

ETHICS OF GLOBALIZATION AND THE AIDS CRISIS FROM A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

by Norbert M. Samuelson

Abstract. This essay explores what Jewish ethics has to say about globalization in relation to the AIDS crisis. Special attention is paid to the consequences in affirming current intellectual trends to transcend traditional limits in both society and thought for rethinking traditional Jewish values. The discussion proceeds from two presuppositions. The first is that there is an intimate connection between ethics, science, and politics. The second is that the history of Jewish ethics involves three distinct forms that are generally correlated but rarely identical in content and moral judgment. These three forms are law, wisdom or virtue, and covenant. The discussion considers related issues of accidental connections in time between the bubonic plague and Zionism and between AIDS and homosexuality in relation to moral-theological issues related to divine providence and distributive justice.

Keywords: AIDS; aspirin; Martin Buber; bubonic plague; *conversos*; covenant; distributive justice; Joel Edelheit; ethics; family; globalization; homosexuality; Jewish; Jewbues; Karaites; Solomon Katz; Kishinev pogrom; Lemba; Mizos; Moses Maimonides; *musar*; nationality; penicillin; politics; religion; science; sex; sexual ethics; *shaatnez*; Torah-true; virtue; wisdom.

In this essay I explore what Jewish ethics has to say about globalization in relation to the AIDS crisis. I will say a word about AIDS, but the primary focus is on globalization. I explore a concrete example in order to highlight the kinds of distinctive value questions involved in globalization from

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the perspective of Jewish ethics. Let me begin by highlighting two factors that my discussion presupposes. The first has to do with the integration of ethics, science, and politics, the second with the three distinct faces of Jewish ethics.

ETHICS, SOCIETY, AND SCIENCE

The first presupposition is that there is an intimate connection between ethics, science, and politics such that the discussion of any one of the three topics inevitably leads to a discussion of the other two. Consider the following two examples.

From Penicillin to AIDS. The drug culture began in Western Europe in 1899, when aspirin, an acetyl derivative of salicylic acid, was first synthesized. For the purposes of our demonstration, however, two other drug developments were more important. Consider the correlation between developments in pharmacological chemistry and sexual ethics in Western civilization. The dominant sexual ethics of the Victorian societies of the end of the nineteenth century were rooted in two major physical fears about socially nonsanctioned sexual relations: fear of venereal disease and fear of pregnancy.

Radical reversals in late-twentieth-century sexual ethics had less to do with rethinking ethics in the light of anthropology and Christian modernist theologies than with two scientific developments. The first began in 1928 when Alexander Fleming obtained penicillin from molds. The important consequence of this discovery for our purposes was its effectiveness against venereal diseases. There is a direct correlation between the development of this drug during and after World War II and the sexual mores of Western males. The second development began in 1953, when George Pincus and Min Chuch Chang demonstrated progesterin inhibition of ovulation. There is a direct correlation between the development of antifertility drugs and the sexual mores of Western females.

I suspect that now that fear has once again been introduced into sexual relations through the fear of AIDS, sexual mores are returning more toward what they were at the end of the nineteenth century. This case seems to me to be a fairly obvious example of how changes in ethics in the general society are tied to changes in science. I turn now to a less obvious example that, for our purposes, is more important.

From the Bubonic Plague to Zionism. When the bubonic plague broke out in San Francisco in 1899, scientists had no clear idea why, and both the politicians and a significant number of the citizens believed that it was because of the Chinese. When it broke out again in 1907, politicians and citizens were again convinced that its cause was the Chinese, but some scientists noted that there had been an earthquake in 1906 and correlated

the two events. The ultimate cause of the disease had in fact nothing to do with the Chinese; its source was the motion of the earth itself.

At the beginning of the twentieth century most people believed in the stability of the universe. They thought that the building blocks of physical reality were very small objects that occupied definite places at definite times and, more important, that both the heavens and the earth were constant. By the middle of the century most educated people would be forced to abandon this sense of security about God's creation. They would discover that terra firma is anything but firm.

