

Ethics and Sacred Attunement

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It is a pleasure to address you today, under the auspices of the Society of Jewish Ethics. I have been asked by the program committee to present some thoughts and considerations bearing on 'The Ethics of Sacred Attunement'. Since this request was stimulated by a reading of my theological writings, I shall construe the invitation in the following, two-fold sense: I shall first consider the nature and role of ethics 'in' my theology book, *Sacred Attunement*; and then offer some new thoughts on the overall character and dynamics of an ethics 'of' (sacred) attunement. Thus, the first part of my presentation will be both descriptive and analytical in nature – taking my earlier work as the basis for the discussion; by contrast, the second part will attempt a more phenomenological and synthetic meditation – taking up the subject of ethical attunement in its own right.

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Ethics in Sacred Attunement

Let me begin by stating what I take to be a core problematic of our modern condition – for just this may open some space for reflection. Pascal is my guide. In a compelling passage in the *Pensées*, he trenchantly observed that we are creatures on a precarious pivot, facing outward toward cosmic infinities and filled within by a psycho-physical world similarly vast. Set betwixt and between, we must mediate these two infinities. But how is this possible? Amidst the clash of critical methods, we have reason to wonder, Is there a measure (or *metron*) in heaven or earth that may orient us for thought and responsible action? Technological rationalities often diminish our personal value and interpersonal relationships; whereas abstract norms ignore the pathos of living experience. So, where to turn? Is there some more fundamental attunement that might

ground our mortal being in the cosmic vastness roundabout? And if there is, what might be the place for culture – even a sacred canon – in such a disposition?

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In my book, I suggested that it is precisely the sudden ruptures or caesural breaks in our everyday attitudes that may propel us toward such a disposition, and indicate the outlines of new perceptions of Being. Now these ruptures may occur in both nature and culture – through natural disasters and experiences of wonder, on the one hand; or via aesthetic achievements and poetic expressions, on the other. They rip the fabric of our normal consciousness, bent on busyness and cultural buffers, and dispose us to a sense of unsettling finitude within a vastness that exceeds all ordinary presumptions. Defenses fall and our fundamental fragility is suddenly manifest, at least for the moment. But if we hold firm, this crisis may yield a re-formed consciousness or attitude. Two fundamental dispositions can result: the first is humility; the other, moral awareness. The more primary disposition of humility is a response to the vastness itself, and issues in tremors of awe; its secondary consequence, moral awareness, is an awakening to the realization that our world of meanings is constructed through ongoing evaluations and interpretations. Thus, if the attitude of humility is an attunement to our fundamental finitude, the sense of moral awareness relates to our primordial responsibility for all our judgments and determinations. In a word, these ruptures may reveal that we are ‘hermeneutic beings’ who bear inalienable responsibility for our assessments and explanations. This is our primary ontological state, which may be reopened through reflection.

I would therefore suggest that *humility and moral awareness are the twin or entwined components of an ontological ethic*; that is, of an ethic that may unfold from an encounter with our basic hermeneutic nature. For we are creatures that ever shape the surrounding vastness into cultural forms and formulations, through our evaluations of its nature and being. Fact and value are always intertwined for us; and awareness of this is an attunement that may provide the very ‘measure’ we are seeking, both within and without.

Let me elaborate.

On the one hand, this ‘hermeneutic of responsibility’ makes us alert to our judgments and

their implications for the world we inhabit; and it may also heighten our moral sense, educing a corresponding sympathy with all persons – similarly disposed and responsible. In this manner, a hermeneutic disposition may convert into distinctly ethical terms and affect how we live with other people. *Our hermeneutic humility thus becomes a first-order ‘measure’ for the vastness we receive and live in.* The world repeatedly unfolds around us, through a flood of sensations; and these are variously perceived and processed. The sudden realization that these patterns and their meanings are neither self-evident nor imposed, but the product of human interpretation, makes us newly attentive to all that we say and do. Moreover, we may now also realize that the self is not simply embedded in the ‘thick of things’, with assorted dispositions and feelings, but that these very dispositions affect the way we sort through things and evaluate them again and again. With growing awareness, we take hermeneutic responsibility for our relations with things and persons. Just this is a fundamental precondition for ethics.

But such a realization takes time, and may be suppressed or displaced. So we must ask, How may this hermeneutic realization and its ethical predispositions be cultivated and sustained?

