Jonas does invoke Jewish sources at points,” he argues that Jonas tended “to decontextualize and/or creatively reinterpret them” (*ibid.*, p. 107). Lawee further argues that Jonas used Jewish sources

fleetingly, in a manner shorn of all technical detail, and with no evidence of interest in exploring, let alone drawing on the wisdom of, the ample Jewish commentary tradition that had come to surround it [the Jewish source which Jonas uses]. (*Ibid.*).

Thus, Lawee suggests that “Jonas was, in essence, a philosopher who happened to be Jewish rather than a philosopher of nature whose work was informed by Judaism” (*ibid.*, p. 117). Nevertheless, Lawee, too, calls to

extend efforts to create a dialogue between Jonas’s core teaching, his philosophical biology, and conceptions of the organic world propounded by more Jewishly engaged and learned thinkers as well as premodern exemplars of Jewish thought. (*Ibid.*, p. 110.)

In my mind, it is precisely Jonas’ creativity and originality of interpretation that makes the “Jewish dimensions” of his thought interesting and worth studying, especially when brought into dialogue with other Jewish thinkers, some of whom (*e.g.*, Artson) are more versed in Jewish tradition than he was. Moreover, the study of Jonas’ theological “speculations,” understood as a continuation by other means of his philosophy (see below), can shed light on the latter, or at least on Jonas’ motivation and philosophical temperament.

pressed otherwise—as the most appropriate, perhaps the only, vehicle for dealing with ultimate questions, the answers to which lie beyond the limits of human knowledge.²³ As Benjamin Lazier suggests, Jonas, in his theological writings, “continued by other means the itinerary he

²³ Jonas, following Kant and rejecting logical positivism, makes it clear that the fact something is not scientific demonstrable does not mean it is forbidden to speculate about it. In fact, his experience with studying the gnostic myths taught him that when it comes to certain questions, “philosophical Logos has nothing to say,” while mythology has the ability “for expressing a truth that couldn’t be spoken directly.” Hans Jonas, *Memoirs* (Krishna Winston, trans.) (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2008), p. 216.

See also Hans Jonas, “The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice,” in Lawrence Vogel (ed.), *Mortality and Morality: A Search for Good after Auschwitz* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), pp. 131–132; Hans Jonas, “Contemporary Problems in Ethics from a Jewish Perspective,” *ibid.*, pp. 176–177.

Jonas argues that, through mythological language and symbolic interpretation of it, theological speculations become more transparent and can express more successfully what cannot be expressed at all: the ineffable. See, esp., Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, pp. 259–261. To put it in Jonas’ words:

The final paradox is better protected by the symbols of myth than by the concepts of thought. Where the mystery is rightfully at home, “we see in a glass darkly” [1 Corinthians 13:12]. What does “in a glass darkly” mean? In the shape of myth. To keep the *manifest opaqueness* of myth transparent for the ineffable is in a way easier than to keep the seeming transparency of the concept transparent for that, to which it is in fact as opaque as any language must be. Myth taken literally is crudest objectification. Myth taken allegorically is sophisticated objectification. Myth taken symbolically is the glass through which we darkly see. (*Ibid.*, p. 261.)

Note that Jonas’ familiarity with Christianity is apparent in the quote above. Jonas, a student of early Christianity, feels comfortable enough to quote a familiar metaphor from the New Testament in his philosophical work. On Jonas’ use of Jewish sources in his thought see Eric Lawee, “Hans Jonas and Classical Jewish Sources” (*supra*).

began with Augustine, Paul and the gnostics.”²⁴ Indeed, on several occasions, to support his philosophical, “secular” ideas, Jonas presented a myth, his variation of the Kabbalistic Lurianic myth of *tzimtzum* (self-contraction).²⁵ This myth (in Jonas’ version) depicts a God who chose to renounce God’s being for the “endless variety of becoming” and who divested God-self of God’s deity “in order that the world might be and be for itself.”²⁶ By withdrawing, God let the world run by chance, risk, and probability—without any divine direction and without knowing what this development will ultimately bring.²⁷ Creation is understood here as a continuous and undetermined process that follows its own logic. The myth further depicts human beings as God’s partners in creation. Humans, through their knowledge of good and evil and the complete freedom to make moral choices, are, via their actions, able to alter radically both the world and God.²⁸

This myth has several theological implications. First, this God is “a becoming God,” a God in process: “[A] God emerging in time instead of possessing a complete being that remains identical with itself throughout eternity.” This is not the perfect, trans-temporal, impassible and immutable God of the philosophers. Rather, Jonas’ God is af-

²⁴ Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the World Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 61.

²⁵ On the Kabbalistic concept of *tzimtzum* see Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, (Ralph Manheim, trans.), (Schocken: New York, 1996), pp. 110ff..

²⁶ Jonas, “The Concept of God,” p. 134.

²⁷ See also Jonas, *Memoirs*, p. 216.

