

## REVIEW ESSAY

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### THE BODY OF FAITH: GOD IN THE JEWISH PEOPLE

*The Body of Faith: God in the Jewish People* by MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD (New York, 1983).

There are two ways of reading—and therefore of evaluating—this work. One is as a corrective to various philosophic tendencies, both internal and external to Judaism, that have been operative in the past and which have resulted in distortions of Judaism. These include medieval rationalism and the demythologization of the concept of God (which reaches its zenith in Maimonides), universalizing tendencies of philosophies of reason, ethicalizing tendencies of the Jewishly alienated and of those who, in recoiling from Christianity, would distort Judaism in order to place it at the furthest possible remove. The second way is as a finished alternate statement about the theology of Judaism. Read as the former, this book is valuable, instructive and on the whole valid. But as a philosophic explication of the fundamentals of Judaism, this work, in some of its major assertions, in my judgment, raises some serious questions.

If one is to judge from the sub-title of this work, “God in the People Israel, it is fair to say that the concept of the election of the Jewish people, in which is reflected their special relationship to God, is the linchpin of Wyschogrod’s philosophic thinking about Judaism.

Let us begin by stating all those proper and correct things that the author says about this concept which are clearly anchored in biblical and rabbinic sources: the election of Israel is biological rather than ideological. God chooses the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be unto him “a peculiar treasure.” Therefore, what makes a person a Jew is not his or her commitment to a certain set of beliefs or even to a way of life, but rather physical descent from a particular people. Wyschogrod then draws all the important implications of this fact: (1) A Jew cannot resign his election; (2) the Jewish body as well as the soul is holy, so all of human existence

must be sanctified; (3) since, in some sense, there is something of God in man, “to abandon man is to abandon God.”

But this biological election is, at the same time, a national election with additional implications: (1) Since “the realm of history is the realm of the public life of nations” (p. 177), God’s identification with the nation of Israel implies that the social and historical orders must be redeemed as well; (2) faith of God in history seems to be tied to this people; (3) Israel as a people cannot escape the service of God; (4) being the people of God confers a certain indestructibility upon the Jewish people.

However, in speaking of the manner in which God is “among” or “in” the Jewish people, Wyschogrod keeps straining to suggest more than that is warranted even by the biblical language. “Is God incarnated in Israel?” he asks, “No,” is the answer, “that would be going too far.” Yet, later (p. 30 and elsewhere) he evidently cannot restrain himself from using the term. After a bit of inconclusive word juggling, he decides that it really makes no difference whether to say that God is “in” or “with” or “among” the Jewish people (pp. 11, 12). Yet, in another connection, he writes, “HaShem must be able to enter space and to be near man wherever he is. And not only near man but in man or more specifically in the Jewish people.” This would seem to imply that “God is *in* the people” does add something which the other expressions do not possess. But what?

Wyschogrod states that “God lives in the Jewish people both individually and collectively” (p. 103). While speaking of God as dwelling in or among the Jewish people collectively makes sense on a historical level, what might it mean to say that God dwells in the Jew, as an individual, in a way in which He is not present in every human being?

In treating the Kabbalah’s concept of “measurement of God’s limbs,” Wyschogrod sees a “physicalization, a materialization” of HaShem. And while he admits that these are interpreted allegorically or symbolically, he adds: “Whatever symbolic meanings they were intended to have, one must not ignore the incarnation by means of which the symbolic meanings are transmitted” (p. 95). After all, he informs us very coyly, “while the Bible does not specifically say that HaShem has a body but then again neither does it say that he does not” (p. 99). Then, just when we are about to suspect the worst, he assures us:

God dwells in Israel, Israel is HaShem’s abode in the midst of its uncleanness. He envelopes Israel. Israel is HaShem’s abode in the created world. This does not mean, God forbid, that Israel is HaShem. Judaism does not accept Christian incarnation with the people of Israel being the incarnation of God. To say that HaShem dwells in the Jewish people does not deify the Jewish people any more than to say that HaShem dwells in the Temple is to deify the stones of the Temple (p. 212).