A professor of meteorology at the University of Graz, Alfred Luther Wegener, hypothesized in 1912 about something called continental drift. On the basis of the correlation between both geological and paleontological data on both sides of the Atlantic, Wegener argued that some 225 million years ago there was a single continent, called Pangaea, from which the continents of North and South America, Africa, and Eurasia began to spread apart on tectonic plates formed by movements in the earth's crust. Few scientists accepted Wegener's theory at the time and almost no nonscientists knew anything about it. However, his theory proved right; at least, the scientific community came to believe him after a British team of geophysicists revived the theory in 1954 on the basis of independent studies of magnetic poles in rocks. Their research led to a theory of polar wanderings whose probability confirmed Wegener's theory of continental drift on tectonic plates in the earth's crust.

These movements caused the San Francisco earthquakes, which brought the rats of the city to the surface of the human habitat, which caused the plague. To be slightly more precise, as Shibasaburo Kitasato and Andre Yersin discovered independently in 1894, the immediate cause of the disease is a bacterium, named *Pasteurella pestis*, that is transmitted by fleas that live on the bodies of infected rats. Hence, the cause of people's contracting the plague was a bacterium that lives in fleas that live on rats that reside on an unstable earth whose foundations are currents of hot liquid. The ultimate cause of the plague is the earth's fluid foundation.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century about 90 percent of all human beings infected with the plague died from it. That death rate was reduced to 5 percent after Selman A. Waksman and Albert Schatz isolated streptomycin in 1947, which was only one year before the creation of the state of Israel. In the causal chain that led to that national rebirth, the bubonic plague also played a role. Because most Americans continued to believe erroneously that Chinese and other immigrants played an important role in the deaths of these fellow Americans, in 1924 their politicians in effect closed the doors of immigration to all people of questionable (that is, impure or infected) national origin (in other words, almost everyone except white Protestant Europeans). Among the "almost everyone" excluded were Jews, especially Jews from Eastern Europe.

As Americans living at the beginning of the twentieth century worried about American deaths caused by diseases believed to be imported by non-Caucasian immigrants, Jews worried about Jewish deaths caused by prejudiced European Christians. On a single day in the Bessarabian city of Kishinev, cossacks, with the support of the Russian Czar, slaughtered almost fifty Jews. To the Jews of the early twentieth century, this act of government-sponsored terrorism was unparalleled in Jewish history, an event that almost defied the imagination of evil of early-twentieth-century people with nineteenth-century minds. The event lent the Jewish people a sense of urgency to find a solution to Europe's "Jewish problem," which was really the Jewish people's "Christian problem."

There were any number of strategies for finding a solution. The most popular was to assimilate. If Jews simply stopped being Jews, Christians would stop hating Jews for being Jews. However, the spread of cultural "Darwinism" carried with it as a tangent the doctrine of anti-Semitism, which replaced anti-Judaism as a cause for hating Jews. It is anti-Semitism that proved the futility of assimilation as a solution to the Jewish problem. If Jews were by biological nature inferior, assimilation was no cure. In fact, it made Jews more dangerous to these Jew haters. Jews were seen to be like bacteria that infected and ultimately destroyed European civilization, and they were most dangerous when they abandoned their Judaism, because then they were invisible, for they seemed to be almost human.

Next to assimilation, the most popular solution for early-twentieth-century Jews was to come to America, a nation they believed to have raised its humanity to a level of excellence beyond the ignorance and prejudice of the Europeans. However, as anti-Semitism rendered futile assimilation as a solution, the 1924 Johnson and Lodge immigration acts made futile any hope that Jews could escape European hatred by migrating to the West. Then and only then did the solution of a handful of Jewish intellectuals win acceptance with the mass of the Jewish people. Zionism became by the middle of the twentieth century the most widely accepted belief of Jews throughout European civilization, and that belief contributed greatly to the creation of the third Jewish state in 1948. Hence, the Jewish state is a result of Zionism (a deeply affirmed belief of both religious and secular modern Jews), which is a result of American immigration policy, which is a result of a then-inexplicable disease in San Francisco, which is a result of the anything-but-firm foundation of the earth.

