abraham j. heschel

THE PROPHETS

HARPERPERENNIAL MODERNCLASSICS

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To the martyrs of 1940–45

All this has come upon us,
Though we have not forgotten Thee,
Or been false to Thy covenant.
Our heart has not turned back,
Nor have our steps departed from Thy way . . .
. . . for Thy sake we are slain . . .
Why dost Thou hide Thy face?

—from Psalm 44

1

The Theology of Pathos

Understanding of God

How should the question about the nature of the prophets' understanding of God be asked? The form in which the question is usually put—What is the prophets' idea of God?—is hardly adequate.

Having an idea of friendship is not the same as having a friend or living with a friend, and the story of a friendship cannot be fully told by what one friend thinks of the being and attributes of the other friend. The process of forming an idea is one of generalization, or arriving at a general notion from individual instances, and one of abstraction, or separating a partial aspect or quality from a total situation. Yet such a process implies a split between situation and idea, a disregard for the fullness of what transpires, and the danger of regarding the part as the whole. An idea or a theory of God can easily become a substitute for God, impressive to the mind when God as a living reality is absent from the soul.

The prophets had no theory or "idea" of God. What they had was an *understanding*. Their God-understanding was not the result of a theoretical inquiry, of a groping in the midst of alternatives about the being and attributes of God. To the prophets, God was overwhelmingly real and shatteringly present. They never spoke of Him as

from a distance. They lived as witnesses, struck by the words of God, rather than as explorers engaged in an effort to ascertain the nature of God; their utterances were the unloading of a burden rather than glimpses obtained in the fog of groping.

The autonomy of ideas may result in their isolation or even in regarding them as independent, eternal, self-subsisting essences. To the prophets, the attributes of God were drives, challenges, commandments, rather than timeless notions detached from His Being. They did not offer an exposition of the nature of God, but rather an exposition of God's insight into man and His concern for man. They disclosed attitudes *of* God rather than ideas *about* God.

The bricks we collect in order to construct the biblical image of God are, as a rule, conceptual notions, such as goodness, justice, wisdom, unity. In terms of frequency of usage in biblical language, they are surpassed by statements referring to God's pathos, which, however, for a variety of reasons, has never been accorded proper recognition in the history of biblical theology.

Having described in the preceding chapters the place of the divine pathos in the thought of individual prophets, we shall now dwell on its general significance as a central category in prophetic theology.

The prophets, as said above, did not simply absorb the content of inspiration, they also claimed to understand its meaning, and sought to bring such meaning into coherence with all other knowledge they possessed. Moreover, inspiration was not their only source of knowledge. Together with receptivity to the word of God they were endowed with a receptivity to the presence of God. The presence and anxiety of God spoke to them out of manifestations of history. They had an intuitive grasp of hidden meanings, of an unspoken message.

A person's perception depends upon his experience, upon his assumptions, categories of thinking, degree of sensitivity, environment, and cultural atmosphere. A person will notice what he is conditioned to see. The prophet's perception was conditioned by his experience of inspiration.

By contrast to speculative knowledge, the pensive-intuitive attitude of the prophet to God, in which God is apprehended through His sensible manifestations, is to be characterized as *understanding*. Our intention of replacing in prophetology the traditional idea of knowledge of God by introduction of this new term is justified not only by the unsuitability of the former designation, but also by the usefulness of the latter. The prophets received their knowledge of God either through the moment of revelation or through intuitive contemplation of the surrounding world. In the first case, they received an inspiration as an expression of the divine Person; in the second, they sensed the signs of God's presence in history. They experienced the word as a living manifestation of God, and events in the world as effects of His activity. The given factor, whether the word* or the event, was for them an expression of the divine. In both cases their comprehension consisted of an understanding of God through His expression, an understanding which proceeds from expressions addressed to them as well as from unspoken signs of their divine source or motivation.

The point of departure of such understanding is any datum which is felt to be an "expression" of God, the course it takes is a meditation on the meaning of this expression, and the final result is an increased sensitivity to the presence of God—not an impersonal knowledge. The culmination of prophetic fellowship with God is insight and unanimity—not union.

Understanding of God is contingent upon the distinction between being and expression. Its quality depends upon one's relationship with the divine. Since the time of Descartes it has been asserted that the understanding of other selves takes place through analogy. While it is true that we do not experience a person independently of his bodily actions or expressions, yet through, and in connection with, these expressions, other selves are experienced with the same immediacy with which we experience our own selves. Our conviction as to their existence is based upon directly experienced fellow-

*P. Heinisch, *Das Wort im Alten Testament und im alten Orient, "Bibliche Zeitfragen,"* 7–8 (Münster, 1922).

ship, not upon inference. To the prophet, knowledge of God was fellowship with Him, not attained by syllogism, analysis, or induction, but by living together.

For a neutral observer, the comprehension of the expressions of love that come from a person who is in love may at times be possible only by way of analogy. However, the person for whom these expressions are intended has an immediate understanding of what they mean. These expressions are not perceived apart from the beloved person; the beloved person is sensed in that person's expressions. And although their meaning is experienced through understanding, it is nevertheless no *circulus vitiosus* to say that the immediacy of the understanding is the result of the meaning. The intuitive knowledge which the beloved person possesses is a primary factor in the act of understanding. This important factor is, of course, not inferred from the act of understanding, but is a determinative element of the understanding itself. The directedness of the divine acts of expression to the prophet thus conditions the peculiar immediacy of his act of apprehension, which does not require analogy in order to be possible.

Even if the prophets had affirmed the essential unknowability of God, they would still have insisted on the possibility of understanding Him by reflective intuition.

The God of Pathos

Prophecy consists in the inspired communication of divine attitudes to the prophetic consciousness. As we have seen, the divine pathos is the ground-tone of all these attitudes. A central category of the prophetic understanding for God, it is echoed in almost every prophetic statement.

To the prophet, we have noted, God does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and expect obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath. He is not conceived as judging the world in detachment. He reacts in an intimate and subjective manner, and thus determines the value of events. Quite obviously in the biblical view, man's deeds may move Him, affect Him, grieve Him or, on the other hand, gladden and please Him. This notion that God can be intimately affected, that He possesses not merely intelligence and will, but also pathos, basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God.

The God of the philosophers is like the Greek *anankē,* unknown and indifferent to man; He thinks, but does not speak; He is conscious of Himself, but oblivious of the world; while the God of Israel is a God Who loves, a God Who is known to, and concerned with, man. He not only rules the world in the majesty of His might and wisdom, but reacts intimately to the events of history. He does not judge men's deeds impassively and with aloofness; His judgment is imbued with the attitude of One to Whom those actions are of the most intimate and profound concern. God does not stand outside the range of human suffering and sorrow. He is personally involved in, even stirred by, the conduct and fate of man.

Pathos denotes, not an idea of goodness, but a living care; not an immutable example, but an outgoing challenge, a dynamic relation between God and man; not mere feeling or passive affection, but an act or attitude composed of various spiritual elements; no mere contemplative survey of the world, but a passionate summons.

Pathos and Passion

Did the prophets conceive of divine pathos as a passion such as may powerfully grip a human being?* By passion we mean drunkenness of the mind, an agitation of the soul devoid of reasoned purpose, operating blindly "either in the choice of its purpose, or, if this be supplied by reason, in its accomplishment; for it is an emotional convulsion which makes it impossible to exercise a free consideration of

*"By passions I mean desire, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, jealousy, pity; and generally those states of consciousness which are accompanied by pleasure or pain." (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1105b, 20 ff.; cf. *Eudemian Ethics,* 1220b, 12 ff.).

principles and the determination of conduct in accordance with them."* In contrast, pathos was understood not as unreasoned emotion, but as an act formed with intention, depending on free will, the result of decision and determination. Even "in the moment of anger" (Jer. 18:7), what God intends is not that His anger should be executed, but that it should be annulled by the people's repentance. (See chapter "The Meaning and Mystery of Wrath.")

The divine reaction to human conduct does not operate automatically. Man's deeds do not necessitate but only occasion divine pathos. Man is not the immediate but merely the incidental cause of pathos in God, the *"occasio"* or *"causa occasionalis,"* which freely calls forth a pathetic state in God. There is no nexus of causality, but only one of contingence between human and divine attitudes, between human character and divine pathos. The decisive fact is that of divine freedom. Pathos is not an attribute but *a situation.*

On the other hand, the divine pathos is not an absolute force which exists regardless of man, something ultimate or eternal. It is rather a reaction to human history, an attitude called forth by man's conduct; a response, not a cause. Man is in a sense an agent, not only the recipient. It is within his power to evoke either the pathos of love or the pathos of anger.

Pathos and Ethos

God's pathos was not thought of as a sort of fever of the mind which, disregarding the standards of justice, culminates in irrational and irresponsible action. There is justice in all His ways, the Bible insists again and again.

There is no dichotomy of pathos and ethos, of motive and norm. They do not exist side by side, opposing each other; they involve and presuppose each other. It is because God is the source of justice that His pathos is ethical; and it is because God is absolutely personal—devoid of anything impersonal—that this ethos is full of pathos.

*Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* par. 29; cf. W. Wundt, *Einführung in die Psychologie* (Leipzig, 1922), pp. 31 ff.

Pathos, then, is not an attitude taken arbitrarily. Its inner law is the moral law; ethos is inherent in pathos. God is concerned about the world, and shares in its fate. Indeed, this is the essence of God's moral nature: His willingness to be intimately involved in the history of man. (See pp. 277 ff.)

The Transitive Character of the Divine Pathos

The divine pathos is not merely intentional; it is also transitive. The gods of mythology are self-centered, egotistic. The cowardice of Ares, the incontinence of Aphrodite, the lusts of Zeus, the jealousy of the gods, are reflexive passions. Zeus is "hit by the dart of desire and is inflamed with passion" for Io, with whom he desires "to enjoy the pleasures of Cypris" so that his "eye may be eased of its desire."*

Pathos, on the other hand, is not a self-centered and self-contained state; it is always, in prophetic thinking, directed outward; it always expresses a relation to man. It is therefore not one of God's attributes as such. It has a transitive rather than a reflexive character, not separated from history.

Man's Relevance to God

The theology of pathos brings about a shift in the understanding of man's ultimate problems. The prophet does not see the human situation in and by itself. The predicament of man is a predicament of God Who has a stake in the human situation. Sin, guilt, suffering, cannot be separated from the divine situation. The life of sin is more than a failure of man; it is a frustration to God. Thus, man's alienation from God is not the ultimate fact by which to measure man's situation. The divine pathos, the fact of God's participation in the predicament of man, is the elemental fact.

The essential meaning of pathos is, therefore, not to be seen in its psychological denotation, as standing for a state of the soul, but in

*Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound,* 645 ff. Pindar speaks of the morbid sexual passion of Zeus and Poseidon, *The Olympian Odes,* 1, 40–45.

its theological connotation, signifying God as involved in history. He is engaged to Israel—and has a stake in its destiny. The profundity of this insight can be sensed only in the light of the prophets' awareness of the mystery and transcendence of God. For the biblical understanding of history, the idea of pathos is as central as the idea of man being an image of God is for the understanding of creation.

