

ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЕ ПАРАДИГМЫ

Shoshana Ronen

Two Diverse Notions of the Deity in Jewish Thought

Shoshana Ronen – Prof. dr. hab. Head of Hebrew Studies Department, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw, Krakowskie Przedmiescie 26/28, 00–927 Warsaw, Poland; e-mail: ronens@uw.edu.pl

The essay presents two different concepts of God in Jewish thinking. The first underlines the perfection of God, in the Aristotelean manner, and the second the personhood of God. It seems as if the second concept reflects better the approach of the Hebrew Bible, however, traces for the first concept can also be found in the same biblical text. On the one hand, the Maimonidean approach that rejects totally the anthropomorphic portray of God is deeply accepted, but, on the other hand, the biblical God is not unmoved mover or nature, but he is a person. His way with human beings is not blind or mechanical but intentional and deliberate. He reacts and responds to the actions of human beings. The essay discusses two modern Jewish thinkers: Abraham Joshua Heschel, a philosopher who emphasized the personhood of God, and Yeshayahu Leibowitz who is the successor of the Maimonidean approach.

Keywords: God, Hebrew Bible, Anthropomorphism, Intelligibility, Maimonides, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Yeshayahu Leibowitz

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For centuries the Jewish tradition, either Talmudical, or philosophical and mystical, read and understood the Hebrew Bible by a filter of interpretations and hermeneutics. The biblical text, rich in anthropomorphic assertions about God, was a source for discomfort for Jewish philosophers and theologians who needed the sublimation of the text to avoid, in their view, a profanation of the divine. The result of the long years of exegetic methods in reading the Hebrew Bible is a great challenge for readers approaching the bare biblical text “purified” from hermeneutical and theological reading, especially when it comes to the character of the supreme being. However, even if a “purified” reading is possible I believe that the various concepts of the divine in Judaism which are rooted in a common source – the Hebrew Bible – do reflect that source which contains numerous, sometimes contradicting, ideas of God.

The Biblical Text

The image of God in the Hebrew Bible is saturated with contradictions, and is confusing with its heterogeneity, with its mixture of abstract speculative attributes and strict anthropomorphic features. Therefore, it is difficult and perhaps impossible to read the text without integrated hermeneutics otherwise the picture is incoherent and perplexing. It is not surprising since “the Bible is not a single book, but a collection of volumes composed by different authors living in various countries over a period of more than a millennium. In these circumstances, divergences of emphasis, outlook, and even of fact, are to be expected” [Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 7, 2007, p. 652]. Also, the canonization of the Hebrew Bible took about five hundred years, from Ezra the Scribe (around the fifth century BC) till after Rabbi Akiva (Akiva ben Joseph: around the first and second century CE), [Adar, 1984, p. 16; Halbertal, 1997]. Consequently, there is not a single coherent depiction of God in the Hebrew Bible but different images of God. More than that, the biblical thinking concerning God is based on observations of the world and human life, however these observations are not presented in a systematic way. God is revealed in various ways: through his deeds (the flood, Exodus), he reveals himself directly to chosen people (Moses, Samuel, the prophets), and he is also revealed in contemplation and inner reflection of certain personalities [Adar, 1984, p. 22–24]. Psalms is saturated with such assertions: “I am ever mindful of the Lord’s presence” (16:8), “I am filled with the vision of You” (17:15 see also: 73:23)¹.

One of the most prominent philosophers, whose thinking became an integral part of Judaism is Moses Maimonides. In his view the anthropomorphism in the Bible is scandalous, and therefore, he uses an interpretive approach which perceives the biblical language regarding God as figurative. “All attributes, such as ‘the First’, ‘the Last’, occurring in the Scriptures in reference to God, are as metaphorical as the expressions ‘ear’ and ‘eye’. [...] In short, all similar expressions are borrowed from the language commonly used among the people” [Maimonides, 1956, p. 81]. For Maimonides the biblical language is metaphoric, and it was used in order to capture the heart and the mind of simple people who are not capable of abstract thinking.