²⁸ Jonas, “The Concept of God,” pp. 134–136. Precisely because of this “awesome impact” of humanity’s deeds on God’s own destiny, Jonas’s God accompanies humanity’s acts with

the bated breath of suspense, hoping and beckoning, rejoicing and grieving, approving and frowning—and ... [by] making itself felt to [human beings] even while not intervening in the dynamics of his worldly scene. (*Ibid.*, p. 136.)

fectured by what happens in the world, including the acts of human beings.²⁹

Second, and most critically for Jonas, this God is not omnipotent and, thus, is limited. Jonas rejected the very concept of omnipotence on logical grounds. Power, for Jonas, is always relational: One being has the power to influence another being with a lesser power. Because absolute power—which contradicts the very existence of anything else besides itself—“has not object on which to act,” it is for Jonas “a powerless power,” or, simply, a self-contradictory and senseless concept. Omnipotence does not make sense theologically either: for Jonas, the Holocaust “added to the Jewish historical experience something unprecedented and of a nature no longer assimilable by the old theological categories.”³⁰ So much so, that it is impossible to attribute to God omnipotence, goodness, and intelligibility all at the same time. Claiming that God could have prevented the Holocaust but chose not to have done so means rejecting God’s goodness. On the other hand, claiming that God’s actions are unintelligible to us would mean disregarding our own moral sensibilities. Therefore, we would be better off renouncing the concept of omnipotence altogether.³¹

And third, this myth portrays a suffering God who could be hurt and disappointed by the world God created. God’s suffering

²⁹ The idea of “a becoming God” helps Jonas reject the idea of eternal recurrence, which he calls “Nietzsche’s alternative” to Christian and Jewish metaphysics. Jonas argues:

[I]f we assume that eternity is not unaffected by what happens in time, there can never be a recurrence of the same because God will not be the same after he has gone through the experience of the world process. Any new world coming after the end of one will carry, as it were, in its own heritage the memory of what has gone before; or, in other words, there will not be an indifference and dead eternity but an eternity that grows with the accumulating harvest of time. (*Ibid.*, pp. 137–38.)

See also Hans Jonas, “Immortality and the Modern Temper” in *Mortality and Morality*, pp. 115–130, esp. pp. 124–125.

³⁰ Jonas, “The Concept of God,” p. 133.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–40.

stems from God's care about creation and humanity; it stems from the very relation God has with the world, from the moment of creation onward, and it can be found already in the Bible.³²

Jonas admits that his concept of God strays far from the concept of God as the Lord of history, the God who rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. But this way of thinking about God allows him to shift the responsibility to evil from God to human beings. "From the hearts of men alone," writes Jonas, evil "arise[s] and gain[s] power in the world."³³ And again:

Having given himself whole to the becoming world, God has no more to give: it is man's now to give to him. And he may give by seeing to it in the ways of his life that it does not happen or happen too often, and not on his account, that it "repented the Lord" to have made the world.³⁴

Jonas' myth expresses a radical shift in the concept of God: According to it, God is not only limited, but, truly impotent. Elsewhere, Jonas addressed this issue and sought to answer the question regarding what constitutes God's power and action in the world. Jonas, in a naturalistic fashion, did not want to understand God's actions in the world as "crude miracles," that is, as actions which breach, pierce, or disrupt nature's causal chain. Instead, he understood God as operating in the world through human beings in a persuasive manner, in such a nonphysical way that leaves the natural order intact.³⁵

³² Jonas argues that although it seems at first glance that the idea of such a God clashes with the biblical God, it is not really the case: The God of the Bible is rejected by human beings; God grieves over them and regrets that God created them (See, for one example among many, Genesis 6:5-7). This is particularly true with regard to God's relationship with the chosen people. (Jonas refers in particular to the prophet Hosea). *Ibid.*, pp. 136-138.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142; "Immortality," p. 129.

³⁵ Hans Jonas, "Is Faith Still Possible? Memories of Rudolf Bultmann and Reflections on the Philosophical Aspects of His Work," ch. 7 of Lawrence Vogel (ed.), *Mortality and Morality: A Search for Good after Ausc-*

For Jonas, every time human beings act from conscious choice, they codetermine, in a nonphysical way, the external course of things. To be sure, Jonas' naturalistic worldview remains intact, for our ability to affect the external course of things is limited by the laws of nature. Yet what Jonas sought to emphasize is that, unlike "blind nature" that "will nearly always select the most probable," humans have the ability to "let the most improbable become actual."³⁶

Now, if humans have the ability to codetermine the external course of things in a nonphysical way, we might think of God's actions in the world in a similar way:

If *we* can daily perform the miracle (and in some sense it *is* a miracle), with the choice of our souls, with our wishing and willing, our insights and errors, our good or evil aims—nonphysical, mental factors all of them—to intervene in and give *our* turn to the course of the world, then that kind of miracle that leaves the natural order intact should be possible also to God, although He may reserve such intervention for rare occasions and ends.³⁷

hwitz (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 157–161.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³⁷ *Ibid.* (italics in original). Evidently, in so doing Jonas attempts to "leave room for the divine," while still remaining within a naturalistic worldview. Unlike his concept of God in "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," here God is depicted as limited, yet not as completely impotent. Cf. Jonas, *Memoirs*, p. 218:

I'm profoundly convinced that pure atheism is wrong, that there's something more, something we can perhaps articulate only with the help of metaphors but without which being in all its facets would be incomprehensible. Although it seems to me that a philosophical metaphysics can't develop a concept of God directly, that this pathway has been closed to us ever since Kant's critique of reason—hence my resorting to myth—I also believe that a rational or philosophical metaphysics isn't prohibited from formulating "suppositions" about the presence of the divine in the world. It seems to me, rather, that philosophical on-

Jonas goes so far as to argue for the possibility of revelation, understood as “an irruption of transcendence into immanence.”³⁸ Discussing the biblical prophets, Jonas argued that they “were not discoverers of a hidden God, but hearers of a God *making himself* known and *willing*, through them, to make himself known in all the world.” In other words, Jonas’ God has a will and a power to act upon God’s will via the human soul. Jonas emphasized that the very notion of the religion of revelation stands or falls on the ability of God to act “‘into’ the world and by a particular act, not simply ‘in’ the world and by way of its ever-present fitness for a transcendent interpretation.”³⁹ I shall return to this point below in my discussion of the critique of process theology.

Bradley Shavit Artson

Artson (b. 1959, San Francisco) is dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University, where he is vice president.⁴⁰ He admits that, as a congregational (Conservative) rabbi, he faced all kinds of life dramas, from spousal and child abuse to illness and death. But it was not until his own son, Jacob, was diagnosed with autism that he started to question his former theological position. Indeed, as Artson admits in a letter to his son:

Your diagnosis made it harder for me to clutch my liberal theology with a Monarch on high who might not manage every detail but who was nonetheless in control of the guaranteed outcome... For some time, I found myself lost and drifting, I still loved God and Torah, but I felt there

theology is allowed to leave room for the divine. It’s a questionable, groping attempt, for which I’ve never claimed a monopoly on truth... Myth also tries to develop a concept of God that makes bearable that which otherwise couldn’t be borne.

³⁸ Jonas, “Is Faith Still Possible?”, p. 161.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, (italics in original).

⁴⁰ As of July 2018.

was a rift, that I could not stand with you and still mouth those sentiments about Sovereign and commands, reward and paradise. For quite some time, I said nothing. I would not be disloyal to what I knew or to whom I loved by failing to assert that you did nothing to deserve autism, that it was neither punishment nor judgment, that God is neither arbitrary nor cruel.⁴¹

Note that Artson has a different type of problem to deal with than Jonas. For here, he seeks to explain theologically not moral or human evil but what seems to be “natural evil,” namely his son’s autism. In other words, unlike the Holocaust, his son’s autism is nobody’s fault except, perhaps, God’s. In some sense, Artson faces a more difficult task than Jonas, for he cannot merely shift the responsibility to evil from God to human beings; natural evil seems to be exclusively God’s fault. Moreover, Artson rejects theodicies that argue for the unintelligibility of God’s morality, for he argues that, according to the Torah itself, human beings are granted by God the ability to distinguish between good and evil.⁴² Artson is determined to emphasize that the classic conception of God—“the God of the philosophers”—is a product of the influence of Greek philosophy, through which Judaism has been filtered for centuries. Greek philosophies, he argues, transformed the very way Jews understand their Judaism. But understanding God’s power as omnipotent in the coercive sense is not only “a philosophical mistake” but also “a religious disaster,”⁴³ for it leaves us not only ethically tormented but also with a feeling of betrayal and abandonment.

Nevertheless, Artson claims to find a way to solve this problem, through integrating process theology and Jewish philosophy. The metaphysical worldview of process theology is clear in Artson’s work. For him, human beings, like all there is, including God, are not autono-

⁴¹ Bradley Shavit Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship: The Dynamic Nature of Process Theology* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013), pp. 155–156.

⁴² Artson, “I Will Be Who I will Be: A God of Dynamic Becoming,” in Elliot J. Cosgrove (ed.), *Jewish Theology in Our Time: A New Generation of Explores the Foundations and Future of Jewish Belief* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010), pp. 5–8.