As a way of approaching this matter, and our consideration of how hermeneutic humility may serve a modern Jewish ethics, let us turn attention to that vast realm beyond our being which awakens this fundamental disposition. I thus wish to bring the phenomenon of cosmic infinities into view, and even name it as a first step towards apprehending how it may provide the milieu of all our measures. In doing so, I shall retrace some steps in my book, now aimed at this new goal.

I start with the point that the vastness of Being is radically silent, inherently enfolded in itself – in a primordial speechlessness. For Being only resounds as itself, and our sense of this mute facticity humbles the human heart to its core. But if one can remain disposed toward this realization, and not too quickly retreat to older, cultural pre-dispositions, one may possibly rise to another plane of consciousness – and some sense of the unfolding deposition of immeasurable Being into every worldly measure. Now all this is only an inchoate intuition of some relation between the infinite vastness roundabout and the phenomena we may perceive in the measurable

foreground. Hoping to bring this awareness to expression, the awakened self may even denote this primordial Non-saying as an Ineffable ‘Shall Be’ – this being the term used in Scripture to mark the divine Tetragram. And just as this sacred ‘Name’ is wholly unsayable, it serving as a limit term for the immeasurable Divine effectivity, so may it similarly bring to mind the ineffable effectivity of all Being, the vitality inhering throughout the sensible world, unspeakable as such. Thus the Name ‘Shall Be’ gathers our sense of the infinite surge of things, this being the experiential ground of all human measures. For a religious sensibility, an attunement to this all-encompassing vitality may evoke a God-consciousness of sorts, some sense of the unsayable Source of all measures. But the mind now hits its limit; for thought cannot encase this ‘Shall Be’ in any way. It necessarily falls into humble silence – like Job. What ‘Is’ and ‘Shall Be’ ever exceeds human understanding.

In an effort to indicate this sense of an all-enfolding Divine effectivity, *an immeasurable Vastness, Source of all measures*, I adapted the term *Torah Kelulah* from the Jewish mystical tradition. It refers to an absolute Primordial Torah, to an effectuality of God that enfolds every possibility. As such an ultimate dominion of Divinity, beyond comprehension, anything we say about this realm of Being is intuitive, derivative, and partial – a human parsing of the ineffable ‘Shall Be’. The *Torah Kelulah* thus marks-off the transcendental world of Divine effectivity for our consciousness. Its silence only ‘speaks’ insofar we strive to hear its address, or attempt to ‘give voice’ to its inscrutable inscriptions upon the tablets of existence. That is our ontological truth. Like Moses, one can only stammer and turn aside in humility.

Our ‘hermeneutic being’ is thus both primordial and fundamental. And insofar as human beings are cognizing modalities of the *Torah Kelulah*, they have tried to derive some sense from its immeasurable expressions. Natural fears and needs may result in small-minded formulations. But great-hearted souls, attuned to the Divine enfoldments of this Primordial Torah, have strived to articulate its potential for a moral and religious life. Such persons comprise the founding spiritual genealogy of a tradition; and insofar their inheritors reshape these values in service to social or ethical matters, they are its ongoing teachers and guides. Repeatedly, older matters are

reinterpreted as new task-imperatives for the enhancement or safeguarding of life. It therefore takes many generations of ancestors attentive to the *Torah Kelulah* to cultivate teachers who may sort the tangle of traditions and bring them to new levels of social ‘good’. The regenerative role of such teachers is thus vital for ongoing values. Alert to the omnipresent *Torah Kelulah* and its many challenges, they mediate its potential through hermeneutic devices that inject the received forms of culture with new possibility. Each interpretive act is thus a mini-rupture of the ordinary, an opportunity to engage our deepest ontological foundations.

For the biblical and rabbinic tradition, Moses is the archetypal voice of the Written Torah. He is its founding Teacher, who sifted the earlier heritage – itself derived from the *Torah Kelulah* – and raised it to a new spiritual level in both content and form. Subsequent teachers of ancient Israel and rabbinic Judaism repeatedly reshaped these instructions under the impact of new life and its evaluation. The result was the scriptural canon, on the one hand, and the Oral Torah of Jewish Tradition on the other. At every point the *Torah Kelulah* was parsed anew, and its immeasurable effects adjusted to the old inheritance through hermeneutic revisions of every sort. Continuously and with remarkable boldness, the bounty of life entered the forms of the Written and Oral Torah and transfused them with new vitality. The result was a multiform stratification of traditions. As this material accrued, it had to be weighed against the pressure of new ethical situations. Authentic teachers were not simply overwhelmed by these challenges, but rose to the occasion and sought to produce new social realities through their responsible integration of the inherited past and the uncharted present.