The biblical writers were aware of the paradox involved in God's relation to man. "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it; yet the Lord set His heart in love upon your fathers and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day" (Deut. 10:14–15).

Never in history has man been taken as seriously as in prophetic thinking. Man is not only an image of God; he is a perpetual concern of God. The idea of pathos adds a new dimension to human existence. Whatever man does affects not only his own life, but also the life of God insofar as it is directed to man. The import of man raises him beyond the level of mere creature. He is a consort, a partner, a factor in the life of God.

The God of Pathos and the Wholly Other

As a reaction to excessive rationalism and the complete disregard of the mystery and uniqueness of the divine, twentieth-century theologians have often tended to go to the other extreme. God is the Wholly Other; religion has to be demonic in order to be authentic, opposed to reason in order to be unique; and God must have nothing in common with His creation.*

The God of the prophets is not the Wholly Other, a strange, weird, uncanny Being, shrouded in unfathomable darkness, but the God of the covenant, Whose will they know and are called upon to convey. The God they proclaim is not the Remote One, but the One Who is involved, near, and concerned. The Silent One may be the antithesis of man, but prophecy is God meeting man.

*Otherness is not a unique category. Evil, Plato suggests, is somehow mere non-existence, or better, is "otherness," *heteroios* (*Parmenides,* 160–162).

The Wholly Other is the sharp antithesis to the consciousness of man. However, all being, anything that is given to the mind, stands over against the mind as otherness. What meets the biblical man is a transcendent relatedness, a divine claim and demand.

Absolute antithesis is alien to the Hebrew mind. That the Lord has made known His ways to Moses (Ps. 103:7) is a certainty basic to biblical consciousness.

Silence encloses Him; darkness is all around Him. Yet there is meaning beyond the darkness. God is *meaning beyond the mystery.*

> *Clouds and thick darkness are round about Him,*
> *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.*
> *Psalm 97:2*

The numinous is not the supreme category for the prophets, else they would not have attacked the sacred, that which the people revered and which was set apart as holy. The primary object of their religious consciousness was a pathos rather than a numen.

Pathos, far from being intrinsically irrational, is a state which the prophet is able to comprehend morally as well as emotionally.

What Abraham and the prophets encountered was not a numen, but the fullness of God's care. The moral law may be obscured, but never suspended. The very act of addressing Abraham was experienced as care. It was because of the experience of God's responding to him in his plea for Sodom (Gen. 18:23 ff.) that Abraham did not question the command to sacrifice his only son, and it was the certainty of God's love and mercy that enabled the prophets to accept His anger.

The holy in the Bible is not a synonym for the weird. "He blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gen. 2:3), not weird or terrible. The Wholly Other stands outside all relations to man, whereas the very genitive "the Holy One of Israel" suggests the relatedness of God. Terrifying in His grandeur and demand, the Holy One evokes a sense of unworthiness and contrition. The Holy is otherness as well as nonotherness. This is why it is possible to speak of God's holiness as a pattern for man.

The Prophetic Sense of Life

To the prophets, the gulf that separates man from God is transcended by His pathos. For all the impenetrability of His being, He is concerned with the world and relates Himself to it. The tragic antithesis between man and the gods is powerfully expressed in a well-known Babylonian prayer of a righteous sufferer:

> I myself was thinking only of prayer and supplication: supplication was my concern, sacrifice my rule; the day of worship of the gods was my delight, the day of my goddess' procession was my profit and my wealth. . . . I taught my hand to observe the divine ordinances. . . . Oh, that I only knew that these things are well pleasing to a god! *What appears beautiful to man is abominable to the god, and what is odious to man's heart is most pleasing to the god.* Who has learnt [to understand] the will of the gods in heaven, the gods' plan, full of wisdom, who can comprehend it? When have stupid mortals ever understood the ways of the gods?*

This is a powerful expression of despair. One knows the power of the gods, but, ignorant of their will, the mind cannot fathom what is good in their eyes. In fact, the gods and man contradict each other. There is no meeting, there is no knowledge of what counts most. "The god's anger, sickness, impurity, sin: it all amounts to the same thing. We offend God even when we ourselves neither know nor desire this; we are enemies of God, and indeed for no other reason than that He is our enemy."†

This prayer expresses the tragic sense of life. In sharp contrast, the prophetic sense of life knows of no such contradiction, of no such ultimate darkness.

*S. Langdon, *Babylonian Wisdom* (Paris, 1923), pp. 168 f. (Italics mine, A. J. H.) Cf. *ANET,* p. 435. At the end of the poem the gods have mercy on the sufferer and turn to him full of goodness.

†G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (London, 1938), p. 520.

Underlying this contrast are two different conceptions of the nature of sin. There is an awareness in many religions of a blindly working guilt, of sin as a situation in which man is begotten, of sin which is involved in man's very being and stands far above the ability of the individual man. Sin is not conceived as something that happens, but as something that is and obtains regardless of man's relationship to the gods. "Since we are what we ought not to be, we also necessarily do what we ought not to do. Therefore we need a complete transformation of our mind and nature. That is the new birth. Although the guilt lies in action, *operari,* yet the root of the guilt lies in our *essentia* and *existentia,* for out of these the *operari* necessarily proceeds. Accordingly our own true sin is really original sin."*

The Mesopotamians, while they knew themselves to be subject to the decrees of the gods, had no reason to believe that these decrees were necessarily just. Hence their penitential prayers abound in self-accusations of faults and misdeeds, but lack the awareness of disobedience to the divine will; they are vibrant with despair but not with contrition, with regret but not with return.

To the prophets, sin is not an ultimate, irreducible or independent condition, but rather a disturbance in the relationship between God and man; it is an adverb not a noun, a condition that can be surmounted by man's return and God's forgiveness.

The divine pathos is like a bridge over the abyss that separates man from God. It implies that the relationship between God and man is not dialectic, characterized by opposition and tension. Man in his essence is not the antithesis of the divine, although in his actual existence he may be rebellious and defiant. The fact that the attitudes of man may affect the life of God, that God stands in an intimate relationship to the world, implies a certain analogy between Creator and creature. The prophets stress not only the discrepancy of God and man, but also the relationship of reciprocity, consisting of God's engagement to man, not only of man's commitment to God. The disparity between God and the world is overcome in God, not in man.

*Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea,* Bk. II, ch. 48.

Confronted with an unconditional and absolute will of God, with eternity and perfection, man in his brittleness appears as a complete antithesis. But the prophets face a God of compassion, a God of concern and involvement, and it is in such concern that the divine and the human meet. Pathos is the focal point for eternity and history, the epitome of all relationships between God and man. Just because it is not a final reality, but a dynamic modality, does pathos make possible a living encounter between God and His people.

The uniqueness and wealth of meaning implied in the divine pathos, and its essential significance for the understanding of the religious situation, lead us to regard it as a theological category *sui generis.*

Pathos and Covenant

The decisive importance of the idea of divine pathos emerges clearly when we consider the possible forms in which God's relation to the world may present itself. A purely ethical monotheism in which God, the guardian of the moral order, keeps the world subject to the law, would restrict the scope of God's knowledge and concern to what is of ethical significance. God's relation to man would, in general, run along the lines of a universal principle. The divine pathos alone is able to break through this rigidity and create new dimensions for the unique, the specific, and the particular.

It is not law and order itself, but the living God Who created the universe and established its law and order, that stands supreme in biblical thought. This differs radically from the concept of law as supreme, a concept found, for example, in the Dharma of Mahayana Buddhism. Before the Torah, the covenant was.

In contrast to our civilization, the Hebrews lived in a world of the covenant rather than in a world of contracts. The idea of contract was unknown to them. The God of Israel "cares as little for contract and the cash nexus as He cares for mere slavish obedience and obsequiousness. His chosen sphere is that of covenant."* His relationship

*W. F. Lofthouse, "*Hen* and *Ḥesed* in the Old Testament," *ZAW* (1933), pp. 29 ff.

to His partner is one of benevolence and affection. The indispensable and living instrument holding the community of God and Israel together is the law.

Prophecy is a reminder that what obtains between God and man is not a contract but a covenant. Anterior to the covenant is love, the love of the fathers (Deut. 4:37; 10:15), and what obtains between God and Israel must be understood, not as a legal, but as a personal relationship, as participation, involvement, tension. God's life interacts with the life of the people. To live in the covenant is to partake of the fellowship of God and His people. Biblical religion is not what man does with his solitariness, but rather what man does with God's concern for all men.

The idea of divine pathos throws light on many types of relation between God and man unknown in apathetic religion. The covenant between God and Israel is an example. The category of divine pathos adds a new dimension to it. The covenant is an extraordinary act, establishing a reciprocal relation between God and man; it is conceived as a juridical commitment. Pathos, on the other hand, implies a constant concern and involvement; it is conceived as an emotional engagement. From the point of view of the unequivocal covenant-idea, only two forms of relationship between God and people are possible: the maintenance or the dissolution of the covenant. This rigid either-or is replaced by a dynamic multiplicity of forms of relationship implied in pathos.

The Meaning of Pathos

The basic features emerging from the above analysis indicate that the divine pathos is not conceived of as an essential attribute of God, as something objective, as a finality with which man is confronted, but as an expression of God's will; it is a functional rather than a substantial reality; not an attribute, not an unchangeable quality, not an absolute content of divine Being, but rather a situation or the personal implication in His acts.

It is not a passion, an unreasoned emotion, but an act formed

with intention, rooted in decision and determination; not an attitude taken arbitrarily, but one charged with ethos; not a reflexive, but a transitive act. To repeat, its essential meaning is not to be seen in its psychological denotation, as standing for a state of the soul, but in its theological connotation, signifying God as involved in history, as intimately affected by events in history, as living care.

Pathos means: God is never neutral, never beyond good and evil. He is always partial to justice. It is not a name for a human experience, but the name for an object of human experience. It is something the prophets meet with, something eventful, current, present in history as well as in nature.

The prophets never identify God's pathos with His essence, because for them the pathos is not something absolute, but a form of relation. Indeed, prophecy would be impossible were the divine pathos in its particular structure a necessary attribute of God. If the structure of the pathos were immutable and remained unchanged even after the people had "turned," prophecy would lose its function, which is precisely so to influence man as to bring about a change in the divine pathos of rejection and affliction.

In sum, the divine pathos is the unity of the eternal and the temporal, of meaning and mystery, of the metaphysical and the historical. It is the real basis of the relation between God and man, of the correlation of Creator and creation, of the dialogue between the Holy One of Israel and His people. The characteristic of the prophets is not foreknowledge of the future, but insight into the present pathos of God.

2

Comparisons and Contrasts

The Self-Sufficiency of God

The uniqueness of the prophetic theology of pathos can be better appreciated when compared with other theological outlooks. Indeed, the various conceptions of God as they have emerged in the history of religious thinking may be evaluated from the notion of pathos as a key perspective.

The idea of pathos is both a paradox and a mystery. He Who created All should be affected by what a tiny particle of His creation does or fails to do? Pathos is both a disclosure of His concern and a concealment of His power. The human mind may be inclined to associate the idea of God with absolute majesty, with unmitigated grandeur, with omnipotence and perfection. God is most commonly thought of as a First Cause that started the world's mechanism working, and which continues to function according to its own inherent laws and processes. It seems inconceivable that the Supreme Being should be involved in the affairs of human existence.

