

Suffering & Prosperity: A Jewish Philosophical Exploration

Lecture 4: Skeptical Theism and Anti-Theodicy

1. איוב פרק ל"ח

- א וַיַּעַן-יְהוָה אֶת-אִיּוֹב, מִנְהַסְעָרָה (מִן הַסְּעָרָה); וַיֹּאמֶר.
- 1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:
- ב מִי זֶה, מַחְשִׁיב עֲצָה בְּמַלְיוֹן-- בְּלִי-דַעַת.
- 2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?
- ג אֲזַר-נָא כְּגֹבֵר חֲלָצִיד; וְאַשְׁאֲלֶךָ, וְהוֹדִיעַנִי.
- 3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto Me.
- ד אֵיפֹה הָיִיתָ, בְּסֻדֵי-אָרֶץ; הַגָּד, אִם-יָדַעְתָּ בִּינָה.
- 4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast the understanding.
- ה מִי-שָׁם מְמַדְיָהּ, כִּי תִדְעַ; אוּ מִי-נָטָה עָלֶיהָ קוֹ.
- 5 Who determined the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who stretched the line upon it?
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- ו הֲבָאתָ, עַד-נִבְכֵי-יָם; וּבְחַקֵּר תְּהוֹם, הַתְּהַלְכֶתָּ.
- 16 Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? Or hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep?
- ז הֲנִגְלוּ לְךָ, שַׁעְרֵי-מָוֶת; וְשַׁעְרֵי צְלָמוֹת תִּרְאֶה.
- 17 Have the gates of death been revealed unto thee? Or hast thou seen the gates of the shadow of death?
- ח הֲתִבְנִנְתָּ, עַד-רַחְבֵי-אָרֶץ; הַגָּד, אִם-יָדַעְתָּ כֻּלָּהּ.
- 18 Hast thou surveyed unto the breadths of the earth? Declare, if thou knowest it all.
- ט אֵי-זֶה הַדֶּרֶךְ, יִשְׁכֵּן-אוֹר; וְחֹשֶׁךְ, אֵי-זֶה מְקוֹמוֹ.
- 19 Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and as for darkness, where is the place thereof;
- כ כִּי תִקְחֶנּוּ אֶל-גְּבוּלוֹ; וְכִי-תִבְיֹן, נְתִיבוֹת בֵּיתוֹ.
- 20 That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof?
- כא יָדַעְתָּ, כִּי-אֲזַ תּוֹלַד; וּמִסְפַּר יָמֶיךָ רַבִּים.
- 21 Thou knowest it, for thou wast then born, and the number of thy days is great!
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- לב מִי-שָׂת, בְּטַחוֹת חֲכָמָה; אוּ מִי-נָתַן לְשִׁכּוֹי בִּינָה.
- 36 Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? Or who hath given understanding to the mind?
- לז מִי-יִסְפֹּר שְׁחָקִים בְּחֲכָמָה; וְנִבְּלֵי שָׁמַיִם, מִי יִשְׁכִּיב.
- 37 Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can pour out the bottles of heaven

2. מורה הנבוכים ג:ל"ג

המפוזרות בבעלי-החיים ההולכים, השוחים והעפים. כוונת כל הדברים האלה היתה ששכלינו אינם מגיעים להשיג את אופן התהוותם של דברים טבעיים אלה הנמצאים בעולם ההתהוות והכליון, ולא לתפוש²⁶ כיצד התחילה מציאותו של כוח טבעי זה בהם²⁷, שהרי אין הוא דבר הדומה למה שאנו עושים. כיצד אפוא נבקש שהנהגתו יתעלה אותם והשגחתו עליהם ידמו להנהגתנו את מה שאנו מנהיגים ולהשגחתנו על מה שאנו משגיחים עליו? אלא חובה לעצור²⁸ אצל שיעור זה ולהאמין שדבר לא נסתר מפניו יתעלה, כמו שאמר אליהוא כאן: כי עיניו על דרכי איש, וכל צעדיו יראה. אין חשך ואין צלמנות להסתיר שם פעלי אָנן (שם, ל"ד, 21-22). אבל משמעות השגחתו אינה משמעות ואין הגדרה אחת משותפת להם, כפי שחושב כל נבוכ. אין ביניהם שיתוף אלא בשם בלבד²⁹. כמו שהמעשה שלנו אינו דומה למעשה שלו, שאין הגדרה אחת משותפת להם, וכהבדל בין המעשים הטבעיים למעשים המלאכותיים כן ההבדל בין ההנהגה האלוהית, ההשגחה האלוהית והכוונה האלוהית לדברים טבעיים אלה לבין הנהגתנו, השגחתנו וכוונתנו האנושית למה שאנו מנהיגים, משגיחים עליו ומתכוונים לו.