The *Torah Kelulah* of God thus holds *immeasurable* potential for human life. How one evaluates these possibilities, and articulates *measures* for beneficent living, is the ongoing moral challenge. My theology is thus grounded in an ontological disposition that educes humility, and ramifies into responsibility for personal judgments and ethical attunement towards all creatures. One attends to the ‘voice’ of God and responds with ‘expressions’ of social care. So considered, *my ethics is a social ethics of hermeneutic responsibility*, grounded in a fundamental disposition of humility before the *Torah Kelulah*.

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We must now ask: How can this disposition be awakened in our day, and a corresponding ethical attunement be cultivated and sustained? And how might the primordial *Torah Kelulah* be conjoined to the historical Torahs of Tradition (of Moses and the sages) in ways consonant with our modern sensibilities? I shall pose an answer through the tradition of Jewish scriptural interpretation. More specifically, a renewed correlation between hermeneutics and ethics requires a rethinking of Scripture and Interpretation.

Let me put it this way:

To formulate such a Jewish hermeneutic ethics – attuned to infinities within and without – I believe it necessary to pass our ethical inquiry through the hermeneutics of Scripture as it has developed throughout rabbinic tradition, since scriptural interpretation has been its basic means of founding values of every sort. I shall therefore use the modes of Jewish Bible interpretation as the formal setting for reawakening our hermeneutic condition of humility and responsibility, and for cultivating thereby dispositions that may serve new ethical attitudes and behaviors. My reflections will thus move through the traditional hermeneutic measures of Jewish scriptural interpretation as a way of educating certain ethical dispositions of a modern sort. I would therefore characterize this procedure as a kind of ‘speculative pragmatics’ of the hermeneutics of scriptural discourse – in the service of ethical attunement. In a word, my Jewish theological ethics are hermeneutical through and through. To appreciate this, let us first recall the major types of classical rabbinic interpretation; so here are some basics.

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The Jewish tradition of scriptural interpretation, as it has developed since antiquity, is multivalent in form and nature. From the Middle Ages on, a particular four-fold structure has emerged, whose most celebrated designation is called ‘*PaRDeS*’ – an acronym for its several sub-types. Following their traditional hierarchy, these include: 1. the *Peshat* or plain-sense of the text, wherein its lexical and contextual meanings are engaged; 2. the *Derash* or legal and

theological interpretations of the text, whereby its intra-canonical meanings and correlations are engaged; 3. the *Remez* or allegorical sense of the text, wherein its philosophical or spiritual hints are educed; and 4. the *Sod* or esoteric dimension of the text, through which its supernal mysteries are suggested or encountered.

Each of these hermeneutic types cultivates its distinct ethical dispositions and modalities, both with respect to the 'world at large' and 'Scripture and Tradition' in particular. Let me be specific.

When one interprets Scripture via the *peshat* model, one reads it *as an individual within a given linguistic universe*. First and foremost, there are the sights and sounds of language and the concern to discern its phonemes and words, semantics and syntax, and inherent flow of meaning. Every determination affects sense or nonsense, casting one forward towards accumulated sense and backward towards their reevaluation. Each breath and tone conveys nuance and meaning – be it simple or complex, redundant or ambiguous, literal or figurative. I may therefore come to this 'reading event' with a given measure of life experiences and acquired knowledge; but these (personal and collective) resources are only pertinent in the act of reading itself, when they are activated by one's textual determinations and understandings. Thus whatever the latent cultural assumptions or various traditional explanations that accrue, it is ever the individual reader who is ultimately responsible for the particular meanings produced. For only the individual enters the hermeneutic circle and establishes the so-called 'world of the text', determining both its inherent shapes and meanings, and how its fundamental otherness (as a document from elsewhere and another time) may be respected and negotiated.

