

MARK STEINER

Philosophizing in Yiddish: Rabbi Reuven Agushewitz on Freedom of the Will

Introduction

When I was a boy, I used to visit my grandparents on Friday night. My grandfather used to spread out the *Morgen Journal* and I would read the Yiddish texts aloud. Little did I know that fifty years later, I would be involved in Yiddish translation. And not something on the level of Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish*, nor that of borscht belt comedy, but a serious philosophical work (though, as you will see below, Yiddish, with its hatred of pomposity, tends to lend a humorous vein even to "serious" discourse).

In the summer of 2001, Rabbi Aaron Feder, a retired businessman and *talmid hakham* in his own right (see his talmudic novellae, *Shalom Be-helekh*, published with the approbation of R. Zelik Epstein, the respected *rosh yeshivah* of Shaar Hatorah in Kew Gardens, Queens), asked me to consider translating the philosophical works of his rebbe, R. Reuven Agushewitz (1897-1950), from Yiddish into English. Feder had studied Talmud with Agushewitz privately on a daily basis while

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attending private school in Manhattan. I was unsure that my Yiddish was up to the task, so I leafed through one of the books, *Emune un Apikorses (Faith and Heresy)* an excerpt of which appears below. (I use YIVO orthography for the transliterations.) I was amazed to see an informed discussion of Zeno's paradoxes, for example, "Achilles un der tsheripakher." I saw right away that I didn't have to look up "tsheripakher" and that I was capable of doing the job. (A note to the philosophically uninitiated or linguistically challenged: the word means "tortoise.") Reading further, I was astonished to see an improvement of Zeno's arguments to take account of an objection by Aristotle ("Avade iz Aristotle gerekht, uber. . ."), an improvement I had never seen in the "goyishe" literature. The closest thing to it was an essay I had read by Professor Max Black of Cornell University in his *Problems of Analysis* (Ithaca, 1954), published well after *Emune un Apikorses* appeared, and not anywhere near as deep. I reported back to Feder, and a few months later, I started to work on the book.

Jews used to say: all other languages are spoken, but Yiddish "redt zikh aleyn" (lit., speaks by itself). Of course, this is a joke based, like many Yiddish jokes, on a philosophical fallacy. (Recall the beggar's boast "If I were Rothschild, I'd be richer than Rothschild, because I would still be a *shnorrer* on the side.") It is similar to the story that Ludwig Wittgenstein used to tell about the Frenchman who argued that French was the perfect language, because only in French do the order of the words follow the order of thought. But there is no question that Yiddish has a flexibility which can, on the one hand, afford great philosophical expressiveness, and on the other hand, make translating it a daunting task.

For example, during the twenty-three years I have been teaching philosophy in Hebrew, I have been looking for a Hebrew equivalent to the English expression "explaining away," which was used by my mentor, Professor Sidney Morgenbesser, himself a native Yiddish speaker who likes to use Yiddish expressions to make subtle philosophical concepts clear. He distinguished between explaining a phenomenon and explaining it away, the latter being an explanation only of why people erroneously thought there was a phenomenon in the first place. There actually is no way to convey this in Hebrew, so when I started translating Chapter Three of *Emune un Apikorses*, on Greek materialism, I was bowled over when I read that Democritus' atomic theory amounts to "oyshpshetln bedoykhek" human action and desire in terms of mere atomic motion and collision. This has a flavor and an irony which is hard to convey in terms of the "pareve" expression "to explain away with diffi-

culty.” (Incidentally, “pareve” is one of the many Yiddish words that express halakhic concepts, or Jewish practice, for which there is no translation into Rabbinic Hebrew. The Talmud, as well as some Jewish communities, uses “fish” as a prototypical “pareve” dish. Another is “yohrtsayt.”)

In what other language, I ask you, could the antinomy between unity and diversity be referred to as an “eybiker vayisroytsetsu,” (cf. Gen. 25:22); and the opposites themselves, unity and diversity, be referred to as “tsvilling fun hipukhim” [antagonistic twins, Jacob and Esau] which are compelled “nebekh” to live together in one bed [“tzuzam-menvoynen in eyn nare”]? Could Kant have written such a sentence? What European philosopher would phrase the mind-body problem as the question: how does a physical representation creep kit and caboodle (that’s the best I can do with “arayngegrokehn hak un pak”) into our mind? What historian of philosophy ever characterized Spinoza’s metaphysics as covering Descartes’ idea of a perfect being “un nokh mit a smitshik”? Or “advised” atheists to dissociate themselves from Spinoza, remarking that his rationalism coheres to materialist philosophy “vi arbes tsum vant” (the best I can do here is “like oil with water”; the literal meaning is “like chickpeas to the wall,” meaning of course, not the Middle Eastern paste called “humus,” but the Ashkenazi preparation usually eaten on Friday night before a circumcision).

And what other language but Yiddish could generate—in the standard dictionary (Weinreich, p. 758)—the following three successive entries: (1) *ay* (but then, precedes an objection) (2) *ay ay* (terrible) (3) *ay ay ay* (wonderful)?

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Who was Reuven Agushewitz? Let’s begin by translating the Hebrew biography written by his late nephew, a well known Borough Park physician, and brother of Dr. Irving Agus z”l Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University. The biography appeared as an introduction to R. Agushewitz’s talmudic novellae, *Bi’ur Reuven to Bava Kamma*, published posthumously through the efforts of Feder and the Agushewitz families:

The Life of the Rav, the Author

by his nephew, Dr. Haym Shmuel Agus

The author did not have the opportunity (*lo zakhah*) to see his work of talmudic logic in print, for he passed away suddenly in Eretz Yisrael on erev Rosh Hashana, 5710 (1950), only fifty-three years of age.

The Gaon, Rabbi Reuven ben Eliyahu, of blessed memory, was born in the town of Svislotz, Grodno district, to a noted rabbinic family. As a child, he amazed those who knew him by his powerful memory and sharp mind. At the beginning of World War I, he was forced to end his yeshivah studies. In those days of ferment, he devoted all his powers to agitation for Zionism and social justice. With great energy and youthful fire, he went from town to town as an orator on behalf of the new Messiahs of the generation. But his father, an outstanding Torah scholar, before his death, prevailed upon his son to give up this adolescent behavior and to cleave to Torah and wisdom. He returned to the Mir and Slobodka yeshivot, earned his reputation as a brilliant and indefatigable scholar, and received ordination with highest honors [*rabbat hitpa'alut*]. Afterwards, he journeyed to Western Europe, where he acquired secular wisdom at the Sorbonne. His friend, Rabbi Amiel, who would later become Chief Rabbi of Tel-Aviv, appointed him as Rosh Yeshiva of Antwerp, where he served for five years.

His literary work began to flourish in the United States, of which he became a citizen in 5689 (1929). He adopted the following regimen: to content himself with the bare necessities of life, while pursuing a literary career. From then on, he lived the life of an ascetic, taught a few disciples, and occupied a niche in the [New York Public] Library. He had great powers of abstract reasoning, which led him to the study of philosophy. But his common sense, prodigious learning, and clear, straightforward elucidation, strengthened his ties to his disciples and to the Talmud. Henceforth, he had a twofold soul: the soul of a pious Jew, trembling at the word of G-d, and the soul of the scientist, the scholar, who seeks philosophical truth. Beginning with 5695 (1935), he published three books in Yiddish (besides many newspaper articles): *Ancient Greek Philosophy*—a sharp criticism of the major trends in Greek philosophy; *Principles*—a theoretical essay on the nature of existence according to the latest philosophers as well as talmudic aphorisms; and *Faith and Heresy*—a sublime work reconciling religion and science, which became widely known in the Jewish world, and which is being published in Hebrew in Jerusalem [It was published in 1951 by Mossad Harav Kook as *Emunah u-Kefirah*—M. S.] He wrote his commentaries to the Talmud in the margins. He left elucidations and emendations on *Nezikin*, *Nashim*, and *Mo'ed* of which the present work [*Bi'ur Reuven to Bava Kamma*] is one example. One of his disciples, well known philanthropist Harry Fischel, founder of the Institute which bears his name in Jerusalem, encouraged him to prepare his commentaries for publication. For this purpose he moved to Israel—but fortune was not kind to him. As the Talmud says of the purely righteous, his work was now finished by others.

Learned, brilliant, straightforward exegete [*pashtan*], clear expositor—few were like him in Israel, but his good heart was paramount. He

was unique in his humility, his goodheartedness, in his willingness to say a good word for every man, in his feeling the pain of every despondent soul, in his generosity and in his frugality. He did not leave a wife or children. But his three brothers and their descendants, his hundreds of disciples and friends, and his thousands of readers, will memorialize his name with a feeling of holiness and admiration.