Another attitude would be to treat the inconvenient verses as remnants of mythical approach. Yehezkel Kaufmann, the eminent biblical scholar, explained the anthropomorphist aspect in the Hebrew Bible as remnants of mythology; ancient mythological conceptions of the people of Israel that were preserved due to the un-systematic nature of the biblical thought. The Israeli idea of God was according to him:

Not a product of intellectual speculation, or a mystical meditation, in the Greek or Indian manner. It first appeared as an insight, an original intuition. [...] The new religious idea never received an abstract, systematic formulation in Israel. It expressed itself rather in symbols, [...] because it never received a dogmatic formulation which could serve as a standard for the systematic reformation of the old

¹ In this text I use a Jewish English translation of the Hebrew Bible: JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003.

religion, it was unable to entirely eradicate all traces of the pagan heritage [Kaufmann, 2003, p. 60].

In the biblical text there is a tension between two main images of the divine: on the one hand, the supreme entity to whom one cannot apply any physical characteristic: “to whom, then, can you liken Me, to whom can I be compared? – says the Holy one” (Isaiah 40:25), and, on the other hand, anthropomorphic images of God are constantly repeated. Anthropomorphic expressions are both physical and psychical personification of God – anthropopathisms.

The biblical God is situated in a certain place, Mount of Sinai or in the Ark of God (II Samuel 6:1–20), he also has human emotions: he loves and hates, feels joy and sadness, pity and revenge, he is satisfied, angry, afraid of man (Genesis 3:22), and regrets (Genesis 6:6). There are references to God as having physical-human organs like “the hand of the Lord” (Joshua 4:24, Deuteronomy 2:15, Judges 2:15, I Samuel 5:6, Ezekiel 3:22), whenever the anger or wrath of God is mentioned the Hebrew idiom refers to the anger of “God’s nose” (Isaiah 5:25, Jeremiah 30:24, Lamentations 2:22), the heart of God (Genesis 8:21, God’s purpose refers to his Heart’s devices; Jeremiah 23:20, 30:24), the eye of the Lord (Psalms 33:18), the finger of God (Exodus 8:15). God hears (Genesis 15:11, 29:23, Exodus 15:9, Psalms 28:6), the Lord sees (Genesis 29:32, II Kings 14:26). God talks (to Moses to Abraham, to the prophets, Exodus 4:21, 7:1, Deuteronomy 2:31, Isaiah 30:30, Jeremiah 1:11) he smells (Genesis 9:21). The Lord sits upon his chair – throne (I Kings 22:19, Psalms 29:10).

God’s localization is different from a mere physical object, he fills the whole universe, both heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24). The most popular image is that he and his throne are in heaven (Psalms 14:2, 53:3, 103:19, 115:16). Zvi Adar claims that God in heaven is an expression of an attitude which combines supremacy and Providence, distance and care, dissimilarity and involvement, being outside the world but also a constant surveillance of it [Adar, 1984, p. 37].

According to Maimonides, in all places where the Hebrew Bible speaks of God in physical terms, as walking, standing, sitting, speaking and anything similar, it is always metaphorical, as the Jewish Sages said, “The Torah speaks in the language of men” (e.g. Babylonian Talmud, “Brachot”, 31:2). In this interpretation we can feel the uneasiness of Maimonides and other Jewish thinkers with the Hebrew Bible itself. Maimonides expressed his hermeneutical attitude to the Hebrew Bible asserting that a person cannot read the Bible literally, because then its sense is falsified.

The same is the case with those opinions of man to which he has been accustomed from his youth; he likes them, defends them, and shuns the opposite views. [...] Such is, e.g., the case with the vulgar notions with respect to the corporeality of God, [...] It is the result of long familiarity with passages of the Bible, which they are accustomed to respect and to receive as true, and the literal sense of which implies the corporeality of God and other false notions; in truth, however, these words were employed as figures and metaphors [Maimonides, 1956, p. 41–42].