I would generalize from these two cases and assert that questions of ethics can never be considered in a vacuum. Ethics is not an independent discipline. It is inescapably tied to actual historical events that are themselves correlated to physical events and our knowledge (as well as lack of knowledge) of them.

THE THREE FACES OF JEWISH ETHICS

My second presupposition is that the history of Jewish ethics involves three distinct forms that are generally correlated but rarely identical in content and moral judgment. These three faces of Jewish ethics are law, wisdom or virtue, and covenant.

The kind of Jewish ethics that relates most directly to questions of Judaism and science, especially issues of medicine, is legal ethics. In a word, the appropriate scholars in this case are those who have mastered the tradition of rabbinic law, who have the background, training, and skill to apply precedents in Jewish law (*Halacha*) to moral issues. Perhaps the clearest sources for this kind of Jewish ethics are the Books of Leviticus and Numbers and the tradition of legal commentary that extends from them through Judah I's *Mishnah* (200 C.E.) and Moses Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah* (twelfth century C.E.) to contemporary discussions of Jewish law by Conservative rabbis such as Elliot Dorff and Orthodox rabbis such as David J. Bleich (see Rosner, Bleich, and Brayer 1999).

No less central to the history of rabbinic legal ethics is the wisdom, or virtue, tradition of Jewish philosophical ethics. Its clearest source is the biblical Book of Proverbs, which served as the foremost textual paradigm for a continuous tradition of Jewish ethics that extends through the *Pirkei Avot* (Sayings of the Fathers, in Judah I's *Mishnah*) and Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah* to Hasidic moral instruction (*musar*) to the nineteenth-century Musar Movement in Eastern Europe.

The third, and for my purposes the most important, tradition of Jewish ethics is what I here call covenantal ethics. It is a form of Jewish ethics whose source is in the narratives of the Pentateuch, especially in Genesis, that is revived in the kind of contemporary Jewish ethics of philosophers such as Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Emmanuel Levinas. As in the case of Jewish legal ethics, covenantal ethics is about questions of duties, but the source is judged to be obligations that arise for a particular conscious human being from a radically different but no less particular conscious being (divine or human), rather than arising (as in the case of Jewish law) out of universal precepts generalized beyond any concrete context. For the perspective I present in this essay, the dominant mode of Jewish ethics considered is covenantal.

A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE ON AIDS AND GLOBALIZATION

At the Zygon Center's symposium on AIDS and globalization, Solomon Katz (2001) proposed the formation of a globalization ethics, drawn from the shared insights of all of the major world religions, to employ in solving the many moral issues that arise from the worldwide AIDS epidemic. I want to argue against his proposal in this form. First, although the moral issues related to AIDS are indeed dire and of immense urgency, there is no

need for a special intrareligious ethic to deal with them. Second, from a particular Jewish perspective, affirmation of a global ethics raises more moral problems than it solves. Let me deal briefly first with the question of AIDS and then turn to what is my main concern in this essay, the moral problems of contemporary globalization.

AIDS. The moral challenges that AIDS raises for all human beings are beyond question. If it were not clear already, the importance of the subject would be evident solely from the statistics that Katz (2001) presented. So far, of the 54.1 million people who have contracted AIDS, 18.8 million have died. This number is growing exponentially beyond the 1999 figure of 8.2 million identified cases.

A religious person may well wonder at the impressive ability of an organism such as HIV, which in the pyramid of complex entities is barely a living thing at all, to “learn” (as Gayle Woloschak [2003] says) to adapt to whatever challenges the highly more complex immune system of the presumably highly more complex organism of the human being can develop to threaten it. It is the virus’s ability to learn that is most threatening. It is like other viruses that attack the human immune system—those that cause influenza, smallpox, hepatitis, rabies, encephalitis, herpes, and the common cold—except that it cannot survive in the air and hence is not as easy to acquire. However, who is to say that it cannot “learn” to become more contagious than it is by adapting to the external-to-the-human atmosphere? Furthermore, so far its aggressive ability seems limited to the immune system; it leaves the rest of its host alone. However, it may learn how to extend its domain to other parts of its human host as well.