We see, then, that Agushewitz is not only a Yiddish writer. Unlike most of them, he is a *talmid hakham*, a talmudic prodigy. This produces special problems of translation. In dismissing the arguments of the nineteenth century atheist materialist, Ludwig Buechner, as an equivocation, Agushewitz complains, as the Talmud does in *Bava Kamma* “Er heybt on mit a fessl, un er endikt mit a krigl” [lit., he begins with a barrel and ends with a pitcher]. Agushewitz goes on to chide Spinoza for forgetting the gemore-logic he learned as a youth, otherwise he would have never have committed a “tartey-desasrey.”

On the other hand, Agushewitz’s talmudic training often makes it easier to translate his work. He is a masterful teacher and “balmasbir” [expositor], who remains in the “besmedresh” even when writing in his nook in the 42nd Street Library. For example, his chapter on Spinoza’s metaphysics is an extremely lucid introduction to a very difficult subject, from which I learned a great deal. His prose is pellucid and, as a great teacher, he has the patience even to repeat phrases for pedagogical purposes. (For example, he never says that A is X and B is not, but always: A is X and B is not X.) All his pronouns have clearly defined, unmistakable antecedents.

Agushewitz’ Lithuanian Yiddish is naturally closer to German than is Polish Yiddish. But the subject matter, too, has its own influence. Agushewitz naturally uses German words when discussing Kant and other German writers, but not only there. The need to extend the Yiddish language to encompass the various fields he is discussing (even Cantor’s set theory) lead him to make use of German vocabulary even where Weinreich’s dictionary has Yiddish equivalents. Thus I found myself using German dictionaries as much as Yiddish ones.

All in all, we have before us a unique work; there is, to my knowledge, nothing like it. Of course, there were Eastern European Jews who became philosophers (Solomon Maimon, Morris Raphael Cohen), but they abandoned Orthodox Judaism. There were Eastern European Jews who studied philosophy without abandoning Judaism, such as, of course, Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, who knew Agushewitz well and wrote an approbation for his talmudic novellae on *Bava Kamma*. As it hap-

pens, I have also worked on translating Rabbi Soloveitchik's essays from Hebrew into English, and a comparison is very instructive.

Classical Western philosophy, from Plato to Kant inclusive, mainly involved an attempt to prove, or at least give good reasons for believing, philosophical theses, by rigorous logical reasoning from acceptable premises. (I will not attempt to define here "philosophical thesis.") Another form of classical philosophy was the attempt to refute philosophical theses, or at least to show that no valid reason had been given for holding them. Much contemporary philosophy, particularly in the English speaking countries, could be called "classical" in this sense, but much contemporary philosophy cannot be so called, even in the English speaking world. I myself was trained by what you certainly could call "classical" philosophers and attempt to write in that vein, even when I take on "large" subjects such as the place of the human species in the entire cosmos.

R. Soloveitchik, I would claim, was not a "classical" philosopher despite his extensive knowledge of classical (and nonclassical) philosophy. The value of his work (and it is certainly an important contribution to modern Jewish thought, particularly to Orthodox Jewish thought) rests in other relations to philosophy than that he was able to confirm or refute philosophical theses and proofs in new ways. Rather, I would say that R. Soloveitchik has the following three relations to philosophical discourse:

(a) R. Soloveitchik's essays provide material for classical philosophical thought. That is, they have philosophical value even for the classical philosopher, without being themselves classical philosophy. My favorite example is *Halakhic Man*, where he puts forward the idea that halakhic Judaism involves intrinsically an alternative description of the world to that of natural science. I think this idea itself—that of re-description—could be developed in classical philosophical style.

(b) R. Soloveitchik utilizes the concepts treated in philosophy, including classical philosophy, to provide attractive descriptions of the outer and inner life of the halakhic Jew. This is sometimes called "phenomenology." What I mean by this is that by reading the works of R. Soloveitchik, one gets an intuitive insight into the meaning of concepts like "freedom" as applied to halakhic man. These insights defeat the detractors of religion, or Judaism in particular (e.g., Kant or Spinoza who claim that Judaism is enslaving), in ways different from (and often better than) merely refuting their arguments. In some cases, they didn't even *have* arguments, but provided loaded descriptions of religion in general, or Judaism in particular, whose

tendency was to weaken the hold of Judaism on its practitioners. For example, Voltaire provided no new arguments for atheism, but rather used the old material to make religion look ridiculous. The satirical and polemical essays and poems by the nineteenth-century *maskilim* in Judaism had a similar effect. R. Soloveitchik's essays redescribe his brand of Judaism to make the criticisms simply beside the point. Philosophical categories serve him in this endeavor.

(c) R. Soloveitchik's essays attempt to "tame" philosophy by outflanking it. One of his strategies, which he employs in "U-Vik-kashtem Mi-sham," is to describe philosophy itself (even nonreligious philosophies) as a manifestation of the relationship between Man and G-d.

I would not underestimate or belittle the value of R. Soloveitchik's success in undermining the paralyzing psychological effect of the intellectual attacks on Judaism, which was more devastating than the intellectual challenge of the arguments themselves. By describing Judaism in philosophical terms (b), and describing philosophy itself in religious terms (c), R. Soloveitchik made Judaism, including the intensive study of Talmud, intellectually respectable to an entire generation (as his disciples in Boston told me when I went there for a sabbatical recently). I believe that in doing this, R. Soloveitchik paved the way in the United States for the establishment of institutions like the yeshivah in Lakewood (whether they showed proper gratitude is another question). At the same time, his influence was felt at such institutions at Harvard, which began to show more understanding for the needs of the Orthodox Jewish student (I heard stories about this as well). And I think that the redescriptions themselves have philosophical value in themselves (a).

It should be not assumed, however, that R. Soloveitchik's (re)descriptions of Judaism had only a defensive purpose. In the case of Liberal religion, R. Soloveitchik used his philosophical descriptions of ideal types to discredit, to distance halakhic Judaism from, its alternatives. He has nothing but disgust for the idea that religion is a palliative, or a means to "peace of mind" (see note 4 of *Halakhic Man*) and makes no effort to show that his prototype of Halakhic Man, R. Ḥayyim Brisker, was at peace.

Having said all this, it remains that R. Soloveitchik, by sidestepping, for the most part, the actual arguments of classical secular philosophy against religion, leaves an objective lacuna in contemporary Jewish thought. It is this lacuna which R. Agushevitz tried to fill, consciously or unconsciously, and thus purported to be a classical, if theistic,

philosopher. His work comes to grips with the actual “proofs” (“bavayzn”) of classical philosophers such as Spinoza or Kant. He does intend to construct original philosophical arguments and to confront directly (by refuting them) the arguments of others, particularly the materialist atheists. And to an amazing extent, especially for a writer who apparently had no advanced degrees in philosophy, he actually succeeds in doing so.

This is not to say that everything in *Emune un Apikorses* is philosophically “ay ay ay.” Ambitiously, and incautiously, Agushewitz took on Georg Cantor’s theory of the infinite without knowing mathematics. (He did, however, show his work to Prof. Yekutiel Ginsburg of YU, a mathematician, which was an excellent idea.) He did this because Bertrand Russell, full of enthusiasm for this theory, had written in *Mysticism and Logic* that Cantor’s achievement, which solves all of Zeno’s paradoxes, is “probably the greatest of which our age has to boast. . . . I know of no age (except perhaps the golden age of Greece) which has a more convincing proof to offer of the transcendent genius of its great men” (*Mysticism and Logic* [Garden City, NY, 1957, first published 1917], 81-82). To which Agushewitz replied (I paraphrase slightly): if that’s the greatest achievement, then our age doesn’t actually have much to boast about. On this specific point, whether Cantor’s theory of infinite cardinal numbers solves Zeno’s paradoxes, I believe that Agushewitz was right (“avade gerekht,” as he would say) and Russell wrong. In the process of arriving at this conclusion, however, Agushewitz made some very uninformed criticisms stemming from mathematical ignorance, particularly of the distinctions between cardinal and ordinal numbers and between unbounded sets and sets of infinite measure. I accepted upon myself the responsibility of pointing these infelicities out where I find them.