Two Approaches to the Devine

God is the main protagonist of the Hebrew Bible and he appears almost in every verse. However, it is important to note that there is neither a definition of God nor any argumentation for proving his existence. Mostly he is revealed by his actions: we can read what he does but not what he is, or as Louis Jacobs suggests, “what he would have men do” [Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 19, 2007, p. 694]. According to Jacobs Judaism is not a philosophy, or even not a theology in its strict sense – an attempt to find what God is – but it is a way of life according faith, and in that case the main question for the Jewish believer is ‘what God wants me to do’. Nevertheless, from the various activities of God described in the Hebrew Bible one can deduce what God is, or at least, what are his characteristics. For instance, he is the creator of all being, but he is transcendent, he cares for creation and is involved in history and influences it. Therefore, the biblical God is not unmoved mover or nature, but he is a person. His way with human beings is not blind or mechanical but intentional and deliberate. He reacts and responds to the actions of human beings.

In Judaism one can find two main approaches to the divine, in one his perfection is essential and in the other his personhood is underlined. Regarding the later, the classical biblical God is not perfect, as Moshe Idel wrote: “the biblical God cannot create one perfect human being, cannot educate humanity, and therefore he has to annihilate it in the Great Flood. [...] This portrayal in the Hebrew Bible could not leave for the rabbinical world a concept of perfect divinity as the Greek one” [Hess & Shturm, 1998, p. 134]. However, from the middle ages and especially with the great influence of Maimonides on Judaism the perfection of God in the Aristotelian sense became also a Jewish perception².

Nevertheless, even for Jewish thinkers who perceive God as a person the biblical anthropomorphism is problematical. Therefore, although the Bible refers to

² In the Bible there is also the idea of *hester panim* namely, the God “hiding the face”, which is to say, that God exists but for some reason withdraws himself from the world. In other words, divine hiddenness means that God exists but at the same time is absent. This is another apparent inconsistency in the biblical perception of God: revelation versus concealment: he reveals himself in his deeds, in history and nature (Psalms 19:1; Job 12:9–10). He revealed himself in Exodus, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, to the judges and the prophets, but he also hides himself. “You are indeed a God who concealed Himself” (Isaiah 45:15), “why do You hide Your face” (Psalms 44:25; and also, 22:2; 88:15). In some places in the Bible the silence of God is a mystery and cannot be understood by human beings, and in other places God hides his face as a means of punishment to wrongdoers (Deuteronomy 31:17–18).

The image of God hiding His face (*hester panim*) is quite common in Jewish theology. In times of catastrophes that come upon the people of Israel God does not rescue his people because he hides his face. The absence of God in times of great suffering was interpreted in Jewish tradition as either a punishment for sins or a mystery which cannot be comprehended by the human mind. When God withdraws from the world, when he is silent or absent, the course of history is entirely in the hands of humanity. It is no wonder then that many responses to the fundamental question of “where was God in the time of the Holocaust?” are variations of this ancient Hebrew concept of *hester panim*. This mystery acts as motivation for extensive human intellectual efforts to explicate the existence of evil and suffering in a world that was created by an all-good and omnipotent God.

the ear, the nose, or the finger of God, Jews accept the Maimonidean approach, namely that these are metaphors and “that the absolute cannot be human in any real sense” [Muffs, 2005, p. 55]. Moreover, Maimonides’ thirteen principles of faith among them one that claims that “God is not a physical body” have been incorporated into the prayer book and the liturgy of many Jewish communities, who recite them at the beginning of the daily morning’s prayer. Therefore, they are a part of the foundation of the normative Jewish belief [Halbertal, 2009, p. 119–120]⁵. To conclude: in the Bible itself there is a tension between two images of God: the supreme entity to whom one cannot apply any physical characteristic, and God as a person, who at times is depicted with anthropomorphic features.