All this is a cumulative act of hermeneutic assessment and judgment, comprised of many smaller acts of a similar kind. As a result, the hermeneutics of reading recapitulates at the level of culture what was noted earlier regarding our primary ontological situation. For here also, in the very 'process of reading', one must repeatedly subject oneself to the given phenomenon, and thereby allow it to 'be given' in the first place. Accordingly, each reading moment may evoke an eruption of sense – perhaps a rupture of habit, as well – and thus provoke a necessity to

reassess one's life values or presumptions.

So considered, reading practices may provide a potential disposition to and a training for attuned living – for our submission to, evaluation of, and complex entwinement with life-events of every sort. As in reading, one is disposed to wonder, where does the 'other' begin and claim me, so that its distinct otherness has a voice and effect?; and where in turn do 'I' begin and make interpretative claims upon 'it'? Further: how, in fact, may an attuned balance between these two effected and sustained? An attuned reading is thus a form of cultural *paidaia* for one's ethical being-in-the-world. And insofar as every shape of the *peshat* provides measures for judgment and evaluation, these hermeneutic measures may dispose the reader to reflect on all correlative assessments and assumptions in life.

I would add that such deliberations may even instruct us *against* the very ethics or values proclaimed by the text. Accordingly, the measures of reading – in this case, the modes of *peshat* – may also provide counter-measures for one's ethical evaluation of character and action. In this way, reading Scripture may cultivate an ethical comportment both with and against the grain of the received text. *Caveat lector!*

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The second traditional type of scriptural interpretation is the *derash* – and when one reads Scripture in this mode one reads it *as a member of a historical religious community*, whose core values and life-forms (legal and intellectual) are founded upon this textual source, deemed sacred and omni-significant and integrated in all respects. Pragmatically, this means, first and foremost, that one does not read according to any merely natural logic (or *ratio*), but in accord with specific cultural 'measures' (or *middot*) that have been established by tradition and that transcend local contexts. That is, one reads (determining laws and values) both with and within the canon as a whole, and with and by the traditional explanations that have accrued for each canonical element. Such a canonical hermeneutic often means two things: first, that single contexts (like sentences or verbal units) are narrowed to smaller components in any passage (usually to a

specific word or phrase); and second, that these elements are variously conjoined to others of a similar kind, either within that sentence or elsewhere in Scripture. Hence, in this hermeneutic mode one reads with parts and wholes, focusing on similarities and dissimilarities, and employing analogies and syllogisms – within the canon as a whole. One may also read attuned to traces of cultural memory and their bearing on the present; and thus canonical cultural dispositions have a role to play as well.

Altogether, *derash* produces a culture of citations and traditions, and of correlations and multivalent meanings. The midrashic corpus keeps all of these in play, in one form or another; though when some decision or determination is required (bearing on legal practice and its value implications), the varieties of tradition are necessarily suspended, at least for the time being.

This said, we must now ask: What are the ethical dispositions to which these hermeneutic measures attune us? At the most primary level, these modes may dispose one to the complexities of discriminating judgment (based on correlation or inference), and the role of cultural needs and presuppositions when making determination of values. For judgments are now made on the basis of one's *responsibility for a community*, and with a conscious regard for the tasks of building and sustaining social values through acts of interpretation. One is humbled by this responsibility, for the hermeneutic texture of a community is threaded or unraveled with the gravest consequences.

Having moved beyond the primary hermeneutic level towards social considerations, we must also consider the relationship between humility and ethics within this modality. In the domain of *derash*, the key concern is to maintain a viable community amid the flow of life. This involves forging a sustainable covenant with God from the ever-indifferent upsurge of the *Torah Kelulah*. At this juncture, the key question is: How may the mute 'Shall Be' educe a 'thou shalt' or 'shalt not' in a manner respectful of all (sayable) human life and the always (unsayable) divine mystery? One is humbled both by the ethical challenges of this task, and by the corresponding hermeneutic imperative to be responsible for each determination. All that is enfolded in divine mystery (that is *kelulah* in the most ineffable manner) is chiseled in awe upon tablets of law and

articulated as the unfolding norms (or *kelalim* in the most articulate sense) of human life. Ethical and hermeneutic humility must consciously bow before this reality and bear it in mind.