In a struggle for survival between the nine-gene human immunovirus (HIV) and the vastly more genetically “developed” human being, the virus seems clearly to be more fit to survive. Certainly this biological war is an interesting example on which to focus attempts by philosophers of biology to explain what words such as *development*, *fitness*, and *survival* mean in evolution. However, until an oral vaccine against AIDS is developed (in which case Jewish legal ethicists will have to judge its status with respect to the kosher laws), I see nothing about the crisis that calls for a distinctly Jewish perspective.

Homosexuality and Divine Providence. There are undoubtedly some observant Jews, no less than some religious Christians, who might believe (whether or not they are willing to say so openly) that AIDS is a divine punishment, in accordance with a traditionalist understanding of divine providence, for willfully violating biblical and traditional prohibitions on homosexuality. However, no individual with a minimally adequate understanding of Jewish (or Christian) classical philosophy could argue in this way.

First of all, as I understand from Katz's presentation, many of those who today suffer from AIDS do so as a result of heterosexual and not homosexual relations. Hence, whatever role the creator of the universe plays in the causal link between these viruses and their human hosts, that link has nothing to do with homosexuality. A person hosting the virus can transmit the virus to another person through sexual intercourse; the sex of the two hosts is causally irrelevant.

Second, even if there were a causal link between homosexuality and AIDS, the suggestion that the disease is a punishment for homosexuality is insidious, an example of "stupid" religion that is unrepresentative of the qualitatively best of Jewish (as well as Christian) theology.

There is little question that a literalistic understanding of the biblical texts strongly suggests that homosexuality is immoral, but this judgment has to be put into a proper perspective. First, the moral repulsion that the text expresses about homosexuality is part of a general moral repulsion about any form of mixing of natural entities, from light and dark, day and night, seas and dry land (Genesis 1:10), and heaven and earth (in the Genesis 1 account of creation) to the nation and land of Israel from other lands and nations in other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, to Hebrew priests from ordinary Israelites, wool and linen (*[shaatnez]*, Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11), and—the most important separation of all—the Sabbath from the weekday. Hence, if someone judged homosexuality as immoral exclusively on the basis of a literalistic interpretation of the Bible, consistency would require him or her to make the same judgment about mixing daytime with nighttime (lighting your home in the evening, for example, would be immoral), or not strictly observing the Sabbath, or mixing wool and linen. The expressed principle underlying all of these prohibitions is the same: a moral repulsion against unnaturally (i.e., through human engineering) overcoming natural limits of separation.

Second, with the exception of a relative minority among nineteenth- and twentieth-century American Protestants, I know of no one else—Muslims, traditional Jews, Orthodox Christians, or Roman Catholics—who ever believed that what the scriptures literally say is their true meaning. On the contrary, the adherents to the classical Abrahamic faiths have always insisted that there are few passages in all of the scriptures so shallow as to be open only to a single line of interpretation, that only an interpretation of the text that is true can be what the text truly means, and that rarely is the most literal meaning of the text what it truly means.

Third, the theology that underlies such a connection assumes that there is a one-to-one correlation between what a person does and the reward or punishment that he or she receives. However, there is no correlation of this sort. Most classical Jewish and Christian theologians have argued that individual acts of obedience or disobedience of divine laws establishes dispositions that gradually affect moral character whose remote end is the

attainment of human happiness. Hence, while obedience leads to happiness and disobedience leads to unhappiness, the claimed result is long-term, not short-term, and general rather than specific. Minimally the good and bad that people experience always involve elements of chance as well as influence from a vast number of environmental factors that affect the life of any individual. All factors being equal, the rabbis would claim, an observant Jew will be happier than a nonobservant Jew; but the factors are never equal.