But if Judaism does not accept Christian incarnation, what sort of incarnation does it accept? Nowhere in his book does Wyschogrod clearly set forth the implications of his understanding of “God *in* the People of Israel.”

A very strange idea struck me as I read Wyschogrod’s puzzling analysis of the sacrificial order in the Temple. He agonizes over the question why the Rabbis accepted the cessation of the sacrifices after the destruction of the Temple: “Why was the sacramental ignored and the word chosen to replace it?” (p. 19). “The shift from cult to prayer is so difficult as to seem almost impossible,” (p. 17). His answer:

The rabbis understood that the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the sacrifices . . . restored the people of Israel to its role as the sacrifice whose blood is to be shed in the Diaspora. . . . If there is no need for sacrament in Judaism, it is because the people of Israel in whose flesh the presence of God makes itself felt in the world becomes the sacrament (p. 25). (And on another level:) The Jews could be made to believe that on the Day of Atonement their sins would be forgiven even though there was no Temple and no sacrifices . . . because the ancient Jew felt God’s love for him and could therefore come to believe that his sins would be forgiven without the Temple and its sacrifices (p. 17).

But if according to Wyschogrod “the flesh of Israel is the abode of the Divine Presence in the world (p. 256) in some profound metaphysical sense, then it turns out that with the destruction of every Jew something is God is dying as well. Does that mean that the flesh and blood of the Jew (the sacramental sacrifice) is in some sense the “substance” of God—who, according to the author, can have a bodily form—Who out of love sacrifices Himself so that Israel can be forgiven on Yom Kippur? Such an interpretation would give dramatic new meaning to the concept of the suffering servant in Isaiah and to all the poignant *midrashim* in which God is pictured as “suffering” along with His people in Galut.

I hope Wyschogrod did not have this in mind. However, I have no other way of making sense of his need to endow the sacrificial cult with such importance. Otherwise I find unconvincing the sharp difference he draws between the sacrifices and the other commandments. I suppose I am just an old fashioned rationalist who believes that prayer both as praise and as supplication can transform the inner person and, as such, is a superior mode of worship than the cult of sacrifices. And in the last analysis, it is that which HaShem praises about His demand, that it is “in thy mouth and thy heart to do” (Deut. 30:14).

Wyschogrod give ample emphasis to the idea that God’s special relationship with the Jewish people is related to His program to make history the chief area of His manifestation. Indeed, God chooses this people “as his vehicle in history” (p. 57). However, it seems to me that he goes too far when he suggests that “God entered the created order through a people . . . the Divine Presence has to become embodied in a people of

flesh and blood . . .” (p. 10). Why “had to”? While it is correct to say that God entered *history* through a people, it is not necessary to say that he had to enter the finite world through a people. The Bible is clear that God is present in nature, in the world for man. God has no difficulty communicating with man, and man is able to relate to God even prior to the appearance of Abraham.

The reader is left to wonder whether all of Wyschogrod’s assertions in this book are to be taken at face value or whether some are perhaps stylistic exaggerations. For example, “there can be no thought about God that is not also thought about Israel” (p. 173). I find this strange and counter-intuitive. Of course, if one believes literally in the doctrine, “Israel the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He are one,” then it is tautologically true.

What is curious about the discussion of the biological election of Israel is the book’s silence regarding the institution of conversion. According to Judaism, it is possible for one who is not of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to become a Jew by a prescribed transformation of his beliefs and way of life. Wyschogrod’s radical emphasis upon the carnal aspect of Israel’s election leaves no obvious way to account for the possibility of conversion. But he should at least discuss it.