The most tantalizing question of all is: for whom did R. Reuven Agushewitz write this book, and why did he not write it in Hebrew? Why would a Lithuanian “iluy,” in 1948, compose a work for a public which, if it ever existed, had been annihilated by the Nazis? (In Israel, Yiddish had been eradicated in educated circles by longstanding persecution of Yiddish speakers, to the point that even in Hebrew University today, there is a danger that Yiddish studies may be eliminated for lack of customers.) I don’t know the answer to this question, but *Torah u-Madda* aficionados should look very carefully at the life and work of Reuven Agushewitz. Here is a man whose Talmudic novellae are graced by letters of approbation not only of R. Joseph Soloveitchik, but of R. Aharon Kotler (one of the few extant documents that contain both signatures). At the same time, his book is a robust, if talmudic-dialectic-

cal, attack on philosophical and dialectical materialism, the enormously influential atheist philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—rather than on the yeshivah world, of which he remained a part, despite his philosophical studies. (I was told by Feder that he was sent by halakhic *gedolim* on missions to free *agunot* from their chains.) At the same time, he makes no apologies for his philosophical erudition, nor does he attempt to find real and imaginary “sources” in Jewish history for what he is or what he is doing. His success in refuting atheism, if that is what it is, is self-justifying. All in all, I have found my encounter with R. Reuven z”l a very enlightening one, philosophically, linguistically, and spiritually.

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What follows is my translation of chapter twelve of *Emune un Apikorses* in its entirety. The chapter deals with what R. Agushewitz calls the “harbe” (baffling) problem of determinism [determinizm] and freedom [frayhayt]. The editor and I felt that this chapter presents an interesting, though not overly technical, sample of the high quality of his work, and that even experts in the field might learn something from his presentation. I offer the piece in his memory, *le-illuy nishmato*.

[Chapter Twelve of Emune un Apikorses]

Determinism and Freedom of the Will

A.

Those who accept determinism do not deny to humans the power of choice. Just as the indeterminists, they believe that each person is free to choose and to do what is good for him. So what then do they believe [vos den]? They hold that that very fact speaks for determinism: since a man does only what he chooses, and since he chooses only that which appears, in his eyes, to be the best for him—the outcome must be, that what he did must have appeared in his eyes to be the best for him and thus he had to choose it, which means that he could not have done other than what he did.

The determinist holds that this logical conclusion applies to the best just as to the worst and silliest deed. One who commits a murder in order to rid himself [poter tsu vern] of a little noise [tum] which his

victim used to make, had to do it, because it seemed to him at the time [beshas mayse], in his eyes, to be best for him. Of course, he will later have regrets [kharote]; he will find out, that his deed is associated with punishments which are far worse than a little noise and therefore this particular deed was not worth doing [nit gelaynt]. But this he could find out only later; at the time he did not have the punishments in mind, and therefore, at the time, he had to hold that what he did was more expedient for him.

But is it possible to overlook the electric chair or the other well known punishments meted out to a murderer? This, one says, is quite possible for persons on a low level [madreyge]. They are in this respect like animals, who are moved mainly by the present and very little by the future. The punishments for murder, which belong to the future, could not occupy any place in their deliberations [kheshboynes].

This is actually what we usually say concerning a murderer or a lecher [baltayve]—that he was blinded—what does that mean? It means simply, that he did not have at the time in mind anything else—something which could combat his lust.¹ Therefore this kind of blindness occurs more often with crude men who are closer to the level of an animal. Refined persons are not usually blinded so much by lust—why so? Because they stand on a more progressive stage of existence, their being is fuller and more active (in Spinoza’s expression), they give off sparks which make contact with what is far removed in time—in short, these persons have in mind at any given time [beshasmayse] the gains and the losses of the future, they therefore better can assess whether their deed is expedient or not; [in the words of the Mishnah,] the “wages of sin against the loss thereof” [*Avot* 2:1].

A third class of people is on even a higher level of existence. The existence of these people is so full and so active that it flows to the length and the breadth; it comes into contact even with that which is removed in space; such a person is moved even by the gain and loss of others. Of course, these people must take into account in their deliberations their altruistic or ethical feelings, and the result of these deliberations must be different from that of the other two classes. On the other hand, the deliberations of of this class, too, must lead to a determinate conclusion, which must be carried out—just as in the other two classes, the egoists; there is no difference in this particular between those who rule, and those ruled by, their harmful impulses.

According to determinism, man is no exception to nature—what issues from him is as determined [bashtimt] as a physical effect, which

issues from its cause, and if we knew well enough a person's character (his impulses and purposes) and his power of calculation we could quite well predict his decisions, just as we can predict a physical effect, when we know the cause. And just as in physics, where two equal and opposite forces neutralize one another, to the extent that neither of them is in a position to bring about an effect, so too in psychology, an equilibrium between two equal and opposite tendencies will never allow a decision. For example, if a person should be equally hungry and thirsty, and he is located at equal distances from food and drink, he will not be in a position to make a decision to move in one direction or another and he will inevitably remain in one place till he dies from hunger or thirst.

B.

The determinist knows quite well that his theory is not so easily swallowed, that it has difficulties on various sides—from epistemological, moral, and pragmatic standpoints. He holds, however, that he can contend [an eytze gebn] with these difficulties easily. What are the difficulties with determinism?

First, it is difficult in any case [stam shver] to believe that everything we do is something we must do as we do it. Take, for example, someone who sits on an easy chair smoking a cigarette. Look how he exhales the smoke in different ways: through the nose, the mouth, in different coils or in one column. Now just [aderabe] try to persuade him that when he blew the smoke in different directions he had to do it that way, he could not have blown the smoke in one column, as in fact he did a moment later.

Still less will he believe you, when you tell him the story [mayse] of Buridan's ass and you tell him that he himself would not behave differently, that he also would die from starvation or from thirst, unable to move from his place, because of indecision over whether to eat or drink. He would certainly be offended. He would say that he is no ass [ayzl]; he knows quite well that staying in one place is worse than anything. He knows, too, that it is possible to do both [efsher lekayem shneyhem; this Hebrew phrase is used by some medieval rabbis (*rishonim*) to set forth an exception to the usual rule that one who is occupied in doing a commandment is exempt from doing another one] that he has the option [breyre] to satisfy both his hunger and his thirst by going first to one and then to the other for sustenance [lebns mitl]. Which first and which later? He doesn't know meanwhile. He is however sure, that in such a

case he would, when it came to it [beshasmayse], have to decide on one side or the other.

These are difficulties from the epistemological standpoint. There are greater ones from the moral standpoint: if we assume that he who does evil or good was compelled to do what he did, he should not be punished or rewarded for his deeds, because a man is not responsible, and he gets no thanks, for deeds he is compelled to do. Nobody would blame another for a blow inflicted when the latter was thrown upon him by a gust of wind. Similarly, no one feels grateful to the official who doles out government aid for the poor or a pension for old people. More yet: deeds which a man is compelled to do are not even thought of as *his* deeds: we say not that the official paid out the pension, but the state; the official is taken only as an instrument through which the payments are made—so how can a person be punished or rewarded for deeds he didn't even do?

In reply to this it may be said that the principle of punishment and reward rests entirely on the basis of utility: it is useful for society to punish a criminal, in order to protect itself against the damage it is likely to suffer from his crimes, because the punishment has the effect of a whip to hold the criminal in check; the punishment serves the criminal himself as a counter-motive to reconsider his decision, against the motives which incline him to commit the crime. Likewise, it is useful for society to reward good behavior, in order that people should seek to do what is good for society.

This would be fine if punishment for evil deeds and reward for good deeds were only dry, mercenary [meykekh-umemker-dike] facts, to be disbursed [oystsoln] the way the owner [balebos] disburses wages to his workers, or the way a borrower [original has: malve, apparently an error] pays interest. But the matter is not so: good and evil evoke special feelings—feelings of praise and love toward the one who does good, and feelings of hate and contempt toward one who does evil—and what sort of justification is there for these feelings? Why should we praise somebody for deeds which he had to do, and which anybody would have done in the same circumstances? And further, why should we hate somebody else who is himself, unfortunately [nebekh], only a victim of circumstances?

On the other hand, there is a danger that these very calculations can have their own effect, and cause much harm to society; persons who adopt the determinist standpoint will cease to blame the criminals—why should somebody feel remorse for a murder when he knows that he

could not help himself, and he is therefore only like an outsider, a spectator who, likewise, could not help? And because this blame which we cast has the effect that next time the criminal is more likely to refrain from committing the same crime, the result is that determinism is likely to interfere with an effective war on crime.

The harm is increased by a psychological factor—a person employs more effort over something which he believes he can accomplish than over something which he doubts he can accomplish. The reasoning [seykhel] is simple: in the first case he is sure that the effort that he employs is not wasted; in the latter case he is not sure, and therefore he is afraid to invest [arayntsubrokn] too much effort. The result is, therefore, that one who believes in free will, and who is certain that he has enough power to combat every evil instinct—he will certainly more readily do, than he who believes that his power to combat the evil instinct is somewhat limited by the determinate amount of effort that he is in a position to exert and that perhaps it is predetermined that he will not be able to combat these evil instincts.