The idea of the Good was the God of Plato, and it was the meaning of the term "good" that determined his understanding of the concept of God. "The Good," says Plato, "differs in nature from everything else in that the being who possesses it always and in all

3

The Philosophy of Pathos

The Repudiation of the Divine Pathos

For more than two thousand years Jewish and later Christian theologians have been deeply embarrassed by the constant references in the Bible to the divine pathos. What were the reasons for that embarrassment? Why did they oppose the idea of pathos? The opposition, it seems, was due to a combination of philosophical presuppositions which have their origin in classical Greek thinking.

It will be our task to set forth these presuppositions, to examine their validity, to show that these presuppositions represent a particular philosophical perspective, and to inquire whether that perspective is the only way to truth, or whether an alternative way may not disclose a more plausible view of ultimate reality.

The Indignity of Passivity

"The Greek had always felt the experience of passion as something mysterious and frightening, the experience of a force that was in him, possessing him, rather than possessed by him." Homer's heroes and the men of the archaic age interpreted such experience as

ate "as the direct working of a daemon who uses the human mind and body as his instrument."* Even Xenocrates, one of the teachers of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, maintained that every emotion, especially that of sudden anger, is aroused by the evil spirits dwelling in the soul.†

The very word "pathos," like its Latin equivalent *passio*, from *pati* (to suffer), means a state or condition in which something happens to man, something of which it is a passive victim.‡ The term was applied to emotions such as pain or pleasure as well as to passions, since they were understood to be states of the soul aroused by something outside the self, during which time the mind is passively swayed by the emotion or passion. The person thus affected finds himself in a relation of dependence upon the agent, comparable to the relation of cause and effect. Such a state was considered a sign of weakness, since the dignity of man was seen in the activity of the mind, in acts of self-determination.

From very early times, it was felt that God could not be affected in such a way. The Deity, the Supreme Cause, could not possibly suffer from, or be affected by, something which is effected by Himself. Passivity was held to be incompatible with the dignity of the divine. It was on these grounds—the conception of a First Cause and its dignity—that pathos was rejected.

Indeed, matter *qua* matter is regarded by Aristotle as the passive principle (*pathētikon*). "It is characteristic of matter to suffer, i.e., to be moved: but to move, i.e., to act, belongs to a different power."§ The Deity is a principle whose very essence is actuality.‖ The Stoics also

*E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston, 1957), pp. 5 ff.; 38 ff.; 185 f.; cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 202e, "Love is a great demon [*daimon*]." Euripides, *Medea*, 1079, Passion, "that cause of direst woes to mortal man. Does his own fatal passion become to each man his god?" (Virgil, *Aeneid*, IX, 185; cf. W. C. Greene, *Moira* [Cambridge, 1944], p. 101.)

†M. Pohlenz, *Vom Zorne Gottes* (Göttingen, 1909), p. 16; *idem*, *Die Stoa* (Göttingen, 1947), II, 77.

‡Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106a, 7, "In respect of the passions we are said to be moved."

§Aristotle, *De Generatione*, 324b, 18; 335b, 29–30.

‖Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1071b, 19.

saw the principle of action in the Deity and the principle of passivity in matter.* Following the Stoic equation of the Deity and the active force, Philo maintains that "to act is the property of God; and this we may not ascribe to any created being; the property of the created is to suffer action."† The numerous attributes which the Bible predicates of God are reduced by him to one single attribute, that of action. In this, Philo is followed by Maimonides.

For Philo, the scriptural denial of the likeness of God to any other being implies not only the incorporeality of God, but also complete lack of emotion. Why, then, does Moses speak "of His jealousy, His wrath, His moods of anger, and the other emotions similar to them, which he describes in terms of human nature?" To this Philo replies, "He hoped to be able to eradicate the evil, namely by representing the Supreme Cause as dealing in threats and oftentimes showing indignation and implacable anger. . . . For this is the only way in which the fool can be admonished."‡ Thus Scripture describes the divine Being in human terms in order to educate man. The pedagogical interpretation of biblical anthropopathy became one of the standard solutions of the problem in Jewish and Christian literature.

The Disparagement of Emotion

One of the major intentions in Plato's philosophy was to show that the soul is beset by a duality, having within itself a faculty which reaches upward to the divine as well as a power which pulls it downward to the contamination of the flesh. The former is identified as the rational and immortal component, and the latter as the irrational and mortal. For the soul, according to Plato, belongs both to the lower world of Becoming and to the higher realm of abiding Being. It bears in itself the traits of both worlds: the rational faculty corresponding to the world of ideas, and the irrational faculties—will and appetite—

*C. Baeumker, *Das Problem der Materie in der Greichischen Philosophie* (Münster, 1890), p. 331, n. 3; p. 339, n. 7.

†*De Cherubim,* XXIV, 77.

‡*Quod Deus Immutabilis Est,* XIII, 60, 68.

corresponding to the world of perception. At the close of the ninth book of the *Republic,* Plato offers a simile of man's composite nature. It is an image of a many-headed monster, a lion, and a man; the second smaller than the first, and the third smaller than the second. Combine these three into one, and you have man as he is, externally one and internally a plurality of forces. The passions in us, we are told, are like cords and strings which pull us in different and opposite ways.

Plato enumerates three faculties of the soul, namely, the appetitive, the impulsive, and the rational. The rational component of the individual soul is made by the Demiurge, whereas the irrational one is the creation of the lower gods. The former is indivisible and immortal, the latter comprises a better and a worse part: the better part manifests itself in energy, courage, and ambition; the worse part functions in desire, appetite, and nutrition.* The rational soul, which is the divine power in man, is located in the head; the heart, the impulsive soul, is the seat of emotion; while the appetitive soul with its desires and passions is relegated to the lowest part of the body—its seat is below the diaphragm. Each faculty has its own virtue, and the harmony of all is justice. Yet the supremacy must belong to reason, the charioteer of the steed, which subordinates the other faculties to its rule.

Disagreeing with Plato, Aristotle teaches the unity of the human soul. "Some say that the soul is divisible and that one part of it thinks, another desires. What is it then which holds the soul together, if naturally divisible? Assuredly, it is not the body: on the contrary, the soul seems rather to hold the body together; at any rate, when the soul is gone, the body dissolves into air and decays. If, then, the unity of soul is due to some other thing, that other thing would be, properly speaking, soul. Why not attribute unity to the soul?"† For Aristotle, as for Plato, knowledge is the highest virtue. The emotions he regards as auxiliaries or impediments to a rational form of life. None of the passions, however, are in themselves bad; they are simply natural, but in order to become ethical they require training. The ethical consists

**Timaeus,* 35a, 69e, 72d; *Republic,* 435b ff., 438d ff., 504a ff., 580d ff.; *Laws,* 644.

†*De Anima,* I, 411b; cf. 404b, 27.

in the restraining of desire and emotion within the limits of the mean through intelligence and discipline.* Indeed, while condemning the man who is unduly passionate, Aristotle condemns equally the man who is insensitive. Neither the virtues nor the vices are passions, and we are neither praised nor blamed for our passion.†

The dualism of the soul was also denied by Strato, the Stoics, and the Epicureans. Strato regarded the soul as a single force diffused through the body.‡ The Stoics asserted the complete homogeneity of the soul. Reason, they maintained, is the primary power, of which all other faculties are parts or derivations.§ The Epicureans, on the other hand, taught that the soul is corporeal; it is a body and part of the body; there is a real unity between body and soul.‖

However, one aspect of the Platonic conception became the prevalent view of subsequent schools of thought and was further developed by the Stoics. It is the view that regards the human soul as a house of two floors, with reason dwelling upstairs, and the emotions downstairs. The two tenants have separate ways and different manners. Reason is dissociated from the emotional life and sharply contrasted with it. Emotions belong to the animal nature in man, reason to the divine in man. Emotions are unruly, fleshy, the source of evil and disaster; reason is order, light, and the power that raises man above the level of the animal.

It was such preference that enabled Greek philosophy to exclude all emotion from the nature of the Deity, while at the same time

** Nicomachean Ethics,* 1108a, 30; cf. 1104b, 24. "It is not possible to perform virtuous acts without pain or pleasure . . . because virtue implies feeling, and feeling pain or pleasure. . . . Virtue is attended either with pain or with pleasure. Now if one does the right with pain, he is not good. So that virtue will not be attended with pain. Therefore with pleasure. Not only, then, is pleasure not an impediment, but it is actually an incentive to action, and generally virtue cannot be without the pleasure that comes from it." (*Magna Moralia,* II, 7, 1206a, 17 ff.)

†*Nicomachean Ethics,* 1105b, 29 ff.

‡H. Siebeck, *Geschichte der Psychologie,* II, 165; E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Greichen,* II (Leipzig, 1919–20), 466.

§M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa,* I, 90 f., 226.

‖G. S. Brett, *A History of Psychology,* I (London, 1912), 183; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers,* X, 63.

ascribing thought and contemplation to it. To Xenophanes, God set all things in motion by the power of His thought alone.* Empedocles speaks of God as "a holy and unutterable mind, darting through the whole cosmos with its swift thoughts."† He is the supreme *nous* or the Mind of the cosmos, in the language of Anaxagoras and others. And to Plato, God is *nous,* the essence of His being is thinking.‡ He is above joy and sorrow.§

The perfect example of an impassive deity is the God of Aristotle. By identifying the Deity with the First Cause, with something which, while it has the capacity of moving all things, is itself unmoved, Aristotle's Deity has no pathos, no needs. Ever resting in itself, its only activity is thinking, and its thinking is thinking of thinking. Indifferent to all things, it does not care to contemplate anything but itself. Things long for it and thus are set in motion, yet they are left to themselves.

Thus, virtues cannot be ascribed to the Deity—not even acts of justice. The circumstances of action are trivial and unworthy of God. "Still, every one supposes that they live and therefore that they are active; we cannot suppose them to sleep like Endymion. Now if you take away from a living being action, and still more production, what is left but contemplation? Therefore the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative."‖

Carneades used similar arguments in order to demonstrate that God cannot be thought of as a living, rational Being without attributing to Him qualities that are incompatible with His nature. If God is infinite, He cannot be thought of as possessing the qualities and living the life of a personal being, for it is impossible to apply the attributes of personal existence to God without limiting His nature. The same

*H Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (3rd ed.; Berlin, 1912), fragment 26. Cf. in contrast: "By the word of the Lord the Heavens were made . . . for He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood forth" (Ps. 33:6, 9).

†Diels, *op. cit.,* fragment 134.

‡*Philebus,* 22c, 28c, *Phaedrus,* 247d f.

§*Philebus,* 33b; *Republic,* II, 377e ff.