It is mainly in regard to the “personality of God” that we see the true implications of Wyschogrod’s assertion that his Judaism is biblical and of his proposal that “we should all learn to speak in the language of the Bible” (p. 11). According to our author, the God of the Bible is a God who has human traits, has a definite personality, may have some bodily form, is “vulnerable,” exposes Himself to “failure and humiliation,” and to a certain extent is “open to the threat of non-being.” Once again, the point of departure is valid. One is inclined to agree that Maimonides went very far in his “demythologizing” of God and left no room for the possibility of a divine-human relationship. Eliezer Berkovitz pointed out a long time ago that Maimonides’s theory of negative attributed and of divine action,

is an opinion that denies the most precious and intimate aspect of God’s relationship to the world and to man. . . . Judaism cannot forego the love and the mercy of God or even His justice and anger. Such attributes have to be related to him in a positive sense or else there is no basis for a living God of religious relevance. What Maimonides denies God, namely affection and tenderness, are of the very essence of the encounter (*God, Man and History*, p. 55).

What the principle of divine-human relationship requires, therefore, is our affirmation that the moral qualities attributed to God in the Bible describe real positive aspects of God’s being: “God is as He is here proclaimed. He is a caring God” (p. 56).

Using the same argument, Wyschogrod asserts that all the human traits that HaShem displays in the Bible are vertical traits of his being

(p. 113). Because only if they are can we say that “it is HaShem that we stand in relation with and not a mask that He turns towards us.” However, this claim can be sustained only in regard to the moral qualities which are sufficient to establish the Divine-human relationship, and because moral qualities are positive attributes. The argument is not valid in connection with other human traits that Wyschogrod wishes to attribute to God. First, because they are not necessary to establish relationship and, secondly, because they attribute imperfections to God. Certainly there are parts of Maimonides’ program of demythologization that any philosophic thinking about Judaism must continue to uphold. Thus, for example, Wyschogrod speaks of a God who seeks association with man because “he is desperately alone” and “is lonely,” Who “has a longing to associate with human beings,” has “weaknesses, insecurities and neuroses.” Wyschogrod demonstrates no textual nor conceptual justification for asserting these human traits about God.

Perhaps some of this language (such as “vulnerable,” “exposure to failure,” and “disappointed”) can be justified in light of the biblical assertion that “it repented the Lord that He had made man on earth and it grieved Him at His heart” (Gen. 6:6). Wyschogrod is correct in saying that the very act of creation of the world involved in a certain *tzimtzum* or withdrawal on the part of God. HaShem abdicates His absoluteness so that something other than He can become” (p. 98). But the essential point is that God gave man the freedom to disobey and to sin. When he does, it can be said that God is “disappointed,” that is, that God’s plan experiences a set back because *man* is a “failure.” It is in this sense that God may be said to be “vulnerable” in that God seeks to have man come to Him voluntarily.

Wyschogrod seems to make daring assertions on one page, only to withdraw or qualify them on another page. And it is not clear which page reflects his final view. Thus, “The God whom man encounters is a God who exposes himself to failure” (p. 15). Yet later he writes: “The limit of human freedom consists of the inability of man to modify the fundamental program. . . . What Israel or for that matter the rest of mankind does can postpone the effective date of fulfillment of the Divine Plan, but it cannot permanently alter it” (p. 213). If so, then God cannot really fail! He claims that “HaShem is vulnerable . . . (and) remains in control with the outcome never in doubt” but then finds “a less prominent but by all means noticeable theme of God embarked on an adventure whose outcome is not altogether certain because those are developments that HaShem cannot fully foresee or control” (p. 107).

Assuming that there exists such a “less prominent” theme in the Bible, is it not the task of the intelligent Jew to come up with a comprehensive view of God which reconciles both themes and which is internally coherent and consistent with the major expressions of the Bible on the

subject? On the same page in which the author speaks of God's "weaknesses, insecurities, and neuroses," he reassures us that "the time will come later to modify everything we say here to emphasize that HaShem is after all the absolute and therefore nothing we say of Him can be interpreted literally" (p. 99). Unfortunately, I have not been able to find where and when "later" he makes this modification. On the contrary, Wyschogrod admits (p. 125) that his approach will "necessarily appear sacrilegious and demeaning to the absolutist, which many will attempt to overcome by various strategies such as the Rabbinic dictum that "the Torah speaks in the language of men." However, he concludes for us, the "authority of the Bible does not permit such evasions." He is not clear on when Biblical Judaism is to be favored over Rabbinic Judaism or the reverse. His advice that we must "neither exaggerate nor ignore the differences between the two" (p. 179) is not particularly helpful. What, then, is a Jew to believe regarding the personality of God?