Inter alia, it emerges that determinism is liable to do great damage to society and that the idea of free will is therefore necessary for the way of progress. These are the difficulties that determinism faces from the pragmatic standpoint.

C.

The determinist, however, will not be overly impressed [nispoel] by these particular difficulties; for these objections [kashes] he has good replies [teyrutzim]—what are they?

(1) As for the difficulty [kashe] from the epistemological standpoint, every determinist knows how to repeat [ibertsukhazern] the answer Spinoza once gave to it: “Men think that they are free, because they are conscious of their wishes and appetites, while at the same time they are ignorant of the causes by which they are led to wish and desire, not dreaming what they are.”² In other words: because we do not know the causes of our wishes, we think that they have no causes, that they are free wishes.

In another place he says the same concerning our actions: “For instance, men are deceived because they think themselves free, and the sole reason for thinking so is that they are conscious of their own actions, and ignorant of the causes by which those actions are determined. Their idea of liberty therefore is this—that they know no cause for their own actions. . . .”³

According to this answer by Spinoza the result is, that the smoker who let out the smoke in different coils, was at that time [beshas mayse] compelled to do it by a determinate cause and he could not, therefore, have done otherwise. Merely because he has forgotten the cause—or perhaps never was conscious of it—he thinks that his present action was uncaused and he therefore could have done otherwise.

The same exact answer Spinoza gives to the query, whether a man would emulate Buridan's ass, if he found himself in the same situation. He says the following in the Note to Proposition XXXIX, Part II of his Ethics: "I entirely grant that if a man were placed in such a state of equilibrium he would perish of hunger and thirst, supposing he perceived nothing but hunger and thirst, and the food and drink which were equidistant from him."

Certainly this seems to us a little awkward: certainly we would conclude that a man, a rational being [bards], would in that situation find a way out [volt zikh gebn an eytze]; he would be able to do the trick [kunts] which children do when playing: they cast lots or count themselves. But this means only that a man would presumably [mistome] never find himself in such an asinine situation: he would certainly look for some cause [epes an urzakh], which would determine him to one action or another—the action which is predetermined by Nature from that cause, which is likely to come into his mind at the time. But should a man really find himself in the situation of Buridan's ass, he would at that time not be aware of any cause which could determine him to one side or another. Then he would really have to cast lots.

(2) Determinists have a similarly good response to the difficulty from the moral standpoint: why do we love him who does good and hate him who does evil, although both are due to circumstances compelled to do what they do? The answer is [iz der teretz] that these feelings are derived not from reasoning but from the societal instinct—an instinct which cannot usually be overcome by reasoning—what does this mean?

Just as we possess instinctive feelings which have the function to protect our personal survival, so too we possess instinctive feelings with the function of protecting the survival of society: we have therefore feelings which compel us to cultivate whatever is useful for society; the first are our feelings of hate and contempt for those who do evil and the second are our feelings of love and esteem for those who do good. The fact that a man must do that which he does does not alter the effect that his deeds have on the survival of society and therefore on our feelings.

But are we not inclined to forgive a sinner, when we discover that spe-

cial circumstances compelled him to commit the sin? Don't we cease loving and admiring somebody, when we discover that the good he did, did not come from a wish to serve society? So why in those cases is the effect on our feelings changed, although the effect on societal survival is not?

The answer is [iz der teretz], that in such cases the deeds themselves are shifted from one category to another—we discover that those deeds do not belong to the category of deeds for which we possess instinctive wishes to punish or reward, but they belong to the category of neutral deeds, which are not relevant [noygea] to our social instincts. Why is this? Because sin which is committed under special circumstances is not at all harmful for society, because special or unusual circumstances usually do not exist and the sin is usually then not committed at all. Similarly, when one does good, but not for a social motive, for example, when a doctor “accepts” a high fee for treating a patient, then he is in any case rewarded for his deeds and therefore they don't belong to the category of deeds which our social instinct compels us to reward.

(3) As for the pragmatic difficulties, the determinist is hardly in a stew over them [makht zikh bikhlal a knapn tsimmes]: it might be [ken zayn] that it is better to believe in free will, but the issue here is not what pays but what is—that it pays to believe in free will does not make the will free. Aside from this, the determinist can point to the merits [mayles] of believing in determinism, and in his eyes these merits are far greater than the drawbacks [khesroynes].

One of these merits is precisely that it introduces an element of reasoning in a place where formerly instinct reigned; it gives humanity the opportunity to have its voice heard where the beast in us had the sole say. How so? When we know that the criminal himself is nothing but a failure and that he could not in his situation help himself, we have more understanding for him, and our conduct towards him is based more upon reason than on the passions of the moment. We understand that we must punish him and sometimes even eliminate him, just as a gardener must weed out harmful plants from the garden; but at the same time we must also have compassion for him, and look as far as possible to sweeten the bitter medicine [trofn] which we are forced to administer.

Another merit, which is much more important than the first one, is that believing in determinism reveals for us the ways and objectives of education: if human wishes and actions follow from their causes as surely as physical effects follow from their causes, then they should be able to be brought forth in the same artful way as physical effects, and thus in the future we should be able to bring forth generations of angels;

all that we need is to be acquainted enough with the causes from which good wishes stem and to produce those causes, i.e. to create a perfect psychology and a perfect education.⁴

On the other hand, the determinist holds that the drawbacks of believing in determinism are in practice much smaller than they appear in theory, because in practice he who believes in determinism will condemn crime and will struggle to prevent it no less than he who believes in free will. Why? Because freedom of the will is an illusion and like every illusion it never ceases to operate even in him who knows that it is an illusion; just as the sun appears near and small even when we know already that it is very far and very large, so will we feel and act as though our will were free, even when we know that it is not.⁵

D.

Of course, the determinists do not content themselves with defense, but go over to the attack; they point to difficulties connected with indeterminism. These difficulties are primarily logical; indeterminism appears quite nonsensical, when we try to formulate it explicitly [im aroysbren-gen min hasofe el hakhutz]. Here is why:

Indeterminism can be stated in two ways: (a) Either we suddenly receive new ideas or wishes—ideas or wishes which are not a continuation of the old causal lines; or else (2) The causality of some of our old ideas and wishes can be extended, more or less, so that we can accomplish with them something more than we have already accomplished—in other words, we always are in a position to exert ourselves a little more and overcome [goyver zayn] the evil inclination [yeytzerhore], i.e. the wishes which impel us to do evil or refrain from doing good.⁶

There is a great difference between these two ways in the matter of freedom: according to the first way, freedom is not *our* freedom—the receipt of a new idea or wish does not turn on us; we are only a passive medium in which an idea or a wish intrudes [khapt zikh arayn] like a transmigrating soul [gilgul] and compels us to act according to its dictates. By contrast, freedom is *our* freedom; we ourselves at the time [beshas mayse] must be active and everything turns on us ourselves.

These two ways are both blocked by the same rule of causality, which requires that every effect must follow from a cause and from every cause must follow the same effect. According to this rule both ways are necessarily impossible—it is not possible for a new idea to originate of itself, nor for more to follow from the idea than what has already followed.

Possibly the logical difficulties with the first way are not so great as what some determinists think, because there is no real contradiction between assuming that something can come from nothing, i.e. that what has not existed at one time should not exist in another time.⁷ But on the other hand this particular way must be rejected because we meet therein all the difficulties which have been presented here in connection with determinism—difficulties which cannot be defeated in the way the determinists defeated them.

First we have the difficulty from the epistemological standpoint: precisely the actions which we take for free are taken as though they followed from our exertions and not from an external source, which does not demand from us any activity. We should not forget that free will is taken to be the same thing as self-rule, which certainly requires exertion.

Then we have the difficulty from the moral standpoint: if a man's good and bad deeds follow from ideas or wishes, which intrude themselves on him fortuitously, then it is not just [yoysherdig] and even useless to judge him according to his deeds, because he who is today compelled by some fortuitous idea to do a good deed can tomorrow be compelled by another fortuitous idea to do a bad deed, and vice versa.

The same holds from a pragmatic standpoint: we find here all of the drawbacks and none of the benefits which are connected with determinism. The result is, that an indeterminist who rejects determinism because of the above difficulties can certainly not accept indeterminism of the first "way," which manifests the very same difficulties, magnified—why would anybody barter a shoe for a slipper [oysbaytn a shukh oyf a laptshe]?

Nothing remains, therefore, for the indeterminist but the second "way." But this way seems to be logically impossible—how can we make a bigger effort than what we make? The indeterminist has the following dilemma: [mimah nafshokh]: if we can, and it is expedient, to make a greater effort to do something or to oppose something, why, then, don't we make the effort? If, on the other hand, it is not expedient, why would we ever make the effort?