‖*Nicomachean Ethics,* 1178b, 7 ff. See Ch. Hartshorne and W. L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 58 ff. On the conception of God as pure thought in medieval Jewish philosophy, see Jul. Guttmann, *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (München, 1933), pp. 184, 222, 226, and 356 n.

contradiction is involved in regarding Him as a living Being, for every living being is composite, having parts and passions, and is hence destructible. For similar reason we can ascribe to Him neither virtue nor intelligence. The assumption of feeling in God is incompatible with the idea of divinity.*

Jewish scholasticism of the Middle Ages agreed with the philosophers on the impossibility of ascribing to God any human qualities in the literal sense. Even Judah Halevi maintains that mercy and compassion are in truth signs of "a weakness of the soul and irritability of nature, and cannot therefore be applied to God. He is a just judge; He ordains the poverty of one individual and the wealth of another without any change in His nature, without feelings of sympathy with one or anger against another."†

According to Maimonides, any predicate that implies corporeality or passibility must not be applied to God. For all passibility implies change; the agent producing that change cannot be the same as the one who is affected by the change, and if God could be affected in any way whatever, this would imply that another being beside Him would act on Him and cause change in Him. Maimonides, accepting the Stoic view that "all passion is evil," interprets the statements of the Bible regarding God which in their literal sense predicate certain qualities of Him as not describing characteristics of His essence, but as human ways of understanding His works. Thus when He is called compassionate, this does not mean that He feels compassion, but that He works deeds in regard to His creatures similar to those which with us would proceed from the feeling of compassion.‡ The same principle holds true of the terms "pain" or "sorrow" when applied to God.§ Love alone, according to Crescas, can be attributed to God, and just as man ought to love God, God loves man.‖

*E. Zeller, *The Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics* (London, 1870), pp. 515–518; R. Richter, *Der Skeptizismus in der Philosophie,* I (Leipzig, 1904), 85 ff.; Ueberweg-Praechter, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie der Altertums* (Berlin, 1920), p. 611. M. M. Patrick, *The Greek Sceptics* (New York, 1929), pp. 170 f.

†*Kuzari,* II, a.

‡*The Guide of the Perplexed,* I, 54–55.

§*Ibid.,* I, 29.

‖*Ibid.,* II, vi, 1.

As a corollary of his proposition that "God is free from passions, nor is He affected with any emotion of pleasure and pain," Spinoza maintains that "strictly speaking, God does not love or hate. God loves no one and hates no one."* Therefore, if we love God, we cannot desire Him to return our love, for then He would lose His perfection by becoming passively affected by our joys and sorrows.

Pathos and Apathy

The Stoics regarded passion, impulse, desire—the emotions in the widest sense—as unreasonable, unnatural, and the source of evil. To live rightly was to dominate the emotional life by reason, and so to act by will. Pathos was considered to be the chief danger to the self-determination of man, whereas "apathy"—the subduing of the emotions—was believed to be the supreme moral task.

The doctrine of *apatheia,* the great ideal of the Stoic school, seems to have been known at an earlier date. Opposition to this extreme doctrine is expressed by Plato: "I want to know whether anyone of us would consent to live, having wisdom and mind and knowledge and memory of all things but having no sense of pleasure and pain and wholly unaffected by these and the like feelings?"†

There are tendencies toward the ideal of *apatheia* in the Cynic school. But it was Zeno, the founder of the Stoa, who demanded of the sage complete freedom from the emotions. Wisdom is shown in the relation which man maintains to his passions. His overcoming of the world is his overcoming of his own impulses.

Zeno defined pathos as "a movement in the soul contrary to

*_Ethics,_ V, prop. XVII. See H. A. Wolfson, *Spinoza* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), pp. 285 f. Otto von der Pfordten, *Religionsphilosophie* (Berlin, 1917), p. 100, maintains mistakenly that a wise instinct of the religious man has always prevented him from using feeling—a specifically human element—in shaping the idea of God. "The prophets in their visions preach an anthropomorphism, which, since it is not in the least likely that they themselves entertained such crude conceptions of the Deity, or that the imagination played them such gross tricks, clearly has the character of deliberate invention" (Redslob, *Der Begriff des Nabi,* [Leipzig, 1839]).

†*Philebus,* 21d, 60e, 63e.

reason and to the soul's very nature."* Whereas Zeno assumed the existence of a nonrational faculty or part of the human soul, from which pathos is derived, Chrysippus denied the existence of any such part. There is only reason in the soul, and nothing else. Pathos is due to an error in judgment, to a false notion of good and evil, for in a state of passion everything is judged from a limited perspective. The craving for money, for example, is essentially the notion that money is desirable. Such radical intellectualism supplied a psychological basis for the Socratic view that virtue is knowledge.† Upsetting the harmony of the soul and the self-determination of the mind, emotions and passions are disturbances of mental health, and if indulged in, become chronic diseases of the soul.‡

Chrysippus denied the contention of the Peripatetics that the emotions—anger or compassion, for example—are a necessary part of the life of the soul, which, if kept within proper limits, are an aid to right living. The knowledge of virtue, he claimed, is perfectly sufficient without the aid of emotion. Moreover, the suggestion that emotions be kept within proper limits overlooks the very essence of emotions, namely, that they know no limits. It is not enough to control them. They must be completely eradicated,§ for it is easier to destroy them than to keep them in check.‖ True virtue can exist only where emotions are no more. The wise man must strive to attain *apatheia,* the complete freedom from emotions.# He must be emotionless, never yielding to anger, never knowing fear or pity.**

*J. Arnim, ed., *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1903–1924), pp. 205–206. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers,* VII, 110.

†M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa,* I, 92, 143 f.

‡Diogenes Laertius, *op. cit.,* VII, 115; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations,* IV, 10, 23. Cf. E. Zeller, *The Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics,* p. 235, n. 2.

§Seneca, *Epistolae* 116, 1.

‖Seneca, *De Ira* 1, 7, 2.

#Epictetus, *Discourses,* III, 62. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism,* III, 235. Diogenes Laertius, *op. cit.,* VII, 117. Unlike Pyrrho, to whom *apatheia* means insensitivity to the impressions of the outside world, the Stoics maintain that the wise man does at first react emotionally, when witnessing a crime, for example. (M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa,* p. 152; on Posidonius and Seneca, see pp. 224–226, 307–309.)

**Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations,* III, 9, 20. Seneca, *De Clementia,* II, 5.

The post-Aristotelian schools, the Epicureans, Skeptics, and Stoics, agreed that happiness is entirely a state of mind, regardless of conditions and events outside the person, and that the only happiness consists of *ataraxia,* of mental imperturbability, or peace of mind. *Ataraxia* may be secured by avoiding all disturbances, those which are due to external causes and those which arise from within, namely, the emotions. The wise man must strive for both *apatheia* (absence of feeling and passion; indifference to what appeals to feelings and interest) and *autarkeia* (independence, self-sufficiency). By achieving self-sufficiency, by withdrawing within himself, he becomes immune to external circumstances and will be unaffected by the course of events around him. For wrong opinions and prejudices to which passions are due arise from one's dependence upon external things. By attaining *apatheia* the wise man has eradicated the emotions.

The classical ideal of the Greeks was the achievement of inner harmony in personal existence. It contains the demand that reason shall control impulses. This is why *sophrosyne,* the power of self-control gained by resisting immediate pleasure, was regarded as the cardinal virtue. As mentioned above, Zeno in his doctrine of *apatheia* set up as an ethical postulate the complete effacement of emotion and passion. Other schools, while opposed to this radical view, granted nevertheless that the root of evil is to be found in the irrational acts of the soul.*

The dualistic conception of the soul prevailed throughout the ages, and has deeply penetrated Western thinking.† To the degree that

*W. H. S. Jones, *Greek Morality* (London, 1906), pp. 26, 59 ff.; A. Bonhoeffer, *Epiktet und das Neue Testament* (Giessen, 1911), pp. 164 ff.; R. Bultmann, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1912), p. 97; R. Hirzel, *Themis, Dike* (Leipzig, 1907), pp. 25 ff. "It was with reluctance and with fear that the Greeks learned the value of the higher meaning of pity. . . . The Homeric heroes feared it; Agamemnon bitterly reproached his brother for feeling it; and Achilles asked the spirit of his friend Patroclus to forgive him for yielding to it. The heroes had the primitive and savage dread of pity that Nietzsche expresses when he says: Pity is opposed to the tonic emotions that heighten the energy of life-consciousness, *Lebensgefuhl.*" (G. H. Macurdy, *The Quality of Mercy* [New Haven, 1940], p. xi.)

†On Neoplatonism, see J. Kroll, *Hermes Trismegistos* (Münster, 1938), pp. 276 ff.

theology has subscribed to this dualism of values, it has attributed to God the power of thinking, but has excluded the realm of emotion. What is postulated for man must be fulfilled in God. *Apathēs to theion* becomes a fundamental principle in the doctrine of God for both Jewish and Christian theologians. Since the passions are unnatural disturbances in man, *a fortiori* they could not exist in God.

Apathy in the Moral Theory of the West

Plato's dualistic conception of the soul and particularly the Stoic disparagement of emotion have deeply influenced the moral and religious thinking of subsequent generations. Morality has often been equated with the suppression of passion, with the control of desire by reason. Passion and vice, emotion and weakness, have frequently been called synonymous. And there seems to be a tacit assumption that reason and ruthlessness, knowledge and evil, are mutually exclusive.

No other system in the history of moral philosophy has had such a lasting impact as the ethical ideas of the Stoics.* Jewish and Christian morality have shown a tendency to coalesce with the Stoic ideal. *Apatheia* has often been a guiding star in the moral search, both in Christian and in secular ethics. According to Clement of Alexandria, to be entirely free from passion is to be most like God Who is impassible. The perfect man, he says, is above all affections: courage, fear, cheerfulness, anger, envy, love for the creature. Clement's doctrine of *apatheia* contributed to the shaping of the Christian ideal of life.† The saint is regarded as a person who has extirpated his passions. Even Descartes regards the emotions and passions as a disturbance of the mind (*perturbationes animi*). Since in such perturbations the mind remains passive, one must strive to free the mind from such states through clear and distinct knowledge.‡

*W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften,* II (Leipzig and Berlin, 1914), 47. Cf. J. Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion* (New York, 1938), pp. 123 ff.

†Cf. T. Rüther, *Die sittliche Forderung der Apatheia ("Freiburger Theologische Studien,"* 63), 1949.

‡R. Falckenberg, *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (Berlin, 1927), pp. 89 ff.

The same Stoic ideal is taught by Spinoza, who defines emotions as "confused ideas," and to whom the overcoming of the passions is accomplished by a knowledge of them, by an understanding of the necessary system of all things. The fourth book of his *Ethics* is entitled "Of Human Bondage, or of the Strength of the Emotions."*

Kant sought to exclude impulse and inclination from the moral life. Duty must be done for duty's sake, out of respect for the law, and never from inclination or passion. Passions cause cancerous harm to the pure practical reason; they are, without exception, evil.† "The principle of apathy," says Kant, "according to which the wise man must never succumb to emotion, not even to that of sympathy for the evils that befall his best friend, is a correct and sublime moral principle of the Stoic school, for emotion makes a person [more or less] blind."‡

Kant's view was challenged by Hegel, who pointed out that "impulse and passion are the very life-blood of all action. . . . We may affirm absolutely that nothing great has been accomplished without passion." Kant's false and abstract view, he claims, is based upon the separation of the mind into independent "faculties." The "practical reason," the "categorical imperative," are here on the one side; the impulses and inclinations are over against these on the other side, usually warring against the practical reason, but in any case quite independent of it. But as soon as it is seen that these very impulses have the "practical reason" implicit in them, are themselves only an inchoate and undeveloped form of it, such an abstract view becomes impossible.§

Reason and Emotion

We have been trained to draw a sharp contrast between reason and emotion. The first is pure spontaneity, the drawing of inferences,

*See W. Dilthey, *op. cit.,* II, 285 ff.