Wyschogrod makes many valid observations about the limited role of reason or theology or philosophy in Judaism; I will not enter here into the distinctions between the terms. Suffice it to say that the author acknowledges that what he is doing is more akin to the approach of Barth in his *Church Dogmatics*, which he characterizes as "theology which is non-philosophical and profoundly Biblical" but at least "systematic and rational" (p. 79).

We would all have to agree that the "human reason that God approves is reason within rules and bounds that are beyond reason" (p. 8); that "God cannot be understood as the Greek gods were by the Greeks" (p. 34); and "Israel does not abrogate to itself the right to hail the Bible before the tribunal of reason but it also does not abrogate the human right to ask questions." However, there seems to be something arbitrary about where he locates these "bounds," what it is that can be understood about God, or what questions *may* be asked. Thus, according to Wyschogrod the Rabbis did not ask Euthyphro's question—whether something was good because God commanded it or whether God commanded it because it is good?—because they had a sense that somehow this question goes beyond the limits (p. 8). But how it is, then, that the Rabbis found the following question quite legitimate: "Is it better for man to have been created or would it have been better for man not to have been created?" (Eruvin 14).

There are times when Wyschogrod adopts a very humble and agnostic attitude towards God while at others he presumes to know a great deal. Let us examine what he tells us about God's love: "Nowhere does the Bible tell us why Abraham rather than someone else was chosen" (p. 176). The implication is that God chooses whom He wishes and that "He owes no accounting to anyone." But is the Jewish reader of the Bible allowed to ask and to speculate, "Why did God choose Abraham?"

Wyschogrod prefers to speak of “God’s falling in love” with Abraham (p. 64). The Bible itself, however, seems concerned to have Israel understand the correct reasons why we were chosen: “And because He loved thy fathers and chose their seed after them . . .” (Deut. 4:37). “The Lord did not set His love upon you nor choose you because you were more in number . . . but because the Lord loved you and because He would keep the oath . . .” (Deut. 7:7, 8). “Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them . . . (Deut. 10:15). At that point, Israel was to understand that they had been chosen by God not because of any quality that they as a people already possessed but because of the oath God had made with the fathers whom He loved and desired. But surely we have a right to ask why did God love Abraham. Wyschogrod himself says that the love with which God has chosen to love man is a love understandable to man” (p. 63). But what would we think of a person who asserts that he has “fallen in love” with another person and wishes to associate with him but can give no reason for his love! We have little regard for people who are at the mercy of inexplicable emotions. Those who inexplicably “fall in love” can tomorrow inexplicably “fall out of love.” Love then ceases to imply moral responsibility.

In describing God’s fatherly love towards His many children, Wyschogrod tells us that “it is inevitable that he would find himself more compatible with some of his children than others and to speak very plainly that he loves some more than others (p. 65). But in what sense can God be said to be more “compatible” with some men than with others except in a moral sense? Indeed the only things God is said to love in the Bible beside certain human beings are moral qualities such as justice, righteousness and kindness. (See Psalms 146:8, 33:5 and elsewhere.) It seems clear to me that the Bible (Gen. 18:19) would like us to understand that God loves Abraham and chooses his seed because of the moral qualities he finds actual or potential in him: “Thou art the Lord, the God who did choose Abram and brought him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees and gave him the name Abraham and found his heart faithful before Thee” (Nehemia 9:7, 8). Wyschogrod says that “Israel has the underlying experience of being loved (by God) and therefore being worthy of love (p. 12). But if we do not know why God loves us, why should we think it has anything to do with being “worthy”?