Perhaps it will be said, that it is expedient to make the effort, but we don't make it, because we do not *know* that it is expedient. But then we cannot make the effort, because out of ignorance we will have to assume that the effort is not expedient, and we will therefore have to act as though it is not expedient.

But could it not be that if we were to suspend judgement temporarily [abissele upvartn mit unser bashlus] we would discover the truth,

that it is indeed expedient? The answer, however, is, that this itself requires effort and therefore we have the same dilemma all over again: if it is expedient to make the effort, we must make it; if not, not. The second “way” thus also fails to achieve an indeterminist philosophy.

E.

As it now appears, the determinists are quite robust [ayzn shtark] both in their self defense and in their offensive against indeterminism, and therefore they believe, in fact, that they have their complete victory in their pockets. We should remind them of one thing that they have not kept in mind, however—a thing which has a double action, one which undercuts [upshvakhn] their self defense and shatters [tsebrekht] their offensive. What is it?

In order to have a net determination, all relevant factors must be determinate; if one of the factors is indeterminate, so is the whole. $1+2+x=3+x$, but if we don't know the value of x , we don't know the value of the total. The outcome is that if all our actions follow from a determinate decision, which is a weighted sum of what is and what is not expedient, the magnitude [mos] of expediency and in expediency of each factor must be determinate—otherwise no determinate decision results.

This does not mean that in order to make a decision, we must know exactly the magnitude of pleasure or pain, that each action can cause for us. Certainly it is enough that we should know in general that this action is more expedient than any other, even if we should not know how much more exactly. But some kind of comparison between actions we must make in our calculations and therefore our actions must be comparable—this is an absolute requirement for the possibility of calculation.

We have no difficulty with this requirement if our calculations take account only of pragmatic motives—expediency and in expediency. Here everything can be evaluated and certainly will be evaluated, either instinctively or with deliberation [yishev hadas], by finding out the advantages [mayles] and drawbacks [khesroynes] of each action. What happens [vi iz uber] when the calculations must take into account moral motives—which are independent of issues of expediency—how is it possible to compare such motives with pragmatic motives?

For example, when the issue is whether to go to the theater after a hard day's work, then we can quite well calculate a decision by representing to ourselves its advantages and drawbacks and seeing what outweighs what. When one imagines, on the one hand, the pleasures of seeing nice

sights, of laughing, and of escaping [oyston zikh] from the daily grind [vokhendikeit—this is hard to translate, since the author appears to see the theater as nothing but a poor substitute for shabbes]; and, on the other hand, the effort of driving to the theater while exhausted, coming home late, and having to show up for work tomorrow without a good night's sleep, then we can pose the question clearly: is it more expedient to pay this much pain for that much pleasure?⁸ The answer will then come of itself [mimeyle] because somewhere in the mind or in our feelings there sits an accountant who occupies himself with this sort of addition and subtraction—the arithmetic of expediency. When it comes to profiting from a falsification, one who avoids falsehood out of moral motives will have to turn to two different departments: to the department of expediency and to the department of moral obligation, and from each department he will receive a different answer. Which of the two answers should prevail? What sort of calculation should determine the answer?

F.

A determinist will surely say that the answer will be determined by the importance of the department from whence come the different answers, or, rightly put, from the importance which each department has for each individual separately: one who takes greater account of the department of pragmatic issues will perforce accept the answer that comes from the pragmatic department; another who takes greater account of the department of moral issues will perforce accept the answer that comes from the moral department.

This reply would not be bad if in such cases the deliberation each time were short and easy, because since from each department the verdict [psak halokhe] comes immediately, without vacillation and without calculations, and because each person has already decided in advance which of the departments is more important for him and in whose favor the verdict will be (according to the determinist, [Arthur] Schopenhauer, this is already decided for each individual at his birth), there need be no deliberation over the verdict. But the facts are otherwise [iz ober di zakh nit azoy]; very often such a decision requires much effort and much time—when we demand of someone, under threat of death, that he betray his friend or his idea, he will certainly ask for time to deliberate and in that time his brain will work very rigorously [shtark] until he comes to a firm conclusion. What happens during that time? And in what does the effort consist?

It will perhaps be said that the time and the effort are filled up with

a battle between the advisors [yoyatzim] of the different departments; during this time a hot discussion goes on in which each side sets forth his arguments. The end of the discussion, the decision, can be determined in advance, by the character of the men in whom the discussion takes place: in one, morally inclined, the Good Inclination will prevail; in another, pragmatically inclined, the Evil Inclination will prevail.

But even this appears a bit difficult: what does a calculation between moral and pragmatical values even look like, when they are incommensurable? We could, nevertheless, say that in the case under discussion, the moral values alone are calculated, because life itself has a moral value as well and one is therefore not required—and is even morally forbidden—to sacrifice one's own life except for morally overriding motives.

For us Jews even this is a weak reply, because a Jew must not make these particular calculations by himself—our Sages, of blessed memory, already made it for him; in Tractate Sanhedrin 74, it is precisely determined, when a Jew must give up his life and when not. A scholar [a yid a talmidkhokhem], who is morally inclined, therefore, should not have to deliberate, when he faces such a trial [nisoyen]. The facts, however, are different; not only did Jews like that often deliberate (for example, R. Amnon, author of the poem “Unesaneh Toykef” of the Yom Kippur liturgy, who asked for three days to deliberate before giving up his life as a martyr during the Crusades), but some could not withstand the ordeal. And there is no doubt that among the Marranos there were often to be found very good Jews [fayne yidn], who even after their failure [durkhfal] fought like lions once again.

Even concerning these cases some will find excuses. Particularly those who seek to underrate the moral attributes of the Jews will certainly argue that in these situations of deliberations before martyrdom the time was occupied by crass calculations, weighing rewards [khelek livyosen, lit. the piece of the Leviathan promised to the righteous] in the next world [oylemhabe] against temporal existence [khayesho'e] in this one. But if this could be said concerning the time of the deliberation before an ordeal, this is no answer whatever to the efforts of those enduring the trials [baale nisoyen]—the efforts which are the apex [smetene] of every lofty moral action, and about which both the Midrash and the best of world literature speak so much.⁹

It should not be forgotten, either, that to exert effort means to add something; when someone exerts himself during a battle or when carrying a heavy weight he adds force [kraft] which he had previously reserved, or which is generated at the time through certain glands.

Therefore, the concept of exertion does not apply [khal] to activities of a thing which cannot at the time of the event add anything—for this reason we cannot say that a wind or another inanimate being exerts effort. For the same reason the concept of exertion does not apply to our wishes if at the time we cannot add anything to them.

G.

But perhaps the determinist can also admit this premise of adding a wish? Perhaps the determinist can say that although a wish can at the time be added to, this particular addition is itself predetermined, i.e. this particular addition must under such and such circumstances, have been added?

Let the determinist admit this premise, he will then necessarily run up against [onshtoysh oyf] a manifest [ofenem] contradiction; if we must add to a wish, we must wish to add to it, i.e. we must wish to will more than we will; and if we wish to will more, then we wish it already, and we need not add any other wish.

True, the indeterminist cannot avoid this contradiction either. But the indeterminist at least is located on a terrain which he can more or less defend against this terrible weapon, while the determinist is not located on such a favorable terrain. Now, in what respect is this so?

The difference between determinism and indeterminism lies chiefly in how they interpret [oystaytshung] the rule of causality: the determinist is sure that the rule of causality can be interpreted only as having necessity and universality; every effect whether a wish or a power, human [medaber] or otherwise, can therefore follow only from a sufficient cause [grund], i.e. a cause which already had in itself everything that is in the effect, and the effect is not more than a combination of what was in the cause uncompounded. By contrast, the indeterminist does not regard himself as such an authority [halt zikh nit far aza mumkhe] on the interpretation of the rule of causality; he holds that our cognition is insufficient to give the rule of causality such a far-reaching exegesis.

The indeterminist can therefore allow quite will [gants gut] the postulate, that in some realm or other [epes a gebit] causality may not rule in complete authority [bekhol toykfo], that in a conflict between expediency and moral obligation there can be added a little wish [a bisele vuntsh], created at the time. The determinist cannot on any account [beshum oyfn] allow such a postulate; from the determinist standpoint, every bit of

wish must follow automatically from the given causes and the possibility of drawing forth a wish through exertion is consequently excluded.

H.

But does not reason justify [git rekht] the determinist? Does not logic require us to assume that there is a sufficient ground for every effect and when there is such a ground the effect necessarily follows? Can we then, concerning our moral actions themselves avoid the query: what makes it the case that we should draw out this or that particular wish, why should we exert our effort? What then will the indeterminist reply to this question? How can he contend with [git zikh an eytze] the logical requirements of his own reason?