⁴³ Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 131.

mous substances. Rather, everything that is is a dynamic event that is interconnected with other events. As modern physics teaches us, we are all interconnected with the entire cosmos, which is in a process of continuous and constant change.⁴⁴ God is understood in this worldview as the “organizing force”⁴⁵ of an eternal process of continuous and constant change. Crucially, this organizing force exists not outside the world, but rather within the world. In Artson words, “God permeates the world.”⁴⁶ Elsewhere, Artson refers to God as the “grand integration of all becoming.”⁴⁷ In this sense, for Artson, God is the whole that is greater than the sum of its parts; God, it seems, is more than the organizing Force/Power/Mind behind the process—God is this process itself, embracing the entire dynamic cosmos and changing with it.

According to Artson, this God is neither omnipotent nor omniscient but is limited in power and knowledge and not in full control over creation. Like Jonas, Artson points out the logical fallacy inherent in the notion of omnipotence,⁴⁸ which is rejected by Artson for theological and moral reasons as well.⁴⁹ Creation, in Artson’s process theology, carries in itself a great risk, because the “cosmos itself does not follow a predetermined script.”⁵⁰ Rather, the cosmos follows its own inner dynamic, which is bounded by the laws of logic and physics and subjected to the free choices human beings make.

Following Maimonides, Artson argues that much of what human beings understand as “evil” is really a natural necessity that has

⁴⁴ Artson, “I Will Be Who I Will Be,” p. 8.

⁴⁵ Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Artson, “I Will Be Who I Will Be,” p. 9.

⁴⁸ Artson takes issue with God’s omniscience as well. While he agrees that “God knows absolutely everything possible to know,” he insists that “knowledge regarding the future is simply impossible because the future has not yet happened and one cannot *know* something that does not exist.” *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5 (italics in original).

⁴⁹ Morally speaking, Artson argues that a “God who could stop a million babies from being murdered [during the Holocaust] and chose not to, for whatever reasons, is a monster and a bully.” Theologically speaking, such a God would violate Judaism’s and the Torah’s own standards of justice and morality. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 31.

no inherent moral value. Earthquakes and hurricanes, for example, are simply natural, necessary, and amoral events.⁵¹ Process theology, as Artson emphasizes, understands these events in a similar vein, namely as “the very source of dynamism and life.”⁵² These are the very natural phenomena that brought forth life in the first place. The dynamism and change of this world mean not only growth and flourishing but also decay and death. Natural disasters, illness, and death are not God’s punishments but the logical outcomes of the metaphysics of becoming, according to which all material things are limited and finite.⁵³

We must stop here and ask, first, what kind of power does such a God possess? And second, where do we find or experience such a God in life? For Artson, God is the force in the cosmos generating creativity, novelty, innovation, complexity, and growth.⁵⁴ God’s power is not coercive but persuasive, and it manifests itself in our ability “to do the right thing.” For Artson, the human ability to “innovate and [to] choose” to make “the best possible choice”—despite and because of external constraints—is divine.⁵⁵ We can

⁵¹ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, (Shlomo Pines, trans.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 443 (III:12).

⁵² Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 31.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁴ This is the same terminology used by Mordecai M. Kaplan, perhaps the first Jewish thinker to integrate process thought and philosophy into Jewish thought. See especially his *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: Behrman's Jewish book house, 1937); *Judaism without Supernaturalism: The Only Alternative to Orthodoxy and Secularism* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1958). For a discussion of Kaplan’s relation to process thought see Jacob J. Staub, “Kaplan and Process Theology” and William E. Kaufman, “Kaplan's Approach to Metaphysics,” in Emanuel S. Goldsmith, Mel Scult, and Robert M. Seltzer (eds.), *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1990); Sheila Greeve Davaney, “Beyond Supernaturalism: Mordecai Kaplan and the Turn to Religious Naturalism,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12:2 (2006), pp. 73–87; and Daniel R. Langton, “Jewish Religious Thought, the Holocaust, and Darwinism: A Comparison of Hans Jonas and Mordecai Kaplan,” *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 13:2 (2013), pp. 311–348.

⁵⁵ Artson, “I Will Be Who I Will Be,” p. 9.

experience God's work through human beings especially in moments of distress, suffering, and grief. For example, reflecting on the death of Joel, one of his congregants who succumbed to cancer, Artson says:

I saw God being very busy throughout Joel's struggle—in moments of laughter and song, in the strength of the relating that bound us all as a community and kept Joel feeling connected through his very last minutes, in the determination to be there with and for his family throughout and beyond the ordeal. I never expected God to guarantee an outcome or suspend reality. I did expect to find God in the steady constant lure toward good choices and responsibility. And that expectation God did not disappoint.⁵⁶

For Artson, then, evil is understood to be "that aspect of reality not yet touched by God's lure or that part of creation that ignores God's lure."⁵⁷ God's "lure," according to Artson, is the way in which God works in/through/with humanity. God offers us "the best possible next step," and we have the opportunity to take it or to reject it. On our part, we intuit God's lure "from the inside;" we know what we should do, but it is our choice to make.⁵⁸ This understanding of God's action in the world is similar to Jonas', yet there seems to be a difference here: Where Jonas understands God to act "'into' the world by a particular act—"an irruption of transcendence into immanence"—Artson seems to hold a more immanent worldview that sees God's "lure" as an ever-present potentiality "in and through all of creation, at any level, inviting every aspect of creation to respond affirmatively" to it. Yet Artson makes sure to emphasize that since God is dynamic and in the process of perpetual change, the "divine lure" is "uniquely appropriate" to every aspect of creation in a precise moment.⁵⁹ That is to say, although Artson—as a process theologian who seeks to

⁵⁶ Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 132.