As an illustration to these two approaches I will discuss two modern Jewish thinkers: Abraham Joshua Heschel, a philosopher who emphasized the personhood of God, and Yeshayahu Leibowitz who is the successor of the Maimonidean approach.

The Intelligible God

In his classical book *God in Search of Man* Heschel wrote:

It is as if God were unwilling to be alone, and He had chosen man to serve Him. Our seeking Him is not only humans’ but also **His** concern and must not be considered an exclusively human affair. [...] All the human history as described in the Bible may be summarized in one phrase: *God is in search of man...* When Adam and Eve hid from His presence, the Lord called: *Where art thou?* (Genesis 3:9) It is a call that goes out again and again [Heschel, 1978, p. 136–137].

For Heschel the call “*Where art thou?*” as well as the divine voice heard at mount Sinai when the people of Israel were given the Torah, were not unique and one-time episodes. This voice echoes constantly. The presence of God is in the world is perpetual, and it invites human beings to identify it, and to respond to it [Kofmann, 2010, p. 144–145, 154]. Heschel’s notion of the pathos of God is essential for understanding the relationship between God and human beings. The idea of pathos illuminates very clearly Heschel’s insistence on God’s need of humanity and God’s dependence on it. Reading carefully the books of the prophets Heschel comes to his concept of the pathos of God:

God does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and expect obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath.

³ Among these thirteen principals of faith the first four are concerned with the image of God. I believe that it is worth to mention them here, since the influence of Maimonides’ philosophy on normative Judaism is fundamental. 1. Belief in the existence of the Creator, who is perfect in every manner of existence and is the Primary Cause of all that exists. 2. The belief in God’s absolute and unparalleled unity. (This principal is important for avoiding any plurality in the Deity). 3. The belief in God’s non-corporeality, nor that He will be affected by any physical occurrences, such as movement, or rest, or dwelling. 4. The belief in God’s eternity. The Aristotelian influence on Maimonides’ philosophy is evident already in these four principals.

He is not conceived as judging the world in detachment. [...] This notion that God can be intimately affected, that He possesses not merely intelligence and will, but also pathos, basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God [Heschel, 1962, p. 288–289].

The divine pathos is the mutual need of God and humanity, and God's need to participate in human life and history. We can see that Heschel's notion of the biblical God is entirely different from the philosophical concept of God, as articulated by Aristotle and Maimonides.

Yet, the idea of God of pathos, which stresses attributes as good, merciful, caring, loving, rewarding etc., is not the only face of the biblical God, who is described as having also dark side. "The Bible ascribes to God actions that, to our way of thinking, lack moral grounds, or even run counter to our moral sense. Indeed, at times they seem to reflect a ruthless, capricious, demonic being" [Kaufmann, 2003, p. 74]. Good examples for that face of God are the binding of Isaac and the story of Job.

The intelligibility of God is also an important attribute in Heschel's thought. God wants to be understood: "Our understanding of God depends not only on man's readiness to approach Him but also on God's willingness to be approached" [Heschel, 1978, p. 128], at least by those who are attentive enough to God's call, by those who are open towards God who pursues them. Heschel's God, who is in search of man, cannot be the God who hides himself from man, as in *hester panim*⁴. God's absence means that people are not open to his presence⁵, to the wonder of existence, and do not respond to his question "where art thou?". This happens because human beings enjoy freedom, which enables them to ignore God's call. Nonetheless, not all epochs are identical; sometimes prophecy is subdued, and in other era people are chosen to be prophets [Heschel, 1978, p. 129]. Heschel adds that human beings cannot know anything about the essence of God, but only his will and pathos, as he reveals them to humanity [Heschel, 1962, p. 620–621]. The God of the prophets is a personal God, in contrast to the God of the philosophers; "he is not encountered as universal, general, pure Being, but always in a particular mode of being, as personal God to a personal man" [Ibid., p. 622]. Human beings cannot know anything about God in himself, about God as an object for contemplation and comprehension but only in his relation to people: "The ultimate element in the object of theological reflection is transcendent divine attention to man" [Ibid., p. 624]. This illustration of God underlines his care and interest in humanity that instantly questions His omnipotence.