†*Anthropologie,* I, 81.

‡*Ibid.,* I, 75; cf. *Critique of Judgment,* par. 29.

§Hegel, *Philosophy of History,* Introduction.

the ordering of concepts according to the canons of logic. Emotion, on the other hand, is pure receptivity, an impression involving neither cognition nor representation of the object. such a contrast, however, is hardly tenable when applied to religious existence. Is religious thinking ever to be completely separated from the stream of emotion that surges beneath it? Religious reason is more than just thinking, and religious emotion is more than just feeling. In religious existence, spontaneity and receptivity involve each other. Is there no reason in the emotional life?

True, if emotion is unreasonable, it tends to distort a person's thinking. But emotion can be reasonable just as reason can be emotional, and there is no need to suppress the emotional roots of one's life in order to save the integrity of one's principles. Receptivity and spontaneity involve each other; the separation of the two is harmful to both.

Reason may be defined as the capacity for objectivity or as a person's ability to think in impersonal terms. To think in personal terms, or subjectively, is to be exposed to bias and error. In the light of such a definition we would have to exclude reason from the nature of God, Whose Person is the truth, and ascribe only emotion to Him. Impersonal reasoning in God would mean an operation in ideas devoid of divinity. Furthermore, pure reason comprehends a concrete fact as if it were an abstraction, a particular being in terms of a generalization. But it is the greatness of God according to the Bible that man is not an abstraction to Him, nor is His judgment a generalization. Yet in order to realize a human being not as a generality but as a concrete fact, one must feel him, one must become aware of him emotionally.

Is it more compatible with our conception of the grandeur of God to claim that He is emotionally blind to the misery of man rather than profoundly moved? In order to conceive of God not as an onlooker but as a participant, to conceive of man not as an idea in the mind of God but as a concern, the category of divine pathos is an indispensable implication. To the biblical mind the conception of God as detached and unemotional is totally alien.

Emotion in the Bible

The ideas that dominate the Hellenistic understanding of the emotional life of man must not affect our understanding of Hebrew thinking. The Bible knows neither the dichotomy of body and soul nor the trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit, nor the trichotomy within the soul. It sets up no hierarchy in the inner life, nor does it tend to compartmentalize the soul. The heart, regarded as "the totality of the soul as a character and operating function,"* is the seat of all inner functions, of knowledge as well as of emotion. To put it in different terms: the mind is not a member apart, but is itself transformed into passion. For the two "do not dwell separate and distinct, but passion and reason are only the transformation of the mind toward the better or the worse."† Nor does the Bible share the view that passions are disturbances or weaknesses of the soul,‡ and much less the premise that passion itself is evil, that passion as such is incompatible with right thinking or right living.

Neither in the legal nor in the prophetic writings is there a suggestion that the desires and passions are to be negated. Asceticism was not the ideal of the biblical man. The source of evil is not in passion,

*J. Pedersen, *Israel,* I–II (London and Copenhagen, 1926), 104.

†Lactantius, *De Ira Dei,* I, 8, 3.

‡Contrary to the view of the Stoics that the passions were not grounded in nature, but were due to wrong thinking and could and should be extirpated, the author of IV Macc. maintains that the passions were implanted in man by God and are not to be extirpated but controlled (2:21–23). The theme of the book is that reason, which is the culture acquired under the law of Moses (1:17), should be the supreme master over the passions. "Reason," the author says, "is not the extirpator of the passions but their antagonist" (3:5; cf. 1:6). Cf. Sirach 6:2 (in the translation of Box and Oesterley): "Be not a slave to thy passions, lest they consume thy strength like a bull." The reference, as the context shows, is to impure passions; see note in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament,* I (Oxford, 1913), 333; *Aboth* IV, 1; *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* A, 23. Philo engaged Moses and Aaron in a debate on the question whether virtue implies control of one's emotions or their complete extirpation, with Aaron the expontent of the Aristotelian view, and Moses representing the Stoic view. He considers complete eradication of emotion to be possible only for rare individuals like Moses; for the majority of mankind moderation of emotions is the goal. (*Legum Allegoria,* III, XLIV, 128 f.; XVI, 136; see H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* II (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), 274 f.

in the throbbing heart, but rather in hardness of heart, in callousness and insensitivity. (See p. 243.) Far from insisting upon their effacement, the biblical writers frequently regarded some emotions or passions as having been inspired, as reflections of a higher power. There is no disparagement of emotion, no celebration of apathy. Pathos, emotional involvement, passionate participation, is a part of religious existence. The utterances of the psalmist are charged with emotion, are outpourings of emotion. Reading the prophets, we are stirred by their passion and enlivened imagination. Their primary aim is to move the soul, to engage the attention by bold and striking images, and therefore it is to the imagination and the passions that the prophets speak, rather than aiming at the cold approbation of the mind.

The ideal state of the Stoic sage is apathy, the ideal state of the prophet is sympathy. The Greeks attributed to the gods the state of happiness and serenity; the prophets thought of God's relation to the world as one of concern and compassion. To quote Nietzsche, "The dignity of death and a kind of consecration of passion has perhaps never yet been represented more beautifully . . . than by certain Jews of the Old Testament: to these even the Greeks could have gone to school."*

Awe and fear of the Lord (*yirath hashem*) is for the Jew what *sōphrosynē* is for the Greek, and *bhakti* is for the Indian. "Awe and fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," says the psalmist (111:10). The characterization of passion as a state of passivity would hardly be consonant with biblical experience.† Passion was regarded as a motive power, a spring, and an incentive. Great deeds are done by those who are filled with *ruaḥ*, with pathos.

In the light of such affirmation, with no stigma attached to pathos, there was no reason to shun the idea of pathos in the understanding of God. Pathos implied no inner bondage, no enslavement to impulse, no subjugation by passion, but a willed, transitive feeling

* *Gesammelte Werke* (Musarion edition), XVI, 373.

†"Feelings are not characterized with the passivity which we instinctively attribute to the emotions of the heart. With the Israelites the heart is the soul, being the organ which at the same time feels and acts." (J. Pedersen, *op. cit.*, I–II, 104.)

which existed only in relation to man. An apathetic and ascetic God would have struck biblical man with a sense, not of dignity and grandeur, but rather of poverty and emptiness. Only through arbitrary allegorizing was later religious philosophy able to find an apathetic God in the Bible.

Impressive as is the thought that God is too sublime to be affected by events on this insignificant planet, it stems from a line of reasoning about a God derived from abstraction. A God of abstraction is a high and mighty First Cause, which, dwelling in the lonely splendor of eternity, will never be open to human prayer; and to be affected by anything which it has itself caused to come into being would be beneath the dignity of an abstract God. This is a dogmatic sort of dignity, insisting upon pride rather than love, upon decorum rather than mercy.

In contrast with the *primum movens immobile*, the God of the prophets cares for His creatures, and His thoughts are about the world. He is involved in human history and is affected by human acts. It is a paradox beyond compare that the Eternal God is concerned with what is happening in time.

> *For thus says the high and lofty One*
> *Who inhabits eternity, Whose name is Holy:*
> *I dwell in the high and holy place,*
> *And also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit,*
> *To revive the spirit of the humble,*
> *To revive the heart of the contrite.*
>
> *Isaiah 57:15*

The grandeur of God implies the capacity to experience emotion. In the biblical outlook, movements of feeling are no less spiritual than acts of thought.

Anthropological Significance

The idea of divine pathos has also anthropological significance. It is man's being relevant to God. To the biblical mind the denial of

man's relevance to God is as inconceivable as the denial of God's relevance to man. This principle leads to the basic affirmation of God's participation in human history, to the certainty that the events in the world concern Him and arouse His reaction. It finds its deepest expression in the fact that God can actually suffer. At the heart of the prophetic affirmation is the certainty that God is concerned about the world.

Beyond these implications for the meaning of history and human deeds, the idea of pathos reflects a high estimation of human nature. The consciousness of the high dignity and sanctity of man, his soul and body alike, accounts for the extreme development of anthropomorphic views in Jewish and Christian tradition, as the rejection of such consciousness played a part in the radical opposition to anthropomorphism. (See p. 291.)

The *analogia entis* as applied to man having been created in the likeness of God and as expressed in the commandment, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2), points to what may be called a *theomorphic anthropology*. Soul, thought, feeling, even passion, are often regarded as states imbued by God. It is perhaps more proper to describe a prophetic passion as theomorphic than to regard the divine pathos as anthropomorphic.

The Ontological Presupposition

Pathos denotes a change in the inner life, something that happens rather than an abiding condition. Since to the Greek philosophers the Deity was immutable, remaining absolutely and forever in its own form,* it could not be susceptible of pathos, which would contradict the transcendence, independence, and absoluteness of the Supreme Being. Indeed, to attribute any pathos to God, to assert that He is affected by the conduct of those He has brought into being, is to reject the conception of Him as the Absolute. Pathos is a movement from one state to another, an alteration or change, and as such

*Plato, *Republic*, II, 381.

is incompatible with the conception of a Supreme Being Who is both unmoved and unchangeable.

The static idea of divinity is the outcome of two strands of thought: the ontological notion of stability and the psychological view of emotions as disturbances of the soul. Having analyzed the psychological view, we shall now examine the ontological notion.

The idea of divine immobility seems to have originated in Xenophanes. In Homer, the gods' quickness of movement is regarded as a special sign of divine power. Xenophanes, however, insists that omnipotence implies repose, absolute calm, and immobility. "But effortlessly he sets everything in motion, by the power of his mind alone, and he always remains in the same place, not moving at all, nor is it fitting for him to change his position at different times."* Yet it was in the speculation of Parmenides of Elea (*ca.* 515–449 B.C.E.), who was perhaps a disciple of Xenophanes, that the idea of immobility gained decisive importance.

Parmenides, insisting upon the sharp alternatives of being and not-being, taught that being is, whereas not-being cannot be, nor can it be conceived of or uttered. Being, he maintained, cannot be many. It must rather be one alone; for anything manifold is subject to change and motion, and this would be contrary to the persistence that is essential to the very nature of being. Thus there are no *onta* in plural (things that are present or given), but only a single *on* (Existent, that which is)—being "unborn and imperishable, complete, immovable and without end; nor was it ever, nor will it be; but now it *is;* all at once; a continuous one."†

Parmenides stressed the concept of being to the exclusion of becoming, affirming that generation, multiplicity, change, and movement are illusory. His thought is an attempt "to strip reality of its character as a world by removing every feature that goes to make it a world at all."‡

*Diels, *op. cit.*, fragments 25, 26; cf. K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford, 1952), p. 23.

†Diels, *op. cit.*, fragment 8; cf. K. Freeman, *op. cit.* pp. 43 f.