⁵⁷ Bradley Shavit Artson, "Ba-derekh: On the Way—A Presentation of Process Theology," *Conservative Judaism* 62:1-2 (Fall-Winter 2010): p. 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 41.

provide a consistent metaphysics—affirms God’s lure to be an ever-present potentiality in and through all of creation, he still leaves room for instances of individual and subjective revelation.

A Partial Answer to the Moral and Epistemological Critiques of Jewish Process Theology

In his discussion of the relation between the thought of Mordecai Kaplan to process theology, Jacob Staub observes that classical works in process philosophy and theology “are not entirely harmonious with the thrust of Kaplan’s vision.”⁶⁰ Kaplan, on the one hand, ultimately understood God as a power or a process making for the good—that is, for salvation, unity, creativity, and human worthwhileness and highest fulfillment.⁶¹ On the other hand, process theologians tend to understand God as an all-empathetic God. Criticizing Charles Hartshorne’s process theodicy, Harold Schulweis argues that “Hartshorne’s God express his love through His all-embracing appreciation of all things... God is our friend, but He is the advocate of our enemies as well.”⁶² God’s goodness is thus expressed by process theologians as God’s equal concern, or empathy, for *all things*; God does not favor one form of being over another. Consequently, such a God, in which both good and evil are included, is amoral. Thus, God’s goodness—precisely what process theology seeks to save by abandoning God’s omnipotence and omniscience—is undermined. In short, as Staub suggests, “[t]his is primarily a God of love rather than of justice.”⁶³ Therefore, he argues that process theology cannot fully explicate and systematize Kaplan’s thought:

⁶⁰ Staub, “Kaplan and Process Theology,” p. 291.

⁶¹ See, for example, Mordecai Menahem Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, pp. 60 and 76; Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 400; and Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1956), p. 103.

⁶² Harold M Schulweis, *Evil and the Morality of God* (Jersey City, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, 2010), pp. 59–60.

⁶³ Staub, “Kaplan and Process Theology,” p. 291.

A faithful explication [of Kaplan's thought] will not allow for an empathic, nonjudgmental God who cares about us but who does not, in some sense, represent the imperative to seek righteousness. In firm Jewish tradition, the Kaplanian perspective chooses to identify the divine with the prophetic and rabbinic ethics rather than with an all-inclusive embrace of the totality of all things—even at the expense of an account of the world that makes complete sense.⁶⁴

What about the theologies of Jonas and Artson? How do they relate to this tension? How should we reconcile Jonas and Artson's approaches with the traditional Jewish notion of the God of justice? An attempt to provide full answers to these questions, as well as an attempt to point out all similarities and differences between Jonas, Artson, and other process thinkers and theologians is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest several comments on them. By doing so, I hope to emphasize that Jonas and Artson, very much like Kaplan, exemplify not a pure form of "classic" process theology but something more akin to a synthesis of process thought, existentialism (for Jonas), and Jewish tradition (mostly for Artson). Furthermore, I believe Jonas and Artson's personal backgrounds, motivations, and justifications—which are different from those of other, Protestant, process thinkers—push their thought even farther from "classic" process theology.

To begin with, unlike other process theologians, Jonas does not see his myth as systematic theology. In fact, the opposite is true. For Jonas, theology strives not toward cognitive knowledge about God but toward "an understanding"—that is, toward a meaningful concept of God which is consistent with Jonas' existential philosophy of biology.⁶⁵ In other words, Jonas is not a theologian at all and therefore not a process theologian, but a philosopher who draws from his own philosophy as well as from Jewish and Protestant religious sources. Thus, as Ron Margolin observed, Jonas' theological writings are

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁶⁵ Jonas, "The Concept of God," pp. 131–132. See also Lawrence Troster, "Hans Jonas and the Concept of God after the Holocaust," *Conservative Judaism* 55:4 (2003), pp. 20–21.

accompanied by “long apologies” regarding his very engagement with metaphysics and theology in a post-Kantian world.⁶⁶ This is indeed the case in “The Concept of God after Auschwitz;” Jonas admits at the outset that what he has to offer is “a piece of frankly speculative theology”⁶⁷ and concludes the essay with the following words:

All this, let it be said at the end, is but stammering. Even the words of the great seers and adorers—the prophets and the psalmists—which stand beyond comparison, were stammers before the eternal mystery. Every mortal answer to Job’s question, too, cannot be more than that.⁶⁸

By this, I do not mean to suggest that Jonas’ argument does not deserve an argumentative assessment.⁶⁹ Rather, I seek to point out a crucial difference between Jonas and other process thinkers. Jonas arrived at his concept of a non-omnipotent God not simply because he was convinced by the logical soundness of Whitehead’s metaphysics. Rather, it was his own moral sense as well as his life-experience as a Jew (or, if you will, the “Jewish dimensions” of his thought) that led him to a specific theological worldview.