Fourth, the link that theology speaks of between the reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience to divine will is tied to divine good and is not essential to human good. In general, what is good for the world is good for humanity, but there is no necessary connection between the two. God is the Creator of the universe, and the human being is the creature—the servant created to serve the master of the universe. The “stupid theology” underlying the presupposed link between homosexuality and the AIDS virus assumes that the laws of nature, which express the will of God, exist to serve the interests of the human, but the servant exists to serve the master and not vice versa. Humans who violate natural laws die for violating laws whose purpose is primarily tied to the ordering of the universe, independent of questions of human morality. Someone falling from a twenty-story building to the ground, whether intentionally or not, violates a divine law (gravity), and such violation always involves a punishment (generally, in a twenty-story fall, death). Calling such a punishment moral, however, is strange. The same can be said of deaths from AIDS, as it can be said of death by any means whatsoever. We all die ultimately because we are ignorant, ignorant of what caused the death and/or how to prevent it. Certainly ignorance is a vice, but the sense of vice involved in all of these judgments is radically different from the sense of moral judgment in our initially postulated “stupid theology.”

Hence, the linking of AIDS to homosexuality and divine providence is a real religious issue, because it says something about the nature of God and the relation between God and humanity. However, in the form it is presented it is a stupid answer to a real question, because the solution presupposes an incredibly simplistic understanding of biblical theology (and even more so of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologies) that would be appropriate only to humanoids whose brain capacity was significantly less than that of human beings.

What Price Life? Questions of Distributive Justice. At the opposite extreme are sound moral questions that require serious moral reflection and are not in any sense distinctively Jewish or even “religious.” These issues involve questions of the appropriate rules of distributive justice. Many of them were raised in Rabbi Joel Edelheit’s presentation at this symposium (2001). Should vaccines be found, who owns them—the scientists

who developed them, the institutions that sponsored the research of the scientists, or no one because these vaccines should be administered out of the interest of the general good and not out of proprietorial interests in profit? Given a limited supply of such a vaccination, who should receive it and who should have less priority, and who should decide these questions?

In general (to paraphrase John Locke), where the supply of any good is so great that all who want it can acquire it or so meager that no system of distribution can enable all who want the good to obtain it, there is no question of moral justice. In the former case, any system will be good; in the latter case, because no system will be good, any system will not be bad. Hence, there are here no issues of morality. Morality enters the picture only when there is sufficient supply of the desired good that a fair distribution can be achieved by some but not all systems, in which case some systems of distribution (or judgment) are good while others are bad. Such a line of legal ethical thinking can be found in the legal and philosophical ethics of classical rabbis, and the same can be said for the legal and philosophical ethics of traditional Christian clerics and in Islam. (I will not comment on Asian religions. I assume that the same is true there as well, but I do not know these traditions well enough to say.) In this case no special global ethics is necessary, because adequate resources already reside within these religious traditions to make these evaluations.

GLOBALIZATION. The situation becomes significantly different when we turn our moral concerns from an application of global religious ethics to the problem of AIDS to the social and political contemporary phenomena of globalization itself. The phenomenon is no less urgent for moral reflection than is AIDS; however, in this case I believe that there is a distinctive Jewish perspective to introduce into the ethical evaluation.

By “globalization” I mean an ever-increasing series of political, economic, and social phenomena that extend their domain beyond the limits of the nation-state into a transnational, worldwide range, all of which are made possible by contemporary developments in technology. The current “war on terrorism” that began on September 11, 2001, is itself a powerful example of the kind of technology-tied globalization—involving the use of airplanes as bombs, attacking buildings far larger than medieval fortresses and cathedrals, killing a large number of people from a large number of nations with an even larger number of nationalities than ever resided in a single place in the past, financed by businesses that extend all over the globe, whose locations are more in the hyperspace of computer spreadsheets than in buildings such as banks that occupy specific space, transmitted over the World Wide Web rather than by human messengers traversing so-called real space in real time.