In speaking of “human nearness to God” or “God being near man,” Wyschogrod determines that “human nearness to God must be spatial because man is a spatial being” (p. 101). But man is also a psychological being and surely having a sense of being close to someone is more important than being spatially close. True, “spatial separation from those man loves is a human misfortune” because generally man loves other human beings who are spatial beings. However, the entire history of religious literature is replete with the experiences of human beings who

report a sense of the proximity of God, His being close as a mystical or psychological feeling and not necessarily spatial.

On the question of the principle of God's incorporeality, Wyschogrod teases us with the assertion that it is not biblical. He is technically correct that "the Bible does not specifically say that HaShem has a body but neither does it say that he has not" (p. 99). And, of course, it is true that the Bible describes God in terms associated with physical beings and attributes to God various spatial locations. However, one can attribute to God "total presence; that God is close to man wherever he is, in a real sense; that God is *in* the world" (all assertions that Orthodox Jews have traditionally believed in) without acknowledging the possibility that God has some bodily form. Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages was able to show the logical relationship between the concept of God's unity and His incorporeality. That is to say, if God is corporeal then that would deny His unity taken in the sense that He is not only one numerically but also in the sense of absolute simplicity. Wyschogrod might be able to counter that even on the question of God's unity the Bible does not explicitly state that He is one in the sense of absolute simplicity. But why would he want to be a philosophic Karaite when he obviously is not a halakhic Karaite!

There is a sense in which HaShem may be called "the Lord of language" (p. 171). But since the language in which HaShem communicates with us is human language, we too are the lords of language. In the last analysis what language is trying to tell us, even the language of the Bible, is up to our own intelligence to interpret. There is no alternative to a rationalized Judaism. And indeed, this is precisely what we have in *The Body of Faith*, only according to the *nusah* of Michael Wyschogrod.

In his treatment of ethics, Wyschogrod begins with his "corrective" program by pointing up the distortions visited upon Judaism by Liberal Judaism, Ethical Culture and philosophers such as Hermann Cohen and Emmanuel Levinas, who chose to reduce Judaism to universal ethics. He argues that this was simply a strategy, mostly unconscious, "by which the assimilating Jew retains a certain spiritual self-respect which was threatened by his guilt at abandoning the faith of his fathers" (p. 182). In truth, however, Judaism consists of theological beliefs, rituals and a national-territorial program as well as a moral system, "and these ingredients must fructify and reinforce each other" (p. 223).

Wyschogrod defends the universality of the ethics of Judaism in spite of the fact that Jews have special obligations towards their fellow Jews. He properly points out that special relationships confer special obligations so that the very nature of Jewish peoplehood with its sense of mutual responsibility morally mandates special consideration by Jews of other Jews over non-Jews.

So far so good. However, in discussing the place of the ethical in Judaism, he is unclear to the point of being misleading. At one point he



asserts that “the ethical is at the center of Judaism from its inception to the present” (p. 191). But in pointing out that “the ethical must be supplemented by the cultic and the national,” he states that of these three components the most important part of Judaism is the existence of the Jewish people “as the earthly abode of HaShem” and not the ethical (p. 223). In defending this point, he makes two questionable arguments: (1) “There are no Jewish values without Jews.” Perhaps, but there are moral values so long as there are human beings. (2) “Destruction of the Jewish people drives HaShem out of the world completely.” Now, Jews believe in the eternity of the Jewish people based upon the promises of the Prophets. However, God was present in the world before the appearance of Abraham or the Jewish people and presumably His presence does not depend upon their existence. Besides, Wyschogrod himself has warned us against saying that anything is “necessary” regarding God. I believe it is his idiosyncratic notion of “God in the Jewish people” that prompts him to take this position.

What effect does Judaism as a national-historical religion have upon the ethical? At one point he says only that “the potential for conflict with the ethical exists” (p. 222). This is to be expected, for it is precisely in the crises of life, in times of war and social conflict that one’s commitment to the ethical is put to the test. But later he says that “it is in the dimension of history that the limits of the ethical are reached” (p. 218), and in referring to the Biblical command to destroy the Amalekites, he states that alongside the unusual moral sensitivity the Bible is also amoral (p. 218). This “clash,” he says, is so perceived not only by us today but also so perceived by those involved in these events.