‡W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford, 1947), see F. M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (London, 1930), p. 36.

Zeno, a disciple of Parmenides, developed the famous arguments against the reality of movement. Immobility, changelessness, and intranscience hang together.

In contrast to the Eleatic school, Heraclitus taught: "Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed." What appears to be permanent is simply an example of change in slow motion. Change, becoming, tension are essential to existence. If strife were to perish, then all things would cease to exist. Even deity is no exception. Particular gods and demigods will eventually be transformed from gods into something else.*

Almost all of Greek philosophy after Parmenides was an effort to reconcile the two points of view.† The solution that prevailed agreed with Parmenides that being, in the true sense of the word, is uncreated, indestructible, and changeless, and that becoming is the combination and separation of those eternal and changeless elements of being. There is no creation out of nothing, and no dissolution into nothing; the elements merely unite and fall asunder.‡

Plato restricted Heraclitus' theory of the eternal flux of all things to the world of sense perception, while in the realm of ideas he found Parmenides' true being. He never wearies of insisting that the objects of true knowledge, the ideas, are changeless and eternal like the being of Parmenides. The idea is that which "always is" and "never becomes"; it is "ever immutably the same."§ Aristotle, too, maintains that true being is incompatible with any change or movement, and he describes substance as that which is "eternal and immovable . . . impassive and unalterable."‖

Parmenides has been characterized as "a tinker who knows no other desire than knowledge, feels no other manacle than logic, and is left indifferent by God and by feeling." For Parmenides and his

*Diels, *op. cit.*, fragments 20, 27, 66; cf. P. Wheelwright, *Heraclitus* (Princeton, 1959), pp. 30–34.

†See J. Adams, *The Religious Teachers of Greece* (Edinburgh, 1909), p. 244.

‡*Cratylus,* 402a; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* 987a, 34 ff.

§*Metaphysics,* 1073a, 11.

‖K. Reinhardt, *Parmenides und die Geschichte der Griechischen Philosophie* (Bonn, 1916), p. 256.

successors in the Eleatic school, the concept of God disappears in the concept of being. Polytheism and monotheism are alike excluded.*

Thus, while Parmenides did not explicitly identify being with God, his theory of absolute being and its predicates was again and again adopted as a basis for philosophical theology. Most speculation on the nature of God held unchangeableness to be an essential attribute.

The principle that change is incompatible with true being has led to what Sextus Empiricus called "the dogma of the philosophers that the Deity is impassible."† Indeed, as a corollary of Eleatic ontology a static view of the Deity has become the common property of most philosophers.‡ Rest and immobility are regarded as the typical features of divine preeminence. The Deity is thought of as a Being who abides in absolute calm.§

The Eleatic premise that true being is unchangeable and that change implies corruption is valid only in regard to being as reflected in the mind. Being in reality, being as we encounter it, implies movement. If we think of being as something beyond and detached from beings, we may well arrive at an Eleatic notion. An ontology, however, concerned with being as involved in all beings or as the source of all beings, will find it impossible to separate being from action or movement, and thus postulate a dynamic concept of divine Being.‖

To Jewish and Christian scholastics of the Middle Ages, divine perfection implies absolute immutability. To Thomas Aquinas, God is *actus purus,* without the admixture of any potentiality.# Everything which is in any way changed is in some way in potentiality. Hence it is evident that it is impossible for God to change in any way. Passion, being a change, would be incompatible with His true Being.

*See J. Adams, *op. cit.*, pp. 206, 244.

†*Outlines of Pyrrhonism,* I, 162.

‡Augustine, *Confessions,* VII, 11; XII, 15.

§We do not include the Stoics.

‖"Wisdom is more mobile than any motion," says the author of the Wisdom of Solomon (7:24), to whom Wisdom, an intermediary between the Deity and the world, possesses all the attributes of the Deity.

#*Summa Theologica,* I, 8, 1; 20, 1.

The Ontocentric Predicament

The Greek concept of being represents a sharp antithesis to the fundamental categories of biblical thinking. Parmenides maintains, "Being has no coming-into-being. . . . For how couldst thou find a birth for it? How and whence could it have sprung? I shall not let thee say or think it came from that which is not, for that which is not can neither be thought or uttered. And what need could have stirred it up out of nothing, to arise later rather than sooner? Hence it must either be altogether or not at all."

But is being to be taken as the ultimate theme of thinking? The fact that there is being at all is as puzzling as the question of the origin of being. Any ontology that disregards the wonder and mystery of being is guilty of suppressing the genuine amazement of the mind, and of taking being for granted. It is true that being's coming-into-being "can neither be thought nor uttered." Yet a fact does not cease to be fact because of its transcending the limits of thought and expression. Indeed, the very theme of ontology, being *as* being, "can neither be thought nor uttered."

The acceptance of the ultimacy of being is a *petitio principii;* it mistakes a problem for a solution. The supreme and ultimate issue is not *being* but the *mystery of being.* Why is there being at all instead of nothing? We can never think of any being without conceiving the possibility of its not being. We are always exposed to the presence as well as to the absence of being. Thus what we face is a pair of concepts rather than one ultimate concept. Both concepts are transcended by the mystery of being.

The biblical man does not begin with being, but with the surprise of being. The biblical man is free of what may be called the ontocentric predicament. Being is not *all* to him. He is not enchanted by the given, granting the alternative, namely the annihilation of the given. To Parmenides, not-being is inconceivable ("nothingness is not possible"); to the biblical mind, nothingness or the end of being is not impossible. Realizing the contingency of being, it could never identify being with ultimate reality. Being is neither self-evident nor self-

explanatory. Being points to the question of how being is possible. The act of bringing being into being, creation, stands higher in the ladder of problems than being. Creation is not a transparent concept. But is the concept of being as being distinguished by lucidity? Creation is a mystery; being as being an abstraction.

Theology dares to go behind being in asking about the source of being. It is true that the concept of that source implies being, yet it is also true that a Being that calls a reality into being is endowed with the kind of being that transcends mysteriously all conceivable being. Thus, while ontology asks about *being as being,* theology asks about *being as creation,* about being as a divine act. From the perspective of continuous creation, there is no being as being; there is only continuous coming-into-being. Being is both action and event.

For the Greek philosophers the natural world was the starting point of speculation. The goal was to develop the idea of a supreme principle—Anaximander's *apeiron* (the Boundless), the *ens perfectissimum* of Aristotle, the world-forming fire of the Stoics—of which they then asserted, "this must be the divine." The words "the divine" as applied to the first principle, current since the time of Anaximander, and "of epoch-making importance to Greek Philosophy,"* illustrates a procedure adopted by philosophers in subsequent ages. It is always a principle first, to which qualities of personal existence are subsequently attributed. Such attribution represents a concession either to one's personal religiosity or to popular religious beliefs. It is a God whose personality is derivative; an adjective transformed into a noun.

To Greek philosophy, being is the ultimate; to the Bible, God is the ultimate. There, the starting point of speculation is ontology; in the Bible, the starting point of thinking is God. Ontology maintains that being is the supreme concept. It asks about being as being. Theology finds it impossible to regard being as the supreme concept.

Biblical ontology does not separate being from doing. What *is,* acts. The God of Israel is a God who acts, a God of mighty deeds. The Bible does not say how He is, but how He acts. It speaks of His

*W. Jaeger, *op. cit.,* p. 31; p. 203, n. 44.

acts of pathos and of His acts in history; it is not as "true being" that God is conceived, but as the *semper agens.* Here the basic category is action rather than immobility. Movement, creation of nature, acts within history rather than absolute transcendence and detachment from the events of history, are the attributes of the Supreme Being.

In the intellectual climate in which this ontology developed, there was no place for the lasting significance of unique, incomparable events. Greek speculation was concerned with the cosmos, not with history, which as the sphere of contingency and change was not a proper theme for philosophy.

The prophets, on the other hand, were preoccupied with history, deeply conscious of the lasting significance of unique events, such as deliverance from Egypt, the theophany at Sinai, the conquest of the land. The call for a change in the sphere of history, for a change in the very nature of man, is the burden of their exhortation. Indeed, the very act of inspiration was a unique event.

It is of extreme importance that theology should endeavor to operate with categories indigenous to the insights of depth-theology instead of borrowing its categories from speculative philosophy or science. What is regarded as the ultimate in philosophy must not be regarded as the ultimate in theology. What man thinks or what man says is the ultimate theme of philosophical analysis. To theology, the ultimate theme is that which man is unable to objectify, which he refuses to conceptualize.

Philosophy objectifies its themes. Imagination creates an image, reason coins a concept. All conceptualization is limitation, restriction, reduction. In the question, What is the cause of being? the ultimate has been restricted to one aspect, to one category. "Cause" is one concept among many; "what" does not mean "who." There is an anticipation of a "who" in the question of religion, as there is an anticipation of a "what" in the question of speculation. Historically, we are told, the idea of God as a purely transcendent Being, a Cause or Author of the universe, entirely distinct from an effect which is spoken of metaphorically as the work of His hands

> carries us back to a primitive stage of pictorial thought like that of the Zulus, mentioned by Tylor,. who trace their ancestry back to Unkulunkulu, the Old-old-one, who created the world. It meets us with something of a sublime simplicity in the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Such a statement yields a temporary satisfaction to the craving for causal explanation, though it is not necessary to go beyond the child's question, "Who made God?" to become aware of its metaphysical insufficiency. As has been not unjustly said, "Contentment with regress to a God-creator or some similar notion is the true mark of speculative indolence."*

This argumentation rests upon the assumption that to the biblical mind the supreme question is, "Who made the world?" and that the essential idea of creation is the answer, "God made it." However, the Bible does not begin by saying, "God created heaven and earth"; it begins by saying, *"In the beginning."* The essential message is not that the world had a cause, but rather that the world is not the ultimate. The phrase "in the beginning" is decisive. It sets a limit to being, as it sets a limit to the mind.

The supreme question is not, "Who made the world?" but rather, "Who transcends the world?" The biblical answer is, "He Who created heaven and earth transcends the world."

It is not "the finitude of being which drives us to the question of God," but the grandeur and mystery of all being. There is no stigma in being a finite creature. Finitude is our excuse rather than our shame. We could not bear being infinite. There is a stigma in being reckless, in forgetting that we are finite, in behaving as if we were infinite.

God is a presupposition as well as a conclusion. He cannot be derived from premises, since the concept of God is not implied in any other concept. A presupposition is either arbitrary or valid. But this very distinction between true and false concerning a Being beyond

*A. S. Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God* (New York, 1917), p. 298.

our grasp assumes the validity of such a distinction regardless of our own predilection. But such an assumption would be absurd without a regard for truth outside man.

God is the climax if He is also the basis. You cannot find Him in the answer if you ignore Him in the question.

In asking about God, we examine our own selves: whether we are sensitive to the grandeur and supremacy of what we ask about, whether we are wholeheartedly concerned with what we ask about. Unless we are involved, we fail to sense the issue.

The Logical Presupposition

The idea of the unity of the Supreme Being has played an important part in the philosophical reflections about divinity since the time of Xenophanes. It precluded not only outward plurality, namely the existence of another Supreme Being besides God, but also any kind of inner plurality or complexity within the nature of God. Eventually unity was understood not only in a numerical, but also in a metaphysical sense. For this reason any statement implying an attribute in God was felt to contradict the plea of divine unity.