In other words, Jonas justifies his most radical and significant claim—that is, the rejection of God’s omnipotence—by appealing to Jewish tradition, to what he understands to be its ideals, values, and concept of God. True, Jonas *consciously* rejects the traditional Jewish concepts of God as the Lord of history or as the God of justice who re-

⁶⁶ Ron Margolin, “*Mi-heqer Ha-gnosis We-’ad Musag Ha-’elohim ’aharei ’aushvits: Qavim Letoledot Hayyav Ul-haguto Shel Hans Jonas*” (Hebrew, “From Gnosticism until the Concept of God after Auschwitz: The Life and Thought of Hans Jonas”), in Ron Margolin (ed.), *Musag Ha-’elohim ’aharei ’aushvits U-ma ’amarim Nosafim* (“*The Concept of God after Auschwitz and Other Essays*”) (trans. from German by Danit Dottan) (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2004), p. 20.

⁶⁷ Jonas, “The Concept of God,” p. 131.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶⁹ For a critique of Jonas’ argument in “The Concept of God after Auschwitz” see Paul Clavier, “Hans Jonas’ Feeble Theodicy: How on Earth Could God Retire?,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3:2 (Autumn 2011), pp. 305–322.

wards and punishes. But he does so from a Jewish standpoint, as it were, for he is well-aware that “on this question the Jew is in greater theoretical difficulty than the Christian.”⁷⁰

To the Christian ... the world is anyway largely of the devil and always an object of suspicion—the human world in particular because of original sin. But to the Jew, who sees in “this” world the locus of divine creation, justice, and redemption, God is eminently the Lord of *history*, and in this respect “Auschwitz” calls, even for the believer, the whole traditional concept of God into question.⁷¹

Precisely because the Jew seeks God’s judgment in “this” world and in history, the Jew is baffled and perplexed in the face of the manifestations of evil in them. For Jonas, given the catastrophic events of his lifetime and the injustice he witnessed, holding on to the “traditional” concept of God would inevitably lead him to reject God altogether. Yet,

one who will not thereupon just give up the concept of God altogether... must rethink it so that it is still thinkable; and that means seeking a new answer to the old question of (and about) Job. The Lord of history, we suspect, will have to go by the board in this quest.⁷²

Artson, on his part, who openly affirms process theology, is perhaps too versed in and influenced by Jewish sources and tradition to suggest a “classic” (*i.e.*, Protestant) process theology. For instance, Artson rejects God’s omnipotence not merely because it is “an account of the world that makes complete sense.” Rather, his rejection of God’s omnipotence stems from his commitment to what he understands as “Judaism’s and the Torah’s own standards of justice and morality.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Jonas, “The Concept of God,” p. 133.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, italics in original.

⁷² *Ibid.*.

⁷³ Artson, “I Will Be Who I Will Be,” p. 5.

I know that if I saw a baby about to be murdered and I could intervene and stop it, my refraining from action would violate my Torah obligations. Such an abdication does not stop being a monstrosity just because God did it. Torah tradition affirms God's goodness unambiguously and asserts two claims that some theologians do not like to remember: we are told... that God gave humans the ability to distinguish between good and evil and that we are made in God's image. That is to say, Torah tells us explicitly that we share the same criteria.⁷⁴

In other words, process theology cannot fully explicate Artson for the same reason it cannot fully explicate Kaplan, for both see themselves committed to "Judaism's standards of justice and morality." But these are precisely the standards and values that led Artson to reject God's omnipotence in the first place in order to save God's goodness.

Thus, it would be more accurate to suggest that both Jonas and Artson use the categories and modes of thought developed within process thinking from Whitehead onward, without appropriating its entire metaphysical scheme, in their personal, and distinctively Jewish, attempts to deal with the problem of evil. Both seek to free God from the responsibility to evil in order to save God's goodness, even at the cost of giving up the traditional Jewish concept of God as the Lord of history or the God of justice who rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked.

Furthermore, Jonas and Artson do not understand God to be the amoral all-empathetic God of Whitehead. For Jonas, God possess a will and a power to act "into" the world through human beings. For Artson, it is only "those events that optimize love, justice, compassion, [and] relationship" that are considered revelatory.⁷⁵ However, as I showed earlier, for both Jonas and Artson, like Whitehead, God's power is not absolute, and it is the responsibility of human beings to act upon God's will. This is a heavy responsibility, for human beings hold "the fate of deity in [their] hands,"⁷⁶ for God and the world are affected by the deeds of human beings.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 43.