At the practical level, this ‘ethics of humility’ is responsibly attuned to the sacred ‘Shall Be’ of all existence, that induces caution before displacing one norm by another, or sustaining others born in fear. Under such considerations, the hermeneutic measures of *derash* may foster new moral awareness, even when they cut against the grain of established norms. Consider the well-known commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself”. What is the proper force of the comparative particle ‘as’ within an ethic and hermeneutic of humility? Would it be to care for the other insofar as that one is ‘like’ oneself, and thus in terms of self-interest; or would it be to provide the same concern for a distinctive life ‘that’ one accords oneself, precisely because that other is ‘the other of one’s self’? The two-fold consciousness just enunciated (of humility and hermeneutic responsibility) evokes the need for a vigilant awareness of the measures that form our life values within the *Torah Kelulah*. From the Immeasurable, we hear and discern measures for our shared existence. So let self-interest and indifference be put on notice.

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This brings me to the third mode of traditional interpretation, to *remez* – and when one reads Scripture in this manner one now reads it *in terms of clues or traces* (of types of hints, in fact) *of a deeper schema of values*. Correlations are now made between certain value-structures presumed hidden in the text and one’s true nature. To read Scripture in this mode is to discover the hints of these values within the text and then conform oneself to their instruction. Sometimes these clues are based upon scriptural topics and values, such the love of God or impulse restraint; on other occasions they derive from topics developed outside Scripture, like the concerns for the soul or virtue first formulated in Greek and Islamic philosophy. Schooled by such matters, the attentive reader tries to discover these ‘deeper’ instructions and take them to heart. It is thus supposed that beneath every scriptural ‘revelment’ lies a more profound ‘concealment’; for nothing is quite as it appears. The tip of any word or phrase may plunge one into the depths of

values – discretely encoded for the spiritual seeker to find.

Altogether this is a hermeneutic of decipherment and enigma, of partiality and inference, and of discernment and presumption. And it yields an ethical attunement of a corresponding sort, for the sake of a life replete with puzzling evidence and obscure or displaced signs. The self is repeatedly confounded by a maze of cues and seeks to connect the dots, even to effect patterns of meaning whose validity lies solely in their inherent or presumptive coherence. The ‘measures’ of this hermeneutic thus cultivate an attunement to worldly fragments and a humility before all our ethical inferences. In a certain manner, this mode of reading casts one back towards the primary ontological condition of deciphering the *Torah Kelulah* as a whole – keeping one morally alert and humble before all evaluations and determinations. Thus, reading through the measures of *remez* fosters an attunement to the fundamentally constructive nature of thought and judgment – ethical and otherwise. But this mode may also cast us forward toward the human community, where the partiality and limits of individual assessments may be collectively discussed, sifted and evaluated, even corrected and reformulated. On this basis, the measures of *remez* may foster an ethics of attentiveness to different perspectives, and provide some grounds for a shared narrative. .

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I turn now to the final hermeneutic mode, to *sod* – and if one reads Scripture by this measure *one is inducted into the transcendental mysteries themselves*, symbolically encoded in the biblical text through infinite permutations of the Tetragram. That is, the outer surface of Scripture is deemed to be a hologram of the most supernal mysteries, which all readers (and all beings) bear within themselves as images of God and of God’s all-effecting vitality. On this view, everything is mysteriously symbolic of Divinity; and Scripture encodes the immeasurable and ineffable ‘Shall Be’ of God. It may therefore provide a spring towards this vast Unknown, if one is engaged in proper hermeneutic contemplation. And if there is a corresponding ethic here, it is perhaps some sense of the immeasurable significance of every act, along with the realization that

all interpretative practices are projections into the Vastness. The hermeneutic mode of *sod* may thus cultivate a most awesome humility and reverential attunement to the All-Immeasurable of God's 'Shall-Be'. So disposed, we are aware that we hang by a hermeneutic thread within the imponderable immensities effected by God – and must remain firm with this awareness. Perhaps just this is *emunah* – 'faith' as a firmness of spiritual resolve, a humble will to be, and a radical faithfulness before God's 'Shall Be', unrequited and awesome at once.