These are questions which cause the indeterminist initially quite a headache [fil kop veytog]. But after he considers the matter more deeply these questions cease to torment [matern] him; he is no longer overawed [nispoel] by these logical demands upon his reason. Why? Because just as there are illusions of the senses, so too are there illusions of reason, and he discovers that these logical demands in their fullest extent, have indeed all the signs of illusions. Now, what are the signs of an illusion?

One sign is what we find mostly in our dreams: a dream presents a cognition which we know that under the existing circumstances we should not be in a position to cognize—for example, while lying in a bed in New York I dream that I am speaking to my brother who lives, surprisingly enough [gor], in the Land of Israel. The same goes for the logical demands upon our reason; we are presented with a cognition concerning the universality of the rule of causality, while we know that our reason cannot be in any position to draw a conclusion like this for every corner of the universe.¹⁰

Another sign of illusion is a contradiction between one cognition and another, so that one of them perforce must be an illusion. We have this case, for example, in our cognition of the sun which represents it as a disk a few feet large, while other cognitions show us, that the sun is very large. This is true also for determinism, which contradicts all three aspects of our cognition of indeterminism: (a) our feeling that the will is free; (b) our ability to weigh expediency against moral obligation, a “calculus of incommensurables,” and to arrive at a decision; (c) our ability to exert effort on behalf of that decision.

A third sign of illusion allows us to choose between contradictory cognition, to determine which of them is true and which an illusion.

What is this sign? A true cognition has its ground in the cognized object itself, while an illusion has its ground in something else. For example, the cognition that the sun is very small has its ground not in the sun itself, but in the distance from the sun, because everything appears from afar smaller than it is. This we have also with the cognition of determinism—determinism has a subjective ground, one which comes from our own reason. How so?

The function of our reason is to inquire concerning the continuity of effects—from what something follows and what something leads to. This is, therefore, the only thing that our reason can take note of; for a discontinuity reason has no “eyes.” Furthermore, for everything reason approaches, it must proceed with the hypothesis [deye] that there is a continuity of effects, for otherwise, there is nothing there to inquire. For this reason [meyhay tayme] it must proceed as well with the hypothesis that this continuity is determined—from the same cause must follow the same effect—because only a determined continuity allows inquiry. For example, should ice follow from heat as well as cold, then we would never be able to know where ice comes from. Accordingly [kumt oys], our reason must approach everything with a determinist prejudice; in other words, the ground for assuming determinism lies not in the cognized object but in our own reason [seykhel].

I.

But if all the signs show that determinism is an illusion, why have most philosophers and scientists not discovered it—indeed, they happen to be inclined to the belief that *indeterminism* is the illusion!¹¹ Are not the philosophers and scientists the biggest experts [hoypm mumkhem] on exposing illusions? Not only do they catch exaggerations, they inquire concerning illusions even in cognitions which have hardly [knap] any signs of an illusion. So why, as a matter of fact, are they not in a position to recognize here (in determinism) such manifest signs of illusion?

The answer [teretz] to this difficulty [kashe] is actually [grod], not hard to find—this error originates in the slightly deviant nature [abisl andersh fun umatum] of this particular illusion: in general, where there is a conflict between the senses and reason, we find the illusion on the side of the senses and the true cognition on the side of reason, while here it is actually the opposite, the illusion is located on the side of reason and the true cognition is represented by our feeling of freedom. And this deviance should have the power to mislead philosophers and

scientists even more than other people, because philosophers and scientists are accustomed to take the side of reason always [shtendig].

This is an error which comes only from custom—one is accustomed to the role of reason in criticizing the senses and not the reverse. Another thing which can mislead is the following—when we philosophize or pursue inquiry, reason is alone in the field; the feeling of true freedom (not the freedom to calculate what is expedient) is never heard from at the time. Why? Because in order that a feeling should be heard from we must have at the time at least a clear recollection of it—but how can we have a clear recollection of something that we do not understand, something against reason?

All this means, that when we treat the problem of freedom of the will, we indeed have not true freedom in mind—the freedom we experience while making an exertion to do what we ought to do. What kind of a freedom should we have in mind when we speculate concerning determinism and indeterminism? Only a fiction, a freedom, which is fabricated momentarily [beshasmayse]. This kind of freedom is in fact nothing but an illusion; worse, it is a speculation of something of which we know only that it is against our reason.

A third cause for self-deception in the matter of freedom is that many people experience it very seldom themselves. We should not forget that free will is not a cheap guest; it stays in very expensive hotels [akhsanyes], in people who are located on a high moral stage. But concerning this we will have further occasion to speak.

J.

There is a final point about which the determinists make a big fuss [vezn]—the point concerning induction. What is that? Indeterminism purports to present a phenomenon which we never meet up with in all nature; all in nature is strongly deterministic; everything follows the requirement of the law of causality. How can it be plausible that there is one thing which rebels against that very law, constitutes an exception?

First the fact must be mentioned, that there is a big doubt whether the law of causality really rules over all nature. As a matter of fact [grod], recently there are many scientists who doubt whether the elements of certain atoms actually submit to the law. And certainly they must have a good reason for this doubt of theirs. But even if we suppose that the causal law rules over all other things, from this it does not follow that man, too, and certainly not every man, is subject to it. A glance

at the technique of inductive logic will show us that such an induction cannot be made.

The technique of induction consists usually in the formation of rules through observed instances. For example, we observe many instances where oxen do not bite people, so we thereby make a rule by induction, that oxen do not bite people. The logic of this technique is the logic of likeness: things that are alike must possess the same nature. It is not hard to show that this logic has the same source as the causality rule which requires that like causes bring out like effects.

The same rule requires, that like effects must follow from like causes—and this really is the logic of the complicated technique of induction, in the case where the matter of induction takes also into account differences and the rule is manufactured only by picking elements of similarity. For example, when we observe that different things fall to earth, logic prompts us to say that the effect of falling follows from something which is common to all these things. Once we discover the common element [tzad hashove], and connect the effect with this alone, we conclude subsequently with a simple induction, like the talmudic argument by generalization [mah motzinu]—from this common element the same effect will always follow, and everything, insofar as it has that common element, will always manifest the same effect.¹²

In an induction, therefore, the conclusion is only by likeness. And if so we shall never be able to conclude by induction that what we have found elsewhere in nature will be found in the spiritual side of people, because the spiritual side of people is quite different from the rest of nature: man has reason, ideals, and other spiritual properties which the other things in nature do not have. And just as man is different in these properties, so can he be different with respect to causality.

K.

Perhaps the determinist will say that although a person *can* be different from all other things concerning causality, it is logical to assume that he is not different, because just as he can be different so might he be no different, and, because of the uncertainty, it is more plausible, rather, to say that he is no different from all existing things, or, at least, from most of them. This is what we say in general, where there is a doubt whether something is like or unlike most things—”majority rules” [Heb., *aḥarei rabbim le-hatot* (Ex. 23,2); the judicial principle of following the majority is derived through a midrashic reading of these words, cf. Mishnah

Sanhedrin 6:1]. So why should we not say the same concerning humans in the matter of causality?

It is, however, not difficult to show that the logic of the majority has also to do with likeness and that which is explicitly dissimilar is not subject to this particular logic. We can see this by considering a concrete example of majority and paying attention to how the logic works there.

Consider the following case: on a ship where most of the passengers are American it would be logical to assume, of every unknown passenger, that he or she is an American. Why? Because in this detail, of being a passenger, the unknown instance is the same as every other one on the ship, and because on the ship, there are more Americans than non-Americans, the unknown is more like the Americans than like non-Americans; if on the ship there were 100 Americans and only 10 non-Americans, then since the unknown passenger has an equal chance to be any of them, then he has a hundred chances to be an American and only ten chances to be a non-American, and the bottom line is, therefore, that the odds are ten to one that he is an American.¹³ This is fine [alts gut] where we are dealing with something which is like the majority. But when we are dealing with something unlike the majority, then this logic falls away. For example, from the fact that the majority of the passengers on the ship are American, we cannot conclude that the furniture or the machinery on the ship are American.

L.

Another thing should be observed, that man is not just plain “different” from other existing things, but rather his difference carries determining signs of indeterminism: he is different in that he possesses the conditions for indeterminism—conditions which are lacking in other existing things whose nature we know more or less.

What are the conditions of indeterminism? First, what is required is the reality of different directions, a fork in the road. Then it is required that the relation between the different directions should be such as gives the possibility to determine which direction should more likely lead to the destination. Besides these two objective requirements there is also a subjective one, namely that the “driver” should not keep his eyes trained in one direction only, but should continually pause and look around in order to observe the different directions which present themselves to him.