In *Heavenly Torah*, his Hebrew book, Heschel provides a very interesting discussion regarding the question of the existing of evil when God is perceived as both

⁴ See footnote no. 2.

⁵ Here we reach a vicious circle: This question is connected to the problem of evil. Heschel says that evil is real, mighty and tempting, and therefore, we can conclude that man chooses evil, i.e. closes his heart to the presence of God because of the seducing power of evil, or the opposite, seeing evil in the world, humanity falls down into the arms of despair, is blinded by suffering and then cannot feel the presence of the divine. I don't think that Heschel has a solution for that riddle, like Joseph D. Soloveitchik who claims that evil and suffering should bring man back to God [Soloveitchik, 1975, p. 65–71]. Heschel asserts that evil is not the problem, but instead the problem is man's relation to God [Heschel, 1978, p. 367–381].

full of mercy and omnipotence. The question is: if God is unconditionally good and powerful how come evil exists? Heschel looks to two main figures in the Jewish *halachic* world: Rabbi Ishmael (living in the first half of the second century C.E) and Rabbi Akiva (50–135 C.E). Both are significant figures when it comes to the way Jewish law and Jewish thought are presented in the Talmud. Heschel portrays the dilemma of mercy versus omnipotence through the teaching of those two ancient scholars, showing that Akiva is on the side of mercy and Ishmael on the side of omnipotence. Therefore, for Akiva it is better to reduce the power of God than to conceive of him as indifferent. Heschel presents Akiva's thinking as follows:

Compassion is the key. Better to limit the belief in God's power than to dampen the faith in God's mercy. Rabbi Akiva viewed all history through the lens of trust in God's mercy. God participates in His creatures' suffering; it is as if God were wounded by the afflictions of Israel, God's people. If Israel is in exile, the Shekhinah is with them. When Israel is redeemed, God is redeemed [Heschel, 2005, p. 210].

God can empathize with his suffering people but cannot redeem them, for when they are saved, he is saved with them. Ishmael is on the side of omnipotence, and Heschel interprets his view as follows: "The whole Akivan notion of God's participation in human suffering [...] was foreign to Rabbi Ishmael's teaching. In his view, this notion did not befit God's dignity and could lead to a denial of God's power. For him, God's justice and power are key, not God's compassion" [Ibid., p. 211].

Those two approaches to the relation between God and humanity, or God and the people of Israel, can be summarized by two different images of the two ancient sages. For Ishmael, "human beings are in the hands of heaven as a servant in the hands of the master" [Ibid., p. 216], while in Akiva's eyes, in his interpretation of the Song of Songs, "the congregation of Israel is compared to a bride, and the holy and Blessed One to her lover" [Ibid., p. 197].

Reading Heschel's works, leaves no doubt that he is on the side of Akiva. "His compassion is greater than His justice. He will accept us in all our frailty and weakness" [Heschel, 1978, p. 378]. An omnipotent God has no need whatsoever for anything, let alone finite creatures like human beings⁶. Susannah Heschel defines Heschel's God as the "most moved mover" [Donnelly & Pawlikowski, 2007, p. 12]⁷. Heschel depicts the dilemma of mercy vs. omnipotence very clearly, asking: Does the image of God's suffering with his people "diminish our image of the divine and limit our belief in the creator's omnipotence?" [Heschel, 2005, p. 118]. Heschel continues: "If there is mercy, there surely is no power; and if there is power, there

⁶ "This is the mysterious paradox of Biblical faith: *God is pursuing man*. It is as if God were unwilling to be alone, and He had chosen man to serve Him. Our seeking Him is not only man's but also His concern and must not be considered an exclusively human affair [...] All the human history as described in the Bible may be summarized in one phrase: *God is in search of man* [...] When Adam and Eve hid from His presence, the Lord called: *Where art thou?* (Genesis 3:9). It is a call that goes out again and again" [Heschel, 1978, p. 136–147].