The special moral problems that globalization raises from a distinctively Jewish perspective are primarily connected with the same topic of natural

limits involved in the foregoing discussion of AIDS. In what follows I illustrate the issues through a (true) story and then spell out the story's relevant implications.

The Story: Jewbues in New Jersey and Thailand. In the late 1960s and early 1970s I served as the Hillel director at Princeton University, where I conducted each week a liberal (that is, Reform or liturgically left-wing Conservative) Friday evening Sabbath service. The spiritual quality vastly improved after Linn, a young graduate student studying population geography, and his wife Gerry began to attend regularly. We became good friends, and I got to know a great deal about them. Linn had been brought up as a Reform Jew, with a born-Jewish father and a non-Jewish wife. Reform Judaism considers anyone to be a Jew whose father or mother is Jewish and is reared in the Jewish faith; hence, Linn always thought of himself as a Jew. For most of his life, Judaism played a small role. However, as an undergraduate student in California he became deeply interested in learning more about Judaism at the same time as he became seriously interested in studying Buddhism. The same was true of Gerry, except that she came from a nominally Roman Catholic family. As Linn and Gerry learned more about Judaism, they adopted more Jewish liturgy into their personal lives. Gerry considered converting to Judaism but decided not to as long as her parents were alive.

Linn and Gerry had come to Princeton because of Princeton's graduate program in geography but, more important, because the university was close to a first-class Buddhist school for meditation, which enabled them to pursue their interest in Buddhism while getting a good science education. At the same time, they both continued to learn about Judaism at Hillel and to incorporate more rabbinic ritual into their personal lives.

The problem was that, as Linn became more traditionally Jewish in his beliefs and observances, he increasingly came to think of himself as not Jewish, because under the rules of traditional (Orthodox) Judaism, a Jew is someone whose mother is Jewish. By the time Linn completed his graduate work, Linn and Gerry were significantly observant of Jewish liturgical practices, strongly committed to Buddhist spiritual practices, and definitely convinced that neither of them was Jewish.

Linn decided to accept a position teaching population geography at a United States Air Force base in Bangkok, Thailand, where he and Gerry could live and learn in a Buddhist monastery just outside Bangkok and attend Sabbath services conducted by the Jewish chaplain at the local Air Force base. The monastery had a complete-silence rule, but it had no rule against intimate relations between husband and wife, and Gerry became pregnant. When the couple learned that their child would be a boy, they decided to have him circumcised, on the eighth day following his birth, by the chaplain, who is also a *mohel* (a rabbi trained to perform circumcisions

in accordance with Jewish law). However, they did not want the circumcision to constitute a Jewish conversion ceremony for their child, because they considered it inappropriate for non-Jewish parents to have a Jewish child. So a way was worked out with the chaplain to have a traditional-inform Jewish circumcision ceremony that would not constitute a conversion ceremony of their non-Jewish son.

The ceremony was attended by all of their head-shaven, toga-wearing friends from the monastery. Imagine a traditional Jewish circumcision ceremony, performed by a U.S. chaplain on a U.S. Air Force base in Thailand, surrounded by a community of Buddhist monks, who one after another turned to his fellow monks (with whom he was able to speak for the first time since they were off the grounds of the monastery) and said, "You know, I haven't been to a circumcision since I left New York." It turned out that all of the guests, dressed as Buddhist monks, were Jews at a circumcision ceremony where the only non-Jews present were the child to be circumcised, his father, and his mother.

Implications of the Story. The story is clearly a tale of globalization in that it takes place on two continents (North America and Asia) and involves the integration of at least three transnational religious traditions (Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Buddhism). The transnational character of the story is not especially morally challenging in itself. Rabbinic Judaism grew up more or less at the time of the destruction of the second Jewish state and thrived until the middle of the nineteenth century as a nationless guest in a number of transnational polities (those of the Muslim and the Holy Roman empires). The adaptation of Judaism to modern nationalism was a struggle, but the problems were more or less overcome with the development of liberal models of religion (Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist) and an equally liberal model of secular nationalism (Zionism and the state of Israel).