These requirements are very well met by humans—particularly by

one who is on a higher moral plane [madreyge], a person who sets himself high ideal goals which he tries to achieve.

First, such a person must have before him different directions, a direction of pragmatic interests and a direction of moral interests; on the one hand, he is pulled by the desires of a simple flesh-and-blood human being, and on the other hand he is attracted by some ideal which is found often enough in the opposite direction. For example, when you tell a Mussarite [musarnik, an adherent of a school of Jewish ethics, founded in the 19th century by R. Israel Salanter of Lithuania] about an exceedingly humble person [groysn onov], you will evoke in him feelings of admiration and envy, i.e. he will wish to be also one who flees from honor [boyreakh min hakoved]. But since he is not (yet) on this high plane, he will simultaneously crave a little honor [abissele koved] on the side, so altogether you will have in him a conflict [vayisroytsetsu, cf. Gen. 25:22] between two opposed desires.

But a conflict between desires can be found as well in men who are on a lower moral level. One who is interested only in pursuing pleasure, can stand before the problem, whether it pays for him to spend so much money for one pleasure or another. But there it is a question only concerning the amount of pleasure—it is only a question of which direction can produce the most pleasure—and this can be determined only through the directions themselves; everything we need to do is only to calculate how many drops of pleasure will rain upon us in each one of the two directions. By contrast, in the conflict between pragmatic and moral interests it is a matter of weighing desires which are incommensurable—a truly humble person must flee honor, whether in small or great measure. In this way the second requirement of indeterminism is fulfilled—the relation between the different directions is such that the proper direction cannot be determined.

In the same way the third requirement of indeterminism—a person who is on a higher moral plane [madreyge] does not rush [aylt zikh nit] to follow a desire, because he is accustomed to meditate over [nokht-suklern] decisions, to “calculate the loss caused by fulfilling a commandment [Heb. *mizvah*] against the gain therefrom and the gain accrued by committing a sin [Heb. *averah*] against the loss therefrom”. [Avot 2:1, quoted in the Hebrew original]” Such a person has time also for the effort required by freedom.

On the other hand, it is certainly [avade] superfluous to demonstrate, that other objects in the Universe do not fulfill these requirements for indeterminism and therefore it is nonsensical to conclude from these

other objects that Man as well is not indeterministic. It is as though we were to conclude that on our Earth there are no animals or plants, since we see [baasher bkhen] that on the sun, the moon, and most planets, the requirements for living organisms like this are missing.

M.

Finally, it will not be superfluous to dedicate a few words to the question of whether the belief in determinism or indeterminism is more socially progressive. We have already seen that there are arguments on both sides [mitsad hasvore ken men zogn azoy un azoy] it is possible to speculate concerning the virtues of determinism and of indeterminism. It remains, then, to consult experience; perhaps there, rather, we will find an answer to this question.

How do we, however, consult [vendt men zikh tsu] experience? Take a poll? Investigate everybody's beliefs and character? Of course, we cannot do this "on one foot." There is, however, an easier way: there are philosophies and religions which have accepted determinism or indeterminism. We can see the fruits of these philosophies and religions, what effect they have on their adherents.

As for philosophies, it would seem, that we cannot find a better example than the case of the Epicureans and the Stoics, which arose almost at the same time, about 2,300 years ago. These two philosophical schools au fond [in toykh] were quite close—close in their physical theory and close in their ethics. Where they parted ways was in the question of causality and of freedom—the Epicureans were determinist, the Stoics believed that everything depends on the will.¹⁴

And what was the outcome of this difference? Everyone can find out easily enough by consulting [areinkukn] any encyclopedia or history of ancient Greece. He will see, that while because of its good influence, Stoicism has the reputation of the noblest pagan philosophy, the Epicureans at the same time earned the nickname, swine. Stoicism succeeded in putting out a line of first class thinkers and moralists, while Epicureanism continually spawned lazy bums [poylentser], gluttons, and drunkards [zoylevesoyve, Heb. *zolel ve-sove*; cf. Deut 21:20].

As for religion, we find the same good example in the case of our cousins, the Arabs. There once was a time, which cultured Arabs certainly regard as their Golden Age; a religion which was modeled upon our faith (in distinction from Christianity, which puts less weight on good works [Heb. *mizvot ma'asiyot*]) woke them from their primeval

slumber and guided them to progressive activity in almost every realm. It did not take long till these former desert people surpassed [aribergeshtign] all the civilized nations of that time. But suddenly all of this came to an end. What happened?

In the Islamic religion the Ash`arite party, who believed in determinism, slowly came to power—in contradistinction to the Mu`tazalites, who believed in free will. Beginning in the twelfth century the latter party was persecuted in all parts of the Islamic cultural world: in Baghdad, in Egypt, and in Spain. And precisely in that period the Arabs begin to revert to their cultural desert—so deep was the effect of the difference between believing in determinism and believing in free will.¹⁵

Experience shows, then, and in vivid colors, that for human progress, it is more expedient that men should believe in free will.

N.

But what do we gain if the belief in free will is expedient for human progress? Does this expediency have make any difference? Is a theory then “truer” if it is expedient to believe in it?

This is certainly a good point [shtarke tayne] concerning philosophy. The matter is quite different when the subject is religion. Here expediency makes a big difference—whether a religion is true or false depends in large measure on whether its postulates are expedient for human progress or not. How so?

We have seen earlier [in this book] that religion consists of two parts: (1) Belief in G-d; (2) Belief in prophecy. The first has to do with the existence of an unknown Power; the second, with our relationship to this very Power: what he demands of us and the reward and punishment connected with these demands.

It is not difficult to realize, that the question of determinism or indeterminism is not connected with the first part of religion, because since the first part does not take into account the relationship between us and the unknown Power, nor, then, does it take into account the relationship between our wills and this Power. For the believer there are, therefore, two ways open: he can assume, that G-d determines every one of our desires, just as he can assume that He leaves room for freedom of the will;¹⁶ thus, indeed, there are religions that include the belief in indeterminism as well as, respectively, determinism.

What causes a religion to adopt the former or the latter? This has entirely to do with the second part of religion, with its prophecy (later

we will see what is meant by the concept of prophecy). And since the task of prophecy is to cognize or become acquainted with the commands of that unknown Power, the question of determinism and indeterminism perforce bound up with the question, what are the commands of the unknown Power—if these commandments should presuppose belief in determinism, then a true prophecy must cognize determinism; and if the commandments presuppose belief in indeterminism then a true prophecy must cognize indeterminism.

We shall see later, that the commandments of the Unknown Power presuppose what is good for human progress. From this it follows, that if the belief in indeterminism is good for human progress, then a true prophecy must presuppose such a belief—it must cognize and acquaint us with indeterminism—because if not, it would not be presented correctly the commandments of the Unknown Power and perforce not be a true prophecy.

O.

Others argue, however, that prophecy cannot presuppose belief in indeterminism, because the two are in contradiction [tartey desasrei]: prophecy means to foresee, i.e. to determine in advance what will be in the future, which is the opposite of indeterminism, of which the simple meaning [taytsh] is indeterminacy regarding the future. Prophecy and indeterminism give the lie one to another—so how is it possible that both should be true, nay more, that one of them should be presupposed in the belief in the other?

It must immediately be remarked, that the logic of contradiction requires only, that opposites should not be represented as the same thing; it does not require, however, that they should not be represented in different things: it is a contradiction to hold that the same thing should both exist and not exist, but it is not a contradiction to hold that one thing exists and the other does not. Therefore prophecy and indeterminism can both be true, although the two are in contradiction, because they refer to different things—since indeterminism has to do only with free will, prophecy can have to do with anything that is not in the category of free will.

It should not be forgotten, that what is not included in the domain of free will represents a very large territory, so large that there is plenty of room for prophecy. For example, there is enough room for prophecy to determine the commandments of the Unknown Power, a determina-

tion which should represent the highest task of prophecy. Similarly there should be enough room for prophecy to determine what is morally good and evil, a determination which should represent the essence of the Commandments of the Unknown Power. Or again, there should be enough room for prophecy to determine the consequences of good or evil, reward and punishment. Finally, there should be enough room for prophecy to determine the ways that lead to good or evil, the Ways of Life [Heb. *orhot hayyim*]

It should not be forgotten what has already been mentioned, that free will is not a cheap guest, he lodges only with the special few [Heb. *yeḥidei segulah*]. In this way, prophecy can determine even what a man usually does, because his usual behavior is deterministic. Furthermore, prophecy can predict what will happen with a group [klal]—with people or with the world—because the small elite [Heb. *benei aliyah*] found within the group will probably come to nothing [botl vern] within it, so that the elite will not have the power to reverse the course [kireven dem rod] of their society. On the other hand, from this point of view, there is no certainty in this sort of prophecy and even a prophecy concerning a group could be overturned—as was the prophecy of Jonah concerning Nineveh.