Euclides of Megara, an Eleatic and also an associate of Socrates, denied the realness of all sensation and called for trust in reasoning alone. Only the One, or the Whole is real; the Many and the Parts have no claim to reality. Unlike Parmenides, who regarded the One as a continuous corporeal plenum, Euclides identified it with the Good, God, Wisdom, and Mind. "It was in this way that the Absolute made its first appearance in the history of philosophy, and its claim to be the sole reality was based on the inherent contradictoriness of all appearance."*

Since all thought presupposes a duality of thinker and the object of the thinking, Plotinus denied even that God was the object which thinks itself. For him, the One contains no more than the negation of

*J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy,* I (London, 1920), 230 ff.; cf. his article "Megarics," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* VIII, 523a.

plurality, and must not be understood in a merely numerical sense. "The One is not one of the units that make up the number Two."* In calling the Absolute "One," we merely intend to exclude the note of inner divisibility.

In the language of Maimonides, "belief in unity cannot mean essentially anything but the belief in one single homogeneous uncompounded essence; not in a plurality of ideas but in a single idea." An attribute is either identical with the essence of that to which is attributed, or different from it. If it is identical, then its attribution is either a tautology (e.g., man is human), or the definition of a term (e.g., man is a reasoning animal). Such attributes are impossible with reference to God. God cannot be described by His definition because He cannot be defined. On the other hand, if the attribute is different from the thing to which it is attributed, and thus an idea added to that thing, then it denotes an accident of that essence. Yet such an attribute would imply a plurality (of essence and accidents) in the divine Being.†

These difficulties arise from the attempt to reduce the biblical insight to an exact rational category. To be sure, the rational component is central to the biblical understanding of unity. However, the biblical intention is not to stress an abstraction, an idea in general, but the fullness of the divine Being; the certainty that the Creator *is* the Redeemer, that the Lord of nature *is* the Lord of history. *God's* being One means more than just being one. It means, we may say, that He is One, not many; unique and only (one-ly), the center and the circle, all-embracing and involved.‡

**Enneads,* V, 5, 7.

†*The Guide of the Perplexed* (Rabin trans.), I, 51-52.

‡See A. J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York, 1951), pp. 111 ff. See also pp. 352 and 356 of the present volume.

4

Anthropopathy

Anthropopathy as a Moral Problem

Mythopoeic thought and reflection about right and wrong represent ways of human thinking which, far from being related to each other, run in different directions and are devoid of coherence. Thus, the realm of religion is one thing and the realm of moral striving another. Even divinity does not connote decency. It was at a late date in history, when he became aware of the majesty and eminence implied in the concept of the divine, that man undertook to remove from this concept all that contradicts propriety. Sometimes the simple insight was enough; what decency forbids man is likewise unbecoming to God.

The aversion to anthropomorphism among cultured Greeks was, first of all, a reaction against conceptions offensive to their moral sensibilities. "Both Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are shameful and a reproach among mankind: theft, adultery, and mutual deception,"* Xenophanes complained. Plato denounced the caprice and corruptibility of the gods, from whom the

*H. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (3rd ed.; Berlin, 1912), fragments 11, 12.

wicked could secure immunity from chastisement by means of soothing entreaties and offerings.* The conception that jealousy or envy was inherent in the very nature of the gods was particularly repulsive to both Plato and Aristotle.†

"Thine is unwisdom, or injustice thine," says Amphitryon to Zeus. And Theseus is even more specific about the gods: "Have they not linked them in unlawful bonds of wedlock, and with chains, to win them thrones, outraged their fathers? In Olympus still they dwell, by their transgressions unabashed."‡

The prophets, the psalmist, the authors of the books of Wisdom, all of whom were powerfully sensitive to the uniqueness and transcendence of the living God, seem to have had no apprehension that the statements of divine pathos might impair their understanding for the one, unique, and transcendent God. One might wonder whether Xenophanes, had he been faced by the Bible instead of by Homer, would have felt compelled to protest against the humanization of divinity. The unbridled indulgence of impulses, the impassioned egoism and caprice of the Homeric gods called forth his criticism. He had scorn for the idea that the gods are corrupt.

As a moral problem, anthropopathy has been of very limited relevance to Jewish thinkers. It was due to other presuppositions that pathos became an issue in Jewish theology.

The Theological Presupposition

A major motive for the rejection of the idea of pathos has been the fear of anthropomorphism, by which we mean the endowment of God with human attributes. The religious man denounces not only the idea that the Deity has a body or limbs like a man or an animal, but also the attribution of emotion or passion (anthropopathy) as incompatible with the nature of a Supreme Being. Since divine pathos was regarded as an aspect of anthropomorphism, or more precisely, of

**Republic,* 378c.
†Plato, *Phaedrus,* 247a; *Timaeus,* 29e; Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* 983a.
‡Euripides, *Heracles,* 345, 1316 ff., 1308.

anthropopathy, every effort was made either to disregard it or to cancel out its significance.

It is an oversimplification to assume that the prophets, who were so deeply aware of the grandeur and transcendence of the Creator of heaven and earth as well as of the failure and frailty of human nature, should have sought to invest God with human qualities. Speaking about God, the biblical man did not intend simply to describe a fact, but to praise, to extol, to celebrate. Merely to personify God would have been to disparage Him.

Anthropomorphism as a way of thinking is in harmony with the thought that man may become a god. The presence of this belief, widely held in ancient religions, may be regarded as a test for the genuineness of anthropomorphism.

Such a belief, however, was an extreme blasphemy to the biblical man. With superb irony the prophet pictures the downfall of the king of Babylon who said in his heart:

I will ascend to heaven;
Above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
. . . But you are brought down to Sheol,
To the depths of the pit.
Isaiah 14:13, 15

In the prophetic mind there was a disassociation of the human—of any biological function or social dependence—from the nature of God. Since the human could never be regarded as divine, there was no danger that the language of pathos would distort the difference between God and man.

There are several ways by which we can establish the presence of anthropomorphic conceptions: the equivalence of imagination and expression; the unawareness of the transcendence and uniqueness of God; the adjustment of God's moral nature to the interests of man; the endeavor to picture or to describe God in His own existence, unrelated to man.

We are inclined to question the legitimacy of applying the term

anthropopathy to the prophetic statements about the divine pathos. The term applies properly to religions in which there is no discrepancy between imagination and expression: the gods are conceived of as human beings and described as human beings—in their appearance, their way of life, their passions, their occupations. There are myths and images. In contrast, the biblical man's imagination knows nothing about God, how He lives and what occupies Him. He is God and not man (Hos. 11:9; Isa. 31:3); man shall not see Him and live (Exod. 33:20); even seraphim cover their faces lest they see Him (Isa. 6:2).

Who in the skies can be compared to the Lord?
Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord?
Psalm 89:6

To whom then will you liken God,
Or what likeness compare with Him?
Isaiah 40:18

Myths are disavowed, an image is an abomination.

The Accommodation of Words to Higher Meanings

The error in regarding the divine pathos as anthropomorphism consisted in regarding a unique theological category as a common psychological concept. This was due to the complex nature of prophetic language, which of necessity combines otherness and likeness, uniqueness and comparability, in speaking about God. One is more easily cognizant of the aspects of pathos resembling human emotions than of the aspects which set pathos apart as superhuman. Regarded as a form of humanization of God, the profound significance of this fundamental category is lost. The otherness and uniqueness of pathos can be understood only by comprehending it in its total structure, not by taking isolated traits out of context; by observing the peculiar usage of the terms as contrasted with assertions about the nature of man.

We must not fail to remember that there is a difference between anthropomorphic conceptions and anthropomorphic expressions.

The use of the latter does not necessarily prove belief in the former. God has often been pictured in human form, or as having passions just like man's. However, to picture Him as human does not mean to think of Him as human. Michelangelo in depicting the Creator in human form may continue to shock those tho are sensitive to the Second Commandment, but he can hardly be accused of believing that God possesses the shape of man.

All language is relative, adapted to the ideas and associations cherished in a particular age and capable of evoking them. But so is our understanding relative, attuned to the ideas and associations cherished in our age. In reading ancient words, it is difficult to ascertain the ideas which they represented and the thoughts which they sought to evoke in their contemporaries.

What sort of ideas were present in the prophet's mind which anthropomorphic words were supposed to convey?

The statements about pathos are not a compromise—ways of accommodating higher meanings to the lower level of human understanding. They are rather the accommodation of words to higher meanings. Words of psychological denotations are endowed with a theological connotation. In the biblical expressions of divine emotions, which are always morally conditioned and morally required, the religious consciousness experiences a sense of superhuman power rather than a conception of resemblance to man.

The idea of the divine pathos combining absolute selflessness with supreme concern for the poor and the exploited can hardly be regarded as the attribution of human characteristics. Where is the man who is endowed with such characteristics? Nowhere in the Bible is man characterized as merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abundant in love and truth, keeping love to the thousandth generation. Pathos is a thought that bears a resemblance to an aspect of divine reality as related to the world of man. As a theological category, it is a genuine insight into God's relatedness to man, rather than a projection of human traits into divinity, as found for example in the god images of mythology.

The conception of selfless pathos, synthesizing morality as a supreme, impartial demand and as the object of personal preoccupation and ultimate concern, consists of human ingredients and a superhuman *Gestalt*. Absolute selflessness and mysteriously undeserved love are more akin to the divine than to the human. And if these are characteristics of human nature, then man is endowed with attributes of the divine.

God's unconditional concern for justice is not an anthropomorphism. Rather, man's concern for justice is a theomorphism. Human reason, a feeble reflection, reminder, and intimation of the infinite wisdom deciphered in God's creation, is not the form after which our concept of God's wisdom is modeled. The language the prophets employed to describe that supreme concern was an anthropomorphism to end all anthropomorphisms.

Prophecy is essentially a proclamation that God's ways are not man's ways. He is not to be utilized. He is not a guarantee for security. The belief that ultimately there is a God of justice, a God whose concern is for justice, is anthropomorphic in the sense in which the idea of transcendence or eternity is anthropomorphic.

The Wisdom and the Folly of Anthropomorphism

According to the celebrated statement of Xenophanes, "If oxen and horses and lions had hands or could draw with hands and create works of art like those made by men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen of gods like oxen. . . . Aethiopians have gods with snub noses and black hair; Thracians have gods with grey eyes and red hair."*

The essential error is not in *how* man depicts God, but in depicting Him at all. The great revolution in biblical faith was to regard any image of God as an abomination. "You shall not make yourself a graven image" (Exod. 20:4). "You saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire" (Deut. 4:15). Imagination and God are not the same.

*K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford, 1952), fragments 15, 16.

Oxen, lions, and horses would depict God like one of them. We are wiser—should we then depict God unlike us? Is it true that the absolute antithesis to man is the true characteristic of the divine? If man has nothing in common with God, he will never be able to know what God is, or even to know that God is the absolute antithesis to man.