⁷ Susannah Heschel probably had in mind Fritz Rothchild's assertion: "The pathetic God as distinguished from the God of Aristotle is not the Unmoved Mover but the Most Moved Mover" [Rothchild, 1959, p. 24]. I would like to thank Edward Kaplan who drew my attention to Rothchild's definition.

surely is no mercy” [Heschel, 2005, p. 118]. The quintessence of the notion of divine pathos is partnership and sharing the same destiny. God and humanity are both in the same boat, and they suffer together.⁸ What Akiva emphasized, and I believe that it is Heschel’s point of view as well, is that the pathos of God, i.e., the mutuality in the relationship of God and human beings, is a participation of the soul. God relates to humanity with love, participates in its sorrow, and, most importantly, God is saved with humanity. As much as human beings need God to be saved, so God needs humanity for His salvation.

The Unintelligible God

As Heschel has the Bible as the source of his concept of God so has Leibowitz, whose main source is the Ecclesiastic and not the prophetic way of thinking. Ecclesiastes, on the contrary to the author of Psalms or the prophets, does not talk to God but observes his world, he does not cry to God and protests injustice, but only describes the way things are. He does not wonder about the world only portrays it, and here are some of his observations: “Alongside righteousness there is wickedness” (3:16); there is no God who takes care of the oppressed (4:1); the righteous suffers the wicked enjoys (8:14, 6:2); it is wise to be careful in what you say and do because when needed God not necessary be there for you “For God is in heaven and you are on earth” (5:1). God is not a guarantee for justice, He himself is not always just “Consider God’s doing! Who can straighten what He has twisted?” (7:13). Koheleth continues to describe the way things are without judging them: “In my own brief span of life, I have seen both these things: sometimes a good man perishes in spite of his goodness, and sometimes a wicked one endures in spite of his wickedness” (7:15). Ecclesiastes’ God is the God one has to beware of, “be not overeager to go to the House of God” (4:17). God is a mysterious being beyond the world, and human beings are unable to understand his ways. He is all-powerful but has nothing to do with morality and does not show any will to conduct the world and human beings according to ethical rules [Adar, 1984, p. 85]. Thus, why to revere God and keep his commands? Because, writes Koheleth, this is the nature, or essence of human kind (12:13).⁹ It is not surprising, then, that Leibowitz perceived Ecclesiastes as one of the greatest books of faith,¹⁰ corresponds to his philosophical approach concerning the true faith – faith for its own sack (*emunah lishma*).¹¹ For Leibowitz, besides

⁸ Akiva’s school represents the vision of partnership: “The Holy and blessed One is a partner in the suffering of His creatures; He is involved in the lot of His people, wounded by their sufferings and redeemed by their liberation. This response constitutes a sublimation of human suffering. It elevates the mystery of suffering above and beyond the human realm and seeks to nullify the afflictions of mortals before the afflictions of heaven” [Heschel, 2005, p. 120].

⁹ In the JPS translation it says: “for this applies to all mankind” and in King James Version “for this is the whole duty of man”. Both translations are possible interpretations, I believe that “this is the nature, or essence, of human kind” is more accurate.

¹⁰ Among the great books of faith Leibowitz chooses: The Book of Job, and The Guide for the perplexed by Maimonides.

¹¹ Faith for its own sack is for Leibowitz the highest form of devotion in which a believer does not have any expectation for reward for his/her piousness. Faith for its own sack does not depend on

Koheleth's reflections, the book of Job and the binding of Isaac are two narratives that illustrate in the clearest way what is faith for its own sake. This kind of faith, which for Leibowitz is the purest, is faith that seeks no reward, no answer, no salvation, faith that does not expect any awards or compensations, faith which is an absolute acceptance of the duty of human beings to worship God and to follow his commands, and in the case of Abraham to obey a demand which entirely contradicts previous divine promises [Leibowitz, 1995, p. 17–42].