⁷⁶ Jonas, "Immortality and the Modern Temper," p. 125.

I suggest that, for Jonas and Artson, the quest for justice and righteousness is inspired by God precisely because of God's goodness, which in turn is achieved by the rejection of God's omnipotence and omniscience. It is not only that God is not amoral, but it is God who provides morality and value to an otherwise cold and indifferent cosmos.⁷⁷ God works for justice in/through/with humanity. Thus, I agree with Michael Marmor, who observes that Jonas and Artson's process theologies replace theodicy by "odyssey of activism and the quest of justice."⁷⁸ In this sense, God is all-embracing only insofar as God inspires morality and justice or works for justice in/through/with every human being. Human beings possess the choice whether or not to listen, to follow, or to join God in this endeavor. Moral evil, in other words, is the direct outcome of the freedom of the entire cosmos, including human beings, to make "bad choices." In regard to Schulweis' critique, Jonas and Artson might respond that God is neither "our friend" nor "our enemies' friend" precisely because God's power is not coercive but persuasive. Put simply, God *cannot* coerce God's judgment. All God can do is to persuade us, and our enemies too, to act with love, justice, and compassion.

However, such an answer would not satisfy a critic like Schulweis, who argues that what determines the moral goodness of God are God's actions. But this very expectation from God to act in favor of the

⁷⁷ See, for example, Jonas, "Contemporary Problems," pp. 169–171:

The world of modern physics is neither "good" nor "bad," it has no reference to either attribute, because it is *indifferent* to that very distinction. It is a world of fact alien to value... Darwinism, in other words, offers an "image-less" image of man. But, it was the image-idea with its transcendent reference by whose logic it could be said "Be ye holy *for* I am holy, the Lord your God." The evolutionary imperative sounds distinctly different: Be successful in the struggle of life. And since biological success is, in Darwinian terms, defined by the mere rate of reproduction, one may say that all imperatives are reduced to "Be fruitful and multiply."

⁷⁸ Michael Marmor, "Resonances and Dissonances: On Reading Artson," *Conservative Judaism* 62:1–2 (Fall-Winter 2010): p. 107.

sufferer is at odds with the basic premise of process theology – that is, that God acts in the world in a persuasive, rather than in a coercive, manner.

Elsewhere, Schulweis points out another epistemic and moral problem of process theology:

How do we know whether what we do or what we are intent on doing is to be traced to “divine” luring, or “divine” persuasion, or “divine” invitation? Before or after the event, can we ever read the intent of mind of the One who lures? In what sense may it be claimed we know the “initial aims” of the lure and its “unfulfilled goals”?⁷⁹

Let me try to respond to Schulweis’ critique on his own terms. For Schulweis, the answer to the epistemic problem lies in what he terms “predicate theology.” Following Ludwig Feuerbach, Schulweis assigns the moral predicates of the divine a new status: Moral qualities no longer derive their meaning from their divine subject; rather, moral qualities are considered to be divine in themselves.⁸⁰ To answer the question regarding what constitutes these moral qualities, Schulweis adopts both Mordecai Kaplan’s notion of the emergence of values within a community and his pragmatism. First, Schulweis argues that moral qualities are “discovered in doing, feeling, thinking, willing, prizing, and evaluating experience.” In other words, moral qualities of godliness are discovered, consensually agreed upon, and validated within a community; they are the products of cumulative experience “which have proven to be of ultimate importance to the believer and the community of faith.”⁸¹ Second, Schulweis adopts Kaplan’s (and ultimately James’ and Dewey’s) pragmatic method: The divine moral qualities are corrigible, that is, they are subject to testing “against the stones of reality.”⁸²

But what is the answer of Schulweis’ predicate theology to the problem of evil? What does it provide for the sufferer who asks, “Why me?” Simply put, Schulweis’ predicate theology provides no answer,

⁷⁹ Harlod Schulweis, “The Pull of the Divine Lure,” *Conservative Judaism* 62:1-2 (Fall-Winter 2010), p. 56.

⁸⁰ Schulweis, *Evil and the Morality of God*, p. 129.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁸² *Ibid.*.

but merely a consolatory and compassionate hug. This is so because God, according to Schulweis, is not responsible for evil. Similarly to Kaplan, Jonas, and Artson—Schulweis understands godliness as discovered in the “powers and energies” that raise up human existence.⁸³ Nature and history are both neutral and amoral. Godliness must be found within them, in human actions of encouragement, in compassion, in mutual aid, and in cooperation. For Schulweis, human beings, by their acts, create godliness, or, increase its presence in the world, a notion that resembles the Kabbalistic notion of *tikkun* (“rebuilding”), which views humanity as co-creator with God.