Oxen would depict God in their image; a community of triangles would worship a triangular God. The fallacy of these statements is concealed in their glibness. Do oxen depict God? Are triangles capable of worship?

The problem of anthropomorphism is an afterthought in the process of religious thinking. It is a type of reflection which stands in relation to genuine utterance as criticism stands in relation to works of creative art, testing and appraising verbal formulations in the light of conceptual criteria. However, there is an essential incongruity of creative and critical thinking, of the effort to hold up insights against words and the effort to hold up words against conceptions. Creative minds are more anxious to save what they sense than to refine and protect what they say. Translating insights into words is not done in the light of conceptual criteria, but under the impact of incomprehensible facts. Ignoring the tension of the moment and the paradox of the endeavor, one would retain the concepts, but lose the facts. Thus, in responding to facts of religious experience, the mind does not always employ the yardsticks of general rules. It is in analyzing the formulated response from a distance that one begins to measure the irregularities of religious language by the scales of general rules.

Impropriety is the mark of all expression that presumes to convey what is meant by the divine. Fortunately, creative thinking is not always hurt by the awareness of impropriety, nor does it dread the frown of the critic. In trying to set things right, we must not forget the anguish of sensing things altogether.

To speak about God as if He were a person does not necessarily mean to personify Him, to stamp Him in the image of a person. Between personifying God and speaking about Him in terms of personality lies a difference as great as between presuming to count and weigh all beings and employing the word "universe."

To most of us a person, a human being, seems to be the maximum of being, the ceiling of reality; we think that to personify is to glorify. Yet do not some of us realize at times that a person is not superlative, that to personify the spiritually real is to belittle it? A person may be both a distortion and a deprecation.*

The idea of the divine pathos is not a personification of God but an exemplification of divine reality, an illustration or illumination of His concern. It does not represent a substance, but an act or a relationship.

The fear of the fallacy of anthropomorphism could lead us to cast aspersions, for example, upon Hosea's proclaiming Israel as the consort of God and His saying: "I will betroth you to Me for ever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in love and in mercy" (Hos. 2:19 [H. 2:21]). Yet the idea of God's betrothal to Israel did not represent a mental image, something imagined by the prophet. There was no picture in the mind that corresponded to the metaphor. Nor was it crystallized as a definite concept, from which logical consequences could be drawn, or raised to a dogma, to an exact formulation of a belief.

The essential function of the critic is to protect such ideas from pretension and inflation, resulting in either visible or verbal iconography. A sacred venture is always in danger of ending in a blasphemy. The sacred venture of conveying more than what minds could visualize or words could say is always in danger of being a failure. Yet the rivalry between the creative and the critical mind must not turn to antagonism. The critic may be ahead of the creative mind in clarity of conception, but remain behind in the immediacy of insight and experience.

As important as the content of our thinking about God is our way of thinking about Him. There is a reflective way, commencing in ignorance and rising from concept to concept until it arrives at the

*See A. J. Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York, 1951), pp. 59 f.

idea of One Supreme Being described by the attribute of perfection. The other way begins in embarrassment, and, rising from insight to insight, arrives at a vision of one transcendent Being, Whom one acknowledges as a source of embarrassment. One cannot describe Him, one can only praise Him.*

The notion of God as a perfect Being is not of biblical origin. It is not the product of prophetic religion, but of Greek philosophy; a postulate of reason rather than a direct, compelling, initial answer of man to His reality. In the Decalogue, God does not speak of His perfection, but of His having made free men out of slaves. Signifying a state of being without defect and lack, perfection is a term of praise which we may utter in pouring forth our emotion; yet, for man to utter it as a name for His essence would mean to evaluate and to endorse Him. Biblical language is free of such pretension; it dared to call perfect (*tamim*) only "His work" (Deut. 32:4), "His way" (II Sam. 22:31), and the Torah (Ps. 19:7). We have never been told: "Hear, O Israel, God is perfect!"

The Language of Presence

What do we mean when we employ the word "God"? It is a word that is used in many ways. It may denote an idea, or a force working within the universe, or wisdom as reflected in nature, or an omnipotent Ruler, or the First Cause. All these words denote ideas. They do not convey any sense of the realness of God. How does one rise from saying the word "God" to sensing His realness?

This is the most serious challenge. God is a Being hidden from the eye and removed from the mind. No image must be fashioned, no concept formed. How can His realness be felt, thought, or uttered?

Greek philosophy, groping for a rational way to comprehend the ultimate Being, was rarely able to transcend the mind's tragic uncertainty as to whether there is a God. In the memorable words of Xenophanes: "There never was, and never shall be, any man, who has

*See A. J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York, 1951), pp. 101 f.

sure and certain knowledge about the gods . . . and all things; for however much he may hit the mark by accident, yet he himself has no knowledge; but opinion presides over all things."* Or to quote Plato: The higher "knowledge which reason herself attains by the power of the dialectic, using the hypotheses . . . as steps and points of departure into a world which is above hypotheses, in order that she may soar beyond them to the first principle of the whole; and clinging to this and then to that which depends on this, by successive steps, she descends again without the aid of any sensible object, from ideas, through ideas, and in ideas she ends."†

Plato thinks of God *in the image of an idea;* the prophets think of God *in the image of personal presence.* To the prophets, God was not a Being of Whose existence they were convinced in the way in which a person is convinced of the truth of an idea. He was a Being Who is supremely real and staggeringly present.

They could not use the language of *essence;* they had to use the language of *presence.* They did not try to depict Him; they tried to present Him, to make Him present. In such an effort only words of grandeur and intensity, not abstractions, can be of any avail.

There is a world, and there is God. Plato planted in the Western mind the consciousness of unseen, eternal ideas, of which the visible world is but a copy. The prophets placed in the Western mind the consciousness of an unseen, eternal God, of Whose Will the visible world is a creation.

My Pathos Is Not Your Pathos

There are two pitfalls in our religious understanding; the humanization of God and the anesthetization of God. Both threaten our understanding of the ethical integrity of God's will. Humanization leads to the conception of God as the ally of the people; whether they do right or wrong, God would not fail His people. The idea of the divine anger shatters such horrible complacency.

*Diels, *op. cit.*, fragment 34.
†*Republic,* 511.

The anesthetization of God would reduce Him to a mystery Whose will is unknown, Who has nothing to say to man. Such indifference was refuted by the prophets' own experiences of being addressed by Him and called upon to convey His word to the people.

We are inclined to assume that thought and sympathy, because they are found in man, are limited to man. However, with the same logic it may be maintained that being, because it is characteristic of man and matter, is limited to them. Sight, because of its being a faculty of man, is not to be denied to God. Yet, there is an absolute difference between the sight and the thought of God and the sight and the thought of man. God compared with man is like the potter compared with the clay.

> *Woe to those who hide deep from the Lord their counsel,*
> *Whose deeds are in the dark,*
> *And who say, Who sees us? Who knows us?*
> *You turn things upside down!*
> *Shall the potter be regarded as the clay;*
> *That the thing made should say of its maker,*
> *He did not make me;*
> *Or the thing formed say of Him who made it,*
> *He has not understanding?*
>
> *Isaiah 29:15–16*

The nature of the divine pathos is a mystery to man. What Isaiah (55:8 f.) said concerning the thoughts of God may equally apply to His pathos: For My pathos is not your pathos, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My pathos than your pathos.

The Bible speaks in the language of man. It deals with the problems of man, and its terms are borrowed from the vocabulary of the people. It has not coined many words, but it has given new meaning to borrowed words. The prophets had to use anthropomorphic language in order to convey His nonanthropomorphic Being.

The greatest challenge to the biblical language was how to reconcile in words the awareness of God's transcendence with His overwhelming livingness and concern. Had the biblical man recoiled form using anthropomorphic words, he never would have uttered: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." On the other hand, to assume that the psalmist, in using the word "shepherd," had the image of a shepherd in his mind is to misunderstand the meaning of that passage.

It is precisely the challenge involved in using inadequate words that drives the mind beyond all words. Any pretension to adequacy would be specious and a delusion.

To others, God seems to recede in a distance; to the prophets, He calls continually for participation. What the prophets experience, they demand of the people: not a fleeting experience of extraordinary surrender, but a perpetual attitude of obedience; not to stand "outside oneself," but to love Him with the whole self; not to lose one's destiny, but to remember one's destiny: being called, being chosen.

This was the central endeavor of the prophet: to set forth not only a divine law, but a divine life; not only a covenant, but also a pathos; not the eternal immutability of His Being, but the presence of His pathos in time; not only absolute Lordship, but also direct relatedness to man.

God is not a point at the horizon of the mind, but is like the air that surrounds one and by which one lives. He is not a thing, but a happening. The psalmist may ask man to meditate on God's works; the prophets call upon man to consider God's inner acts. They not only sense God in history, but also history in God.

All expressions of pathos are attempts to set forth God's aliveness. One must not forget that all our utterances about Him are woefully inadequate. But when taken to be allusions rather than descriptions, understatements rather than adequate accounts, they are aids in evoking our sense of His realness.

"The father and maker of all this Universe is past finding out, and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible."* The mind of man can never go beyond the limits indicated in

*Plato, *Timaeus*, 28.

Plato's words. What does the mind know about God? His works. Where is His goodness to be found? In His works. There is no greater goodness than that which is already given in the universe. The prophets speak of a mercy that transcends the mercy found in the world. It was not from His works alone that they knew Him, but also from His word.

God is alive in His regard and concern for life, for man, for righteousness. Compassionate is His concern, although the form in which it is expressed may be harsh. Man is callous and deaf to God's call. It is frequently in moments of distress that he regains ultimate understanding.

Thou turnest man to contrition,
And sayest, Turn back, O children of men!
Psalm 90:3

His wrath can be unbearably dreadful, yet it is but the expression and instrument of His eternal concern.

A merciful or angry God was not unknown to the Babylonians or Egyptians. New is the prophetic conception that mercy and anger are not sporadic reactions, but expressions of *a constant care and concern*. The divine pathos embraces all life, past, present, and future; all things and events have a reference to Him. It is a concern that has the attribute of eternity, transcending all history, as well as the attribute of universality, embracing all nations, encompassing animals as well as human beings.

By God's livingness the prophets did not mean living in a biological or physiological sense. They never thought of God as a thing or an organism, as a force or a cause. God's life was thought of as a unity of conscious acts, of creating, demanding, expressing, and responding. He was conceived of in terms of acts, in terms of moments, rather than in terms of thinghood. A thing may be thought of as a force or a cause. Personal life is the presence or manifestation of a will, of unity of intention, of a regard and a concern for the nonself.

Is history derelict, a mere chain of chance? Is the survival of mankind the exclusive concern of man? Is human life to be defined as

life that cares for itself? Biblical religion did not simply evolve from a reflection about an ultimate cause. Its premise rather seems to be that, just as there is an ultimate origin, there is an ultimate concern. Human life is life that God cares for and that is concerned with Him.

"God is alive" does not mean He is a Person among persons. "It means," the psalmist or the prophet would say, "that more than my own life do I cherish His regard for me." "For Thy love (*ḥesed*) is better than life" (Ps. 63:3 [H. 63:4]).

My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the rock of my heart
And my portion for ever. . . .
The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
Psalms 73:26; 23:1