I am not at all sure what Wyschogrod is trying to say here. Is it that the command of God transcends or supercedes the ethical? At one point he toys with the Hegelian idea that the state has a higher morality than the individual (p. 220) and adds that “this frame of mind is not entirely foreign to the Bible.” Yet at the last minute he seems to enthrone the ethical in a very obfuscating formulation: “The Jewish claim to the land can therefore not conflict with the ethical” (p. 223).

My own reading of Judaism sees the ethical as presiding over the other components of Judaism inasmuch as HaShem has revealed Himself to be a moral God. Since God is the creator, He has the right to deprive one nation of its land and bestow it upon another. But He does not act arbitrarily. Abraham is told that his seed will not enter the land until the fourth generation, “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16). With regard to waging war upon the seven nations who inhabit Canaan, there is the view in the Talmud, adopted by Maimonides and based upon a possible reading of the biblical sources, that Israel was required to offer them two options to war: (1) leave the land or (2) stay in peace but abandon idolatry. Then as today the “clashes” between the

historical-national and the ethical are often real in practice. However, conflict between the *demands* of the historical-national and the ethical within Judaism are apparent only. Then as now the problems of building and maintaining a national state in the real world while living up to the ethical are immense and often insoluble. But, as the Sages often say, "The Torah was not given to the ministering angels" (Berachot 25b).

In further explication of the nature of the ethical, Wyschogrod states: "But the ethical is not autonomous in Judaism. It is rooted in the being and command of God without which no obligation is conceivable" (p. xv). Strictly speaking, his first sentence is true. Since the ethical is rooted in the *being* of God, it is theonomous and not autonomous. The Bible makes it quite clear that God is an ethical being and that the basic moral values of *tzedek*, *mishpat*, *hesed*, *ve-rahamim* are, in some sense, aspects of the divine personality (Ex. 34:6, 7; *Hilkhot De'ot* 1:6). At the same time, the ethical is not, strictly speaking, theonomous because it is not rooted in the *command* of God. That is to say, God Himself cannot change the principles of morality, cannot command otherwise than what they are, since they are a part of His essence and "I the Lord do not change" (Malakhi 3:6). Evidently, Wyschogrod does not agree with this. In speaking of the caution we must exercise in speaking of God lest we "infringe his sovereignty" (p. 58), he gives an example of such infringement. We must not try to justify God's actions by saying: "What He did measures up to the highest standards of morality," because "God must not be judged by standards external to him." But to say that no more limits God's sovereignty than to say that "God can be counted on not to commit suicide." The morality by which we judge God are His own standards; God Himself has disclosed that He is a moral being.

What distorts Wyschogrod's presentation is his failure to consider the implications of the fact that between God and the ethical stands man. According to ordinary usage, what distinguishes morality from folkway is that the former deals with behavior appropriate to man *qua* man. According to the Bible, man was created by God in His image and endowed with freedom, moral knowledge and responsibility, and thus became a moral agent. Knowledge of the fundamentals of what is right and wrong is known by man intuitively and is so assumed by the Bible. Otherwise, it is impossible to render intelligible God's many judgments on mankind in the period prior to the revelation of His will at Mt. Sinai.

Once man, creature of God, stands forth as a moral agent, then the ethical assumes features associated with autonomy, so that now even men who do not hear the command of God have moral obligations once they accept their humanity. Wyschogrod ultimately seems to affirm such a view when he says, "If man is other than God, then he must appropriate the moral command even if it is also the command of God, as his own command freely chosen by him as an autonomous act of self-legislation" (p. 194).