We see then that, at least regarding its answer to the problem of evil, Schulweis’ predicate theology provides similar arguments to those of Jonas and Artson. True, Schulweis’ predicate theology provides—by emphasizing that moral qualities are discovered, validated, and consensually agreed upon within the community—a protection factor, as it were, from fundamentalism, fanaticism, and despotism. Yet this “protection factor” could be applied to process theology as well and thus answer Schulweis’ own epistemic critique.

Conclusion

As we have seen, scholars have argued that it is theodicy that lies at the heart of Jewish adaptations of process thought and theology.⁸⁴ This paper follows this observation by asserting that the motivation of both Jonas and Artson in developing their process theologies was a moral one. Like other critics of classical theodicy, both Jonas and Artson claim that metaphysical accounts cannot answer the sufferer’s “why,” or more precisely, “why me.” According to them, no reason will adequately explain away the pain of human loss, tragedy, or illness. I sought to argue here that process theology, especially in its “Jewish version” of Jonas and Artson, does not merely attempt to answer the sufferer’s “why.” It attempts to do more than this.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁸⁴ Schulweis, “The Pull of the Divine Lure,” p. 55; Marmor, “Resonances and Dissonances,” p. 107.

First, it attempts to save not merely God's morality but our own moral sense as well. It asserts that only a moral God is worthy of worship. That is to say, only a moral God can deserve our love—and not merely our fear.

Second, the Jewish process theology manifested by Jonas and Artson understands theodicy as futile insofar as it is not primarily a call for action to eliminate suffering. For both Jonas and Artson, human beings are responsible for moral evil in this world, and any intellectual attempt to explain evil theologically not only misses the mark but testifies to irresponsibility on our part. In a critical essay of post-Holocaust theologies, Amos Funkenstein claimed that the focus on theology diverts us from acknowledging the real problem, namely, that human actions led to the catastrophe. Instead, Funkenstein called us to turn our attention from God to humanity. For him, the Holocaust is comprehensible and meaningful insofar as we understand it as a possibility of human life.⁸⁵ Jewish process theology, as manifested by both Jonas and Artson, understands evil as a real possibility of human life, and does not attempt to deny human responsibility to it. Thus, it might serve us better as a post-Holocaust theology as well. Jonas and Artson's emphasis on the moral autonomy and agency of human beings means real and heavy responsibility for all creation. The true sin, according to both, is to act similarly to Job's friends: to disregard our own moral sensibilities in order to defend evil, "because it requires either blaming the victim or denying our ethical compass."⁸⁶

And third, Jonas and Artson's Jewish process theology does not reject the reality of suffering by telling the sufferer that her suffering is for some "greater good." Rather, it tells the sufferer that she might never receive a satisfactory answer to her "why;" it tells the sufferer that God simply could not help. Furthermore, it affirms God's suffering as well. But process theology provides not only an answer which releases the sufferer from the need to cling onto the idea of an omnipotent God; it provides an existential and religious hope as well. Jonas quoted Etty Hillesum's diary from the Nazi camp of Westerbork as testimony that even amid the Holocaust the idea of a non-omnipotent

⁸⁵ Amos Funkenstein, "Theological Interpretations of the Holocaust: A Balance," in Francois Furet (ed.), *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987.), pp. 275–303.

⁸⁶ Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 132.

and suffering God had a religious and existential meaning. Hillesum, Jonas noticed, prayed *for* God:

But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves. And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend your dwelling place inside us to the last.⁸⁷

Margolin suggests that such a prayer resembles the Hasidic prayer for the sake of heaven, which is considered "loftier than a prayer for one's sake." He further suggests that, for Jonas, the aim of prayer is not to ask God to supply our material needs, but to "deepen the meaning of life by asking God to dwell in the world."⁸⁸ Such a God is a source of existential and religious hope for Artson as well, for "God is found not in the suspension of nature's propensities, but in the intrusion of novelty and surprise in normally established patterns, in the abiding nature of hope and the transforming power of love, a power that is persuasive, not coercive."⁸⁹

For both Jonas and Artson, then, God is still out there—not in evil, destruction, death, and illness, but in the very ability of human beings to transcend themselves, to overcome disasters and recover from trauma, to find creative solutions in times of distress, and to risk their lives for love. By so doing, human beings can affect God and strengthen God's presence in the world. In this sense, God is perhaps—at least potentially—omnipotent after all: God is the all-

⁸⁷ Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941–1943*, (trans. from Dutch by Arnold J. Pomerans) (New York: Metropolitan Books / Henry Holt and Company, 1996), p. 178.

⁸⁸ Ron Margolin, "Hans Jonas and Secular Religiosity," in Hava Tirosh-Samuels and Christian Wiese (eds.), *The Legacy of Hans Jonas: Judaism and the Phenomenon of Life* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 253–254.

⁸⁹ Artson, *God of Becoming*, p. 132.

powerful and endless force enabling, or liberating, humanity's divine potential to be more than we are.

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