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Before turning to the next phase of my remarks, I wish to note several factors inherent in the preceding discussion of PaRDeS and its ethical correlatives. The first of these is that we live in multiple life-worlds simultaneously, and that our ethical attunements are intertwined. Hence, matters distinguished earlier for analytical purposes are often synthetic or conjunctive in real life. For the fact is that we come to the world with various hermeneutic strategies, which variously and altogether affect the dispositions that condition our attunements and actions. This means that we often move along several contextual tracks at the same time – one perhaps being the narrative thread of life; another the genealogy of the cultural past, a third the disparate hints or signs in the bundle of life, and yet another being the broader ecological or cosmic setting. Just as our life-worlds intersect, so do the various contexts of our ethical dispositions and attitudes. We thus enfold in numerous modalities as we go about our daily business. Each is hermeneutic in its own sphere, and, through our most fundamental dispositions, integrated into unified patterns of life.

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The Ethics of Sacred Attunement

I turn now to the second part of my presentation. In this setting I shall attempt to present

a phenomenology of the ethics of attunement.

I begin with several ontological considerations.

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First, our primary human condition is one of radical subjectivity – that is, our being quite literally ‘thrown under’ (or *sub-jected* to) an overwhelming swirl of elements, configurations of every sort. This sense of being over-whelmed is a primordial terror, only gradually contained by assuring voices and touches, and by words that name and help sort out this swirl. We thus come into the world through a hermeneutic tradition of language and practice that is, so to say, always already there, and that only grows in objective character and clarity. The values inherent in our words and relations also grow in explicitness, even as they settle into the routine of customary behaviors and sensibilities. All these features follow in their own channels, consciously or not, until there occur those key moments (I called them caesural ruptures) that rend the fabric of our lives. And then we are cast back into that immeasurable swirl from which we (primordially and repeatedly) re-engage our ontological condition as interpreters of reality and evaluators of its meanings. That primal swirl is the most fundamental ground of consciousness, from which and through which we see and hear and make all decisions. Ever requiring new acts of interpretation, that swirl is the archetypal site of an ontological ethics.

We thus come to situations always already preformed by traditions and values and a sense of interpretation, as do all other sentient creatures we relate to – each according to their nature or measure. We must not forget this. Not only every personal moment, but every interpersonal one as well involves an intersection of hermeneutic vectors, conjoining different beings with different capacities for relationships and evaluation. This is a conjoint moment of hermeneutic fragility, where responsible judgment is at the core of all inter-subjectivity. The primary moments of ontological reflection, or their shattering recurrence, must include such a realization; otherwise they are based on a false assessment of our basic ontological condition,

and invalid at the core.

In any case, such moments constitute the very ground of ethics, before particular acts shape its character.

With this as background, we may consider the emergence of ethical situations as such.

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Ethical situations begin with an *affective disposition*. We have a sense of the pulse and presence of the environment roundabout us (our living *Umwelt*), with a feel of awareness of its colors and sounds. All this is an indiscriminate field of perception, and what is swirling about (however much it has some customary character, or is known in some inchoate sense) remains at the pre-reflective level. I have no conscious intention of this or that – just some underwhelming sense of, or disposition toward, certain felt patterns in the life-world.

At some moment, for some reason, there is a *solicitation of attention*. We sense a call or claim made upon our awareness. The field of perception is now narrowed to something more particular, to a specific this or that, with a distinct character; though, actually, it is myself (and my hermeneutic) that establishes the nature and borders of its appearance, and myself that names it implicitly, and thus accords it value (for itself and me at this time). If I am aware of myself, I am aware of this intention. But even without such a reflection, some such intention rises in my consciousness. Something whelms me and I parse it; something has exigence, even as I exegete it. I somehow take its measure and interact with it; and if it be a him or a her, then this inchoate interaction is vaguely and (still) implicitly inter-subjective.

Just what is this inter-subjectivity at the onset of ethics? It is the sense – not yet a certain realization, but its foundation – that my subjectivity includes (or is constituted by) all that I am now aware of and attentive to. There is no ‘me’ here and ‘you’ there, but ‘me and you’ together at once; and somehow I realize that I must include the sense that I am beholden to you as well (in the double sense of being seen and made real by your consciousness of me). Thus my ‘me’ is a ‘me-you’ that is also a ‘you-me’ simultaneously. All this is emergent to consciousness and at the

clasp of ethics. For at this moment there is a *primary attunement* of myself to you and you to me, this being an initial conjoint taking of measure through our interaction. Attunement begins, quite literally, with this primary vibration. I enter into some interpersonal ‘accord’, as it were, bringing my life-tone to you; and it is tempered by yours in that same process. Giving and receiving are simultaneous.