What is challenging is the implication of the story for the breakdown of various defining limits of traditional human society in terms of sex, family, and (for our purposes, most important) religion, as well as of nationality. Let me say a word first about the breakdown of sex and family lines.

The family of Linn and Gerry is by contemporary standards traditional in that it involves a man and a woman with a child. However, as the technology and engineering of human reproduction evolve, there is no clear reason that a child-rearing family need involve a man and a woman rather than two women or (eventually) two men, or even just a single parent. In fact, there is no good reason why a family should involve children at all. There was a time when children had significant economic value—as nonsalaried farm workers or assistants in the family store—but in our post-industrial age of the nuclear family, children are, from a strictly economic

perspective, a drain—a major economic investment that involves no economic return and (in many cases) no positive emotional return as well. Hence, it is not surprising that increasingly in our so-called postmodern world, despite any contrary pressure from our genetic biology, the interest of young adults in marriage is declining or simply being transformed from what it was into what can best be described as a friendship between two (or more) people that involves minimal commitment of both obligations and time.

The change in what constitutes a family is also part of the breakdown of distinctions between the sexes, for it is primarily in terms of the family (with its division of family-unit obligations along gender lines) that sex has been socially defined. All of this is of enormous importance to Judaism, given that the family is the fundamental unit upon which Jewish communal life depends. In a world of dissolving families and sex distinctions, it is not clear what living a Jewish life will become—perhaps something like the Jewbu arrangement of the Christian (or post-Christian) Linn and Gerry.

The answer for Jews who are concerned with being Jewish is not some form of new global ethic. It is rather a need for informed Jews, as Jews, to delve into their sources and find creative and authentic ways to live fully under the conditions of our new world while continuing to preserve the continuity of the Jewish community of faith. How Jews can do this is far from obvious. However, a solution is at least conceivable strictly within the apparatus of a liberal understanding of Jewish legal moral thinking.

The second issue, that of crossing the line of religion and nationality, is more troubling with respect to the capability of Jewish law to adapt to a new environment. The Linn and Gerry story illustrates the contemporary crisis of Jewish identity in our new global community that is unparalleled at any time in Jewish history, going back at least to the spread of the Roman Empire throughout the entire Mediterranean world. If what historians have deduced from the slim surviving records is correct, rabbinic Judaism was just one of a great variety of radical candidates for the inheritor of Toraitic faith after Judea's three disastrous wars of national liberation from the empire. Just which kind of religion would survive as "Torah-true" was not clear until the seventh century C.E. at the earliest, possibly not until after the tenth century, when rabbinic Judaism won its political and ideological debate with Karaism. However, since at least the tenth century Judaism has been clearly defined by political-spiritual continuity of rabbinic rule in the Muslim empire, on into the Europe of the Holy Roman Empire, on through the hegemony of Western culture in the nineteenth-century Christian and post-Christian commercial nation-states of Western Europe and North America. Until the end of the nineteenth century it was reasonably clear who was and who was not a Jew. A Jew was anyone whose mother was Jewish or who was converted to Judaism in accord with a legal process that traces itself back in a continuous chain of rabbinic

tradition at least to the second century C.E. and Judah I's *Mishnah*, and was not formally converted to Christianity. The first major challenge to that identity has come with the social acceptance of Jews in Christian and post-Christian societies. Its expression is intermarriage. For example, is someone Jewish whose mother did not identify herself as a Jew because she was a "pagan" (someone who believes that the world of our sense data, the domain of modern scientific study, is all there is), because her mother was a Jewish-born pagan (in the sense just described), because *her* mother was a Jewish-born pagan? Can someone be Jewish who has no memory of Jewish ancestry and no real interest in being Jewish?