Koheleth, according to Leibowitz, cannot find any meaning and value in human existence. "The vain human existence is in front of God. God is present in the book in every verse. And Koheleth does not find any sense in the human existence in front of God – this is his nihilism [Ibid., p. 50]". In his investigations he looks for what is good for humans and concludes that all is futile: sensual pleasures, material comfort, wisdom or knowledge. The search for knowledge characterizes human beings but it is also sometimes a source of misery. It is so, according to Leibowitz, because people want to understand the world but cannot. "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (1:18). Futile is also moral behavior because in the world righteous suffers and wicked has success. Koheleth, who was looking for what is good for human beings could not find an answer. The conclusion of Koheleth search is surprising: "Revere God and observe His commandments" (12:13). According to Leibowitz, Koheleth does not conclude with "revere God and observe his commands because it is good for mankind" (*ki ze tov la'adam*), but with "because it is the nature/essence/duty of mankind" (*ki ze kol ha'adam*). Koheleth did not find what is good for mankind, but what is mankind's nature. The valuable essence of human existence is to revere God, this is the sense of human life and its essence, even if it will not bring any good. Faith is a value for its own sake and not a mean for having benefits, for example, eternal life. The moral content of the existence of humanity is nothing but the fear of God [Ibid., p. 57].

In the book of Koheleth there is an infinite distance between God and his creatures, and he is detached from the world, where human beings cannot understand him, yet, in other books in the Hebrew Bible God is intelligible, he contacts people, talks to them, reveals himself to Moses and the prophets and is active in history. Therefore, Koheleth's God is closer to the Aristotelian God than to the God of Abraham, and it also corresponds with the perception of Leibowitz, to whom there is an unbridgeable gap between the human sphere and the divine. Leibowitz reads the Maimonidean philosophy and theology in a similar way he reads Koheleth. According to Leibowitz also Maimonides claims that the whole world, including the human world, human values, human desires and needs are worthless. Only God truly exists, and the worship and fear of God is the only true goal of human beings. God worshipping has no other aim than God worshipping, it has no other purpose to

the world and God's attitude towards it. An inferior, although very common form of faith, is for Leibowitz "faith not for its sake", when a believer expects benefits for his/her devoutness. For example, when a believer keeps the mitzvot for reaching heaven after death. In this kind of faith human beings treat God instrumentally, as a god who should satisfy needs, whether material or spiritual [Leibowitz, 1982, p. 38–39].

achieve some benefits, neither peace of mind nor material rewards. Because humans are trapped in their own “human all too human” categories of thinking and language, and their senses, and since God is beyond the human world, one cannot relate to God any image, and the only way to relate to God is through *via negativa* [Leibowitz, 1995, p. 68–70]. For Leibowitz, every image related to God is false, it is impossible to portray God with qualities and functions which are intelligible to the human perception. Nothing can be said about God, and the only content of faith is the recognition that one has to worship God, not having any knowledge about God. In that context, Leibowitz quotes from the thirteen principals of faith by Maimonides that God ‘is incorporeal; that He is free from all anthropomorphic properties; and that He has no likeness at all’. Leibowitz interpreters convincingly the Hebrew words *ve-lo yasiguhu masige haguf* as the claim that God cannot be perceived by the categories of the human thinking [Leibowitz, 1999, p. 17, 109].

Nevertheless, there is some positive knowledge about God that Leibowitz assumes, namely that God exists, and that he is totally transcendent. He cannot be grasp by nature or history, he is beyond nature, and beyond the world [Leibowitz, 1982, p. 88]. In fact, his divinity has no connection what so ever to the existence of the world, including the human world [Ibid., p. 39]. Naomi Kasher understands this positive Leibowitzian perception of God as the equivalent of the Kantian the thing-in-itself. And although a perception of the thing-in-itself/God is impossible, in the realm of values humanity can stand in front of God, a person can relate to God by revering him [Kasher, 2018, p. 58–59].