This particular example shows quite clearly that we are dealing here not with ignorant hypotheses [boykh svores], but with the viewpoint of the Jewish religion. I believe that it is not necessary here to cite Jewish texts to establish the fact, that according to the Jewish religion a prophecy concerning men or people can be overturned [botl vern]—as in the talmudic expression from Sanhedrin 89: “Perhaps he had regrets.” On the other hand, we do see fit to cite the famous Midrash of the Jerusalem Talmud (Makkot 2:6): “They asked wisdom, what is the punishment for a sinner? She answered, ‘Evil will pursue the sinner.’ They asked prophecy, what is the punishment for a sinner? She answered: ‘The soul of the sinner shall perish.’ Finally, they asked G-d: What is the punishment of a sinner? G-d answered, ‘Let him repent, so that he be forgiven.’ ”

This will have to suffice [mit dem veln mir yoytze zayn] concerning the baffling [harber] problem of determinism and indeterminism, as we go over to the third argument of the materialists, which will be treated in the next chapter.

Notes

1. This standpoint is taken by our Torah, which demands that a criminal must be warned when he commits the crime, in order to bring into his mind the full harm [shod] associated with his deed. This thought is explicitly expressed by one of our Rabbis [tanoim] who therefore holds that “A scholar [haver, talmidkhokhem] needs no warning, because warnings are given only to distinguish between inadvertent and deliberate actions.” The majority of our sages go even further. They hold that this standpoint of our Torah applies even to scholars. Even more, they hold that the human mind can be so caught up in lust, that he may not be in any position even to take heed [derhern] even of an explicit warning; a criminal can therefore not be punished with the biblically ordained punishment unless he states explicitly that he knows the punishment associated with his deed and is doing it anyhow. Of course, the result of this standpoint is that it is impossible to punish a criminal, and in order to defend society our sages had to administer to criminals a passive measure—prison [kipe]. Later we will see why this does not contradict the standpoint of indeterminism, which is assumed in our religion.
2. [Translator’s note: I have used the Hafner library translation of the *Ethics* in giving this quotation, from the Appendix to Part I of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, rather than translating the Yiddish version.]
3. [Translator’s note: *Ethics*, Part II, Proposition XXXV, Note. Here again, and in the next quotation from the *Ethics*, I have used the Hafner edition for the translation.]
4. Today’s determinists reject Schopenhauer’s hypothesis that a bad character cannot be made over. They believe, indeed, in eugenics, in the heritability of character, but they hold that appropriate circumstances can improve, bit by bit, even a bad character. See the chapter concerning freedom of the will in Cunningham’s *Problems of Philosophy*. [Cunningham, G. Watts. *Problems of Philosophy. An Introductory Survey*. New York: Henry Holt, 1924.—M. S.]
5. See the Note to Proposition XXXV, Part Two, of Spinoza’s *Ethics*.
6. See the chapter on willing in William James, *Psychology* [1890], particularly p. 455, where he says, “In the experience of exertion we feel as though we could do more or less than what we actually do in one moment.”
7. This has already been discussed at length in my book, *Principles*, pp. 174-192.
8. [Translator’s note: The way the author poses the question, I want to go to sleep right now—he seems, however, insensitive to the issue of decision under a description, i.e. that the same action can be described in many ways, and these alternative descriptions may well be relevant to their expediency.]
9. As an example in world literature it suffices to mention Tolstoy’s “Resurrection.” For our sages, again, the only absolute might is “Who is mighty? He who conquers his own lust” [*Avot* 4:1].
10. It appears that the determinist is completely blind to this limitation of our reason and this is the origin of his exaggerated gnosticism: it is also the origin of Spinoza’s opinion that he knew the ways of heaven just as well as he knew the streets of Amsterdam [Translator’s Note: This of course is an allusion to the Talmudic sage and astronomer Samuel, who knew the ways of the heavens just as well as he know the streets of his home town in

Babylonia]; the origin of Schopenhauer's self-deception, that he had detected [dertapt] in the will the true noumena, the thing in and for itself that Kant had held that with our reason we will never discover; and finally, the origin of the materialist certainty that there exists nothing but what the senses can perceive.

11. Of course, this is said only of most philosophers. A minority of philosophers has long exposed the illusion of determinism. So did the ancient skeptics, and Kant came to the same conclusion. The problem [khisorn] with Kant, however, was that he stumbled into a web of weak postulates [shvakhe hanokhes] and weak proofs and in this mountain of copper, the bit of gold was lost [farfaln].
12. I say "insofar", because the conclusion of an induction cannot be extended [oysshpreytn] from the common element to something else with which it is related [farbunden], i.e. that if a thing should include other elements apart from the common element, then we cannot conclude that the effect which is connected to the common element is also connect with these other elements. For example, we can conclude only that the body of a man is subject to gravity, but not his ideas.
13. It will perhaps be said that this particular example presents only one kind of majority, while in fact there is another sort—the majority of opinions, for example, when a conference adopts the judgment of the majority. This case is not the same, however, to the sort of majority which sets forth the relation of the other existing things to men and therefore it should not concern us if the case of majority opinion should be based upon another logical principle. But the truth is that it appears that even the case of majority opinion is based on the logic of likeness. Why do we accept the judgment of the majority against the judgment of the minority? Because since every person's judgment expresses that which he sees in the matter, and because the matter must have some appearance of—i.e. some resemblance to—what each person sees in it, the matter must therefore have more resemblance to what the majority sees in it. Therefore, indeed [tak'e], when an opinion does not express an appearance of the thing—for example, when it is a matter of an opinion of one who knows nothing concerning the thing but is trying simply to guess [glat tref]—then it is of no value, and nobody will take such an opinion into account in deliberation.
14. One will recall what has already been stressed, that materialism is based on two postulates: (1) that everything that exists must be connected with matter; (2) everything follows from the law of causality. The first postulate was accepted even by the Stoics—they, too, believed that everything that exists must be connected with matter and that our ideas originate in impressions on our brain matter which is at birth a "tabula rasa," an empty slate. Just so is the moral theory of the Stoics similar to that of the Epicureans—the life style recommended by Epicurus and Lucretius from the standpoint of expediency is also recommended by Zeno and the other prominent Stoics from the standpoint of perfection. However, the second materialist postulate is rejected by the Stoics, because, for them matter possesses internal activity—it is a burning fire—and it does not need, therefore, external causes to elicit effects. One of the activities of matter is "binding" and we have, therefore, a unity for which matter is the body and activity (the art of creation) is the

soul. This is the pantheism of the Stoics. However, for the Epicureans, for whom matter is internally passive and has no binding power, matter must perforce be constituted by discrete atoms.

15. Some believe that the sudden break in Arab progressive creativity has to do with the invasion of the Seljuks in the eleventh century. But first, the Seljuks took over only the Baghdad caliphate. Egypt was not only left untouched, but on the contrary, under the celebrated Saladdin, Protector of Maimonides, became stronger by far. Second, it is simply unreasonable that pious Mohammedans like the Seljuks would hinder the Mutakallimun, the Islamic religious scholars. The sudden cessation of Islamic cultural creativity must have come from some malady in the theories of these very scholars.
16. Some argue that the perfection of G-d contradicts our power of self-determination, because if we had such a power, then this determination would depend upon us and not upon Him, so that something would be independent of Him, i.e. He would not have the power to rule over it; so that G-d would lack a certain power, and thus not be perfect. Some go even further, concluding from His perfection that He Himself is also not free, that He can do nothing other than what He does, because since He is perfect, everything that issues from Him must be perfect, everything that He does must also be perfect, and thus perforce He must do only that which He does.

Now [iz] concerning the first argument, it should be remarked that those who believe in free will suppose that the Master of the Universe desired that Man should possess free will and that thus He created him. This means, that the freedom of Men is derived not from G-d's negativity, from a privation [feln] of power but, on the contrary, from His positive power to create a free will and from his own will to let Man be free. This reply already invalidates [makht shoy'n mimele botl] also the second argument—even if G-d's perfection requires that He Himself must do everything He does, Man can nevertheless be free because the freedom of Man expresses a case of perfection. In any case, these particular arguments do not touch the first part of religion, but the second, prophecy, because how could we know whether the Unknown Power is perfect or imperfect if not for prophecy?

[The word "God" is spelled with a dash throughout this translation to reflect the spelling used by Rabbi Agushewitz in the Yiddish.]