Conversely, can someone be Jewish who has a strong sense of a Jewish identity through a continuous tradition that is not rabbinic but whose lineage is a branch from the same tree (cultural and religious) of rabbinic Judaism? Are the Karaites who live today in Israel "Jewish"? Are the descendants of those Jews who continued to practice some part of their Judaism in Spain and Spanish territories in the New World (descendants of the fifteenth-century *conversos* or *marranos* who want to continue to practice their faith in the distinct, rabbinically heterodox, way of their ancestors) "Jewish"? Similarly, are the Mizos in India, who claim descent from the biblical tribe of Manasseh, or the "Israel de Dios" in the foothills of the Andes in Peru, or the Abayudyos in Uganda "Jewish"?

The most interesting case of all is that of the Lemba of South Africa, whose priests carry DNA sequences uniquely shared with "priests" (*cohanim*) whose Jewish descent goes back through Europe to the Muslim world to postbiblical Judea. If to be Jewish is to have a certain genetic lineage, the members of the Lemba tribe have at least as much right (maybe even more) as Jews of European descent to call themselves Jews. And if to be Jewish is to share a certain religion, who has the right to define that religion? Is it the Orthodox, who while they do not accept the religion of liberal Jews as Judaism do accept these themselves as Jews? In this respect is there any difference between heterodox Jews of European descent and the Jewish heterodoxies of Africa and South America?

Finally, and possibly most confusing of all, is the change in Judaism reflected by the many Jewbues like Linn and Gerry. The line of separation that Jews have drawn in self-definition from Christians is a line drawn more by a history of aggression than by deep theological differences. There are no such lines with other religions, and today the main faith attraction to contemporary "post-rabbinic" and "post-pagan" Jews is Buddhism. Is there no line of any kind to be drawn here as well?

CONCLUSIONS

I have no answers, only questions—and a conviction that answers must be found and that the answers will be, unavoidably, so radical that no Jew

living today at the beginning of the twenty-first century would be able to recognize what Judaism and Jewish life will be like at the beginning of the twenty-second century. For me this expression of confidence in the nature of change over the next one hundred years is no expression of either hope or fear. I am sure that much of it will be good and much bad.

At the end of Buber's 1923 *I and Thou*, Buber hypothesized that the course of history is a spiral of continuous movement from I-thou to I-it relations back to I-thou relations. The critical point is that he saw this movement as a spiral and not a circle. In each epoch the move to the interpersonal, the I-thou (which was for him the realm of the moral life) would become more intense, and interpersonal and moral life would achieve levels of depth never before known in history. However, the same would be true of the move to the impersonal, the I-it, which would also become more intense. Buber wrote these ideas in Germany just ten years before Adolph Hitler became the ruler of Buber's homeland. What will our future be if Buber was in truth a prophet? Clearly the line between the human and the machine is becoming increasingly blurred as is the line between being alive and being dead or (as in the case of the AIDS virus) between being chemical and being organic.

Is this blurring of distinctions good or bad for all of us—as humans and as Jews? I have no idea. However, I do have a hope. It is the same hope that Buber expressed at the end of *I and Thou*: “Every spiral of its path leads us into deeper corruption and at the same time into more fundamental return. But the God-side of the event whose world-side is called return is called redemption” ([1923] 1970, 168). And it is the same hope that the Jewish prayerbook expresses at the end of every public service: “Therefore we put our hope in You, *HASHEM* our God, that we may soon see Your mighty splendor . . . to perfect the universe through the Almighty's sovereignty. Then all humanity will call upon Your Name . . . *HASHEM* shall reign for all eternity. And it is said: *HASHEM* will be King over all the world—on that day *HASHEM* will be One and His Name will be One” (p. 161 of the Art Scroll Siddur). It is the hope that beyond the God of the creation of the universe and the God of the revelation to the prophets there is the God of the redemption of everything. It is a hope for the kingdom of God at the end of days, when the disparities between the is and the ought will collapse into the unity of God.

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