Thus, Leibowitz claims that both Koheleth and Maimonides see the essence of humanity in revering God, a divine who is attached from humanity that cannot relate to him any trait besides existence. The true worshiping of God then, is a worship for its own sack without any expectations for benefits both material and spiritual.

Heschel and Leibowitz based their arguments on the same book and formulated diverse theology. Therefore, it can be concluded that different philosophical and theological approaches can find their origin and support in the biblical text, and all of them are plausible.

Neil Gillman writes about three different paths to the awareness of God’s reality: The first track is the rational approach that holds that God’s existence can be perceived by rational reflections. The essence of God is a pure thought, and he is the one cause for all existence, similar to the Aristotelian concept of the Unmoved Mover. Maimonides is the best representative of that approach, and also Leibowitz in contemporary philosophy. The second is the experimental approach, namely, God’s presence can be experienced or felt in the world – Heschel with his idea of God of pathos who is caring and loving is a good illustration for that approach. God created humanity as free creatures although he knew that they could inflict chaos, disobey his commands and not observe the Torah, but his love overcame his knowledge and he have chosen to create mankind [Muffs, 2005, p. 172–173]. In addition, God wears human persona because he knows that only in this disguise human beings can reach him.

The third approach is the existentialist, and it is different from Heschel’s and Leibowitz’s, but it is a version of God as a persona. It claims that God can be

encountered in an intense personal relationship. This is the approach of Martin Buber in his concept of “I-Thou”, which relates to God and human relationships, in its mutuality [Gillman, 1990, p. 67–74]. Mutuality that is absent from Heschel’s approach, who although holds that God is full of pathos and care does not place human beings and God on the same rank as the I-Thou concept. In Buber’s approach God is “the supreme and eternal Thou, the preeminently personal God who enters into relationship with those who seek to encounter Him” [Ibid., p. 79]. Gillman claims that Buber’s approach is a modern formulation of the biblical notion of the personal God. God is encountered and not reflected as an abstract philosophical concept¹².

Buber claims that encountering God is possible only when one does not renounce the I, as mystics do, because the I is indispensable for any relations that presuppose I and You¹³. In addition, for encountering God one cannot withdraw from the world, one has to carry the world within him because only “when you consecrate life you encounter the living God” [Buber, 1970, p. 126–128]. The mutuality of I-Thou relationship is necessary, God needs man as much as man needs God, “But don’t you know also that God needs you – in the fullness of his eternity, you?” [Ibid., p. 130], and with that conclusion Heschel would agree totally.

However, Maimonides would claim that it is senseless assertion, human beings can know nothing positive about God. Leibowitz asserted that, in contrary to many religious people, he does not have a direct access to God’s will, he cannot know God’s intentions, if God has any, “I do not have communication with what is behind the curtains. [...] the selective use of ‘the finger of God’ (providence) for what is comfortable or desirable for us is the same as the misuse of the concept of ‘holiness’ for national-political goals” [Leibowitz, 1982, p. 138]. Human beings, Leibowitz claimed, can know only their duty to revere God and to follow his commandments¹⁴ without any expectations for any kind of reward, whether in this world or in after life.

All those great thinkers: Maimonides and Leibowitz, Buber and Heschel not only treated the Hebrew Bible as their fundamental text but also were convinced that their way of reading is the right one. These words lead me to the conclusion: God in the Hebrew Bible has as many faces, or images, as the various commentators of him.

¹² De Lange summarizes the relationship God-Human today in one possible way: “The crucial point about God, in the Bible, throughout Jewish history, and in the lives of men and women today, is not that he exists in the abstract but that he is present in the life of the individual and the people” [De Lange, 2000, p. 179].

¹³ De Lange shows that the origin of this thought is in the philosophy of Hermann Cohen [Ibid., p. 178].

¹⁴ At that point we can ask how we know or feel that this is our duty, especially when there is no answer or response from the “other” side? If we cannot know directly from God that our task is to worship him then how we enter this state of mind, or get this understanding?

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