Wyschogrod understands the moral Noahide Commandments to be binding on mankind as a result of a historical covenant similar to the Sinaitic covenant concluded with Israel. But then to account for the inclusion of the generations before Noah, he makes the following statement: "Receptivity to the command is therefore rooted in gratitude for salvation, for bringing into being (Adam) and for saving from non-being (Noah) and bondage (Israel)" (pp. 28, 20). What argues against the literal interpretation that the Noahide Commandments were revealed in an historical covenant is the fact that unlike the Sinaitic covenant with Israel, no response is recorded in the Bible either from Noah or from Adam. Furthermore, if these Noahide Commandments, were "given" or "revealed" at some particular time to certain particular people, then how did mankind as a whole learn of them? It would hardly be fair on the part of God to hold all men responsible for their behavior if their moral knowledge depended upon the vagaries of a transmitted tradition. It is these considerations which impel many traditional thinkers to interpret the moral Noahide Commands as moral intuitions found in all men. Moreover, if response to the command of God is expected on the basis of gratitude, then what need was there for a covenant? In Israel's relationship to God, the role of gratitude has generally been seen as supplying the moral motivation for entering into a covenant in the first place. Once entered into, there devolves upon Israel the moral obligation to honor its commitment. Only when Israel forgets its commitment does the Bible appeal to gratitude (Deut. 32:6).

Wyschogrod raises the interesting question as to why the issue of autonomy is raised and considered pressing in the ethical realm and not in the cognitive and aesthetic areas. For we could surely ask an analogous question in these areas as well: Does  $2 + 2 = 4$  because God wills it or because it is so independently of him? Are certain things perceived beautiful because God so willed it or is it beautiful independent of the opinion of God? (p. 192). In my judgment, the analysis here is incomplete. To the believer in Judaism, the difference is clear. The entire structure of reason giving man knowledge of himself and the world he inhabits is part of the contingent created order as willed by God. Whatever corresponds to "knowledge" in God stands outside the structure of reason. Should God choose to operate within the structure of reason, as when He communicates with man, He is limited by its principles. Hence the observation of Maimonides that even God could not square the circle. Similarly, in the aesthetic realm, the approach of the religionist is quite straightforward. God created the universe in such a way that man can perceive beauty therein, whatever its ontological status. Since the created order as a whole cannot exist independently of God, neither can the quality of beauty. The ethical, however, is different primarily because of what the Bible tells us about the relationship between God and morality. God Himself discloses

that He is a “merciful and compassionate God . . . ,” qualities that are in some sense resident aspects of His personality. Only in conjunction with morality is man told to imitate God: “. . . to walk in His ways” (Deut. 10:12), which are the ways of “justice and righteousness” (Gen. 18:19). This means that God Himself is bound by the ethical, by the same standards that He has commanded man.

Even if we should determine that perception of beauty and the structure of reason are such only by the command by God, it would not make much difference to human existence. This is because both are deeply rooted in empirical experience. We would go on enjoying our perceptions of beauty and reaping the practical benefits of proper reasoning. However, the empirical roots of morality are rather tenuous. Intuitions that certain acts are morally right or wrong are weak and easily explained away. Should it turn out that the entire meaning of moral values is simply “commanded by God,” then moral experience generally will have been ontologically impoverished and grievously undermined. Michael Wyschogrod has given us a very thoughtful and provocative work which cannot be ignored by anyone who professes a philosophic interest in Judaism. Its special importance lies in the personal perspective of the author who in terms of traditional Judaism “is an insider whose Jewish living and education preceded his interest in philosophy.” As a man of faith who is thoroughly at home in modern philosophy and Christian theology, he is superbly equipped to measure his thinking against the current conventional wisdom.

Space does not permit me to deal with the many acute observations which Wyschogrod makes on the subject of the place of Israel; the role of art; the Messianic idea in Judaism; and his treatment of some of the special problems of halakhic Judaism. The detailed criticism I have given to some aspects of the book does not eclipse the many basic areas of Judaism in which I am in total agreement with the author.

We are grateful to him for this work. For, as the author says: “Because Judaism in our time has entered history, fundamental theological thinking is no longer a luxury” (p. 238).