And now for the ethical moment itself. The human exigency I am engaged with is not an abstract or formal condition for action, but a particular person in a particular situation here and now. The situation as a whole is constitutive, and I have a preliminary sense of it based on my tradition and its values. But when the ethical moment breaks forth, I do not merely have some sense of the event, but assess it consciously. I would call this hermeneutic moment a *reflective pause*. For now I do not act mindlessly or in terms of formal principles, but I rather create a space for reflection and deliberation – what the rabbinic tradition calls *shiqqul ha-da’at*, or the balancing and thoughtful weighing of things. This act of attunement involves a first assessment of the situation, based on various factors, including how one person disposes themselves towards another, and the response it evokes. In the process, one is alternatively more active or passive, or more prone to speech or action or body language. The reflective pause is thus not some single assessment, once and for all; nor is the act of attunement realized in one fell swoop. Rather, the initiating moment of ethical attunement has ongoing micro-moments in which the situation is repeatedly assessed. Ethical attunement requires a series of pauses amidst the entwined loops of inter-subjectivity, each one effecting deliberate acts of co-regulation between the selves.

This involves an awesome responsibility. For if I am properly attuned, and if the ethical moment is grounded in an awareness of myself as an interpreting and evaluating being, I am then disposed to the uniqueness of these moments of interaction – and aware that the other person is a distinct self implicated in my hermeneutic judgments. Sensing this depth and height of such acts of evaluation, the moment becomes holy and the interaction sacred. Ethical attunement thus involves the awareness of my effect upon the patterns or shapes of existence – especially persons – as I interact with them and am shaped reciprocally thereby. Sacred attunement means that all

living is holy. Spiritual exercises may serve this end. But ethical acts are spiritual exercises in their own right, engaging one with the sacred.

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Coming to the end, I wish to suggest some minimal definitions and programmatic considerations.

First:

The issue of ethics involves a certain way of *being with* persons in the world, according to a certain ‘measure’ that seems proportionate to oneself and the particular person encountered – all within the framework of a given tradition, actual events, and thoughtful interpretation. If we can speak of an initial guiding standard, let its measure be the uniqueness of each person, in the happening of the moment, and the entwinement of that one with myself, who receives the other with humility. Ethics involves the co-regulation of this interrelationship, through an attuned regard of one person for the other – of each through each.

But it does not start on a mutual plane. It rather begins with an initial subjectivity of one to the other, with some inaugural sense of what is given through someone’s felt presence (what I referred to earlier as an initial solicitation or claim). Eventually, this subjectivity moves in two directions. For as I am subjected to you, you are subjected to me through correlative receptivity. I (and you) move alternatively to the more active pole of the dyad as our entwinement elicits a response; and eventually such co-responsiveness may even move in two concurrent directions of co-responsibility, as we mutually engage in interpretation in the ongoing process of attunement. Hence, I do not impose myself upon the world, but receive it (you) as a rupture of routine and a ‘measure’ for action. Moreover, my co-regulation with others (entwined with myself) must *serve a shared world* in which persons are maximally enhanced, within the entailments or adjustments necessary for a common life of values and regard.

Breaches of this entwined attunement, dis-regulations and interpersonal infringements of every sort, mark the insidious path of evil in its various degrees and forms. For evil occurs along

a hermeneutic spectrum. It may begin somewhat innocuously, with a forgetting or obscuring of one's primary hermeneutic responsibility – perhaps through the inurements of habit or self-centeredness. One expression of this is indifference. Such an attitude may lead to disregard – perhaps for similar reasons. The result is a more deliberate turning away from the other person. All such moments may result in interpersonal or social dis-ease, and may corrode into malign acts of disruption or deliberate destruction. Each act along this spectrum thus effects a different rendering of worldly co-habitation, a different effacement of the human presence that has solicited me and my being. Thus ethics may be thought of as involving attunements of intentional co-regulation, for the sake of transforming the world into communities of value through reflective acts of inter-subjective interpretation.

Ultimately, ethics is founded upon an alert and cultivated readiness for attunement; and is realized through an attuned readiness on the alert for another's well-being. If there is more, it lies in the moral details. The highest social ideals, and all our personal virtues, would be shaped accordingly. All this, I believe, is the fundamental *being with* of ethics, grounded in hermeneutic humility and responsibility.

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I shall end here. My thanks for your attention.