זאת היתה מטרת ספר איוב כולו, כלומר לתת את עיקר האמונה הזו ולהסב את תשומת-הלב אל הראיה הזאת מן הדברים הטבעיים, כדי שלא תטעה ותבקש בדמיוןך שידיעתו תהיה כידיעתנו, או כוונתו, השגחתו והנהגתו ככוונתנו, השגחתנו והנהגתנו. כאשר האדם יודע זאת יקל עליו כל פגע³⁰, והפגעים לא יוסיפו לו ספקות באשר לאלוה, והאם הוא יודע או אינו יודע, משגיח או מזניח. יתר על כן, (הפגעים) יוסיפו לו אהבה, כמו שאמר בסיום ההתגלות הזאת: על כן אמאס ונחמתי, על עפר ואפר (שם, מ"ב, 6)³¹, וכמו שאמר (חכמיו) ז"ל: עושים מאהבה ושמחים בייסורי³².

The description of all these things serves to impress on our minds that we are unable to comprehend how these transient creatures come into existence, or to imagine how their natural properties commenced to exist, and that these are not like the things which we are able to produce. Much less can we compare the manner in which God rules and manages His creatures with the manner in which we rule and manage certain beings. We must content ourselves with this, and believe that "nothing is hidden from God, as Elihu says: "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves" (xxxiv. 21, 22). But the term management, when applied to God, has not the same meaning which it has when applied to us; and when we say that He rules His creatures we do not mean that He does the same as we do when we rule over other beings. The term "rule" has not the same definition in both cases: it signifies two different notions, which have nothing in common but the name. In the same manner, as there is a difference between works of nature and productions of human handicraft, so there is a difference between God's rule, providence, and intention in reference to all natural forces, and our rule, providence, and intention in reference to things which are the objects of our rule, providence, and intention. This lesson is the principal object of the whole Book of Job; it lays down this principle of faith, and recommends us to derive a proof from nature, that we should not fall into the error of imagining His knowledge to be similar to ours, or His intention, providence, and rule similar to ours. When we know this we shall find everything that may befall us easy to bear; mishap will create no doubts in our hearts concerning God, whether He knows our affairs or not, whether He provides for us or abandons us. On the contrary, our fate will increase our love of God; as is said in the end of this prophecy: "Therefore I abhor myself and repent concerning the dust and ashes" (xlii. 6); and as our Sages say: "The pious do everything out of love, and rejoice in their own afflictions." (B. T. Shabb. 88b.)

3. תורת האדם שער הגמול, רמב"ן

וכן תראה ענין רוב מוסרי הקב"ה אל איוב, לעלות מעשיו הנפלאים ולהודיעו (נ"א : מעשה האלהים, ואת) מיעוט דעתו של איוב ביסוד הנבראים, שלא ידע יסודות הארץ והשמים והבהמות והעופות והים ובריותיו והכלל מעשה בראשית. ורצונו לומר כי מי שלא ידע בכל אלה, עם ראותו בהם ההשגחה וטוב הסדר וההנהגה אע"פ שהם בלא זכות ובלא חובה, למה לא יחשוב בכלל שמשפטי האלהים בבני אדם נעלמים, וסודם ביצירת הנפש והגוף סתום וחתום, ולמה לא יתן צדק לפועלו מן הסתם אחרי ראותו חמלתו והשגחתו הטובה בשאר הבריות השפלות, ומדוע יבא אחרי המלך את אשר כבר עשהו.

4. "Skeptical Theism," *Philosophy Compass* (Justin McBrayer)

According to skeptical theism, if there were a God, it is likely that he would have reasons for acting that are beyond our ken, and thus we are not justified in making all-things-considered judgments about what the world would be like if there were a God. In particular, the fact that we don't see a good reason for X does not justify the conclusion that there is no good reason for X

5. בבא קמא פ"ה.

ולרבנן בתראי דאמרי כל שחייב בשבת חייב ברפוא וכל שאינו חייב בשבת אינו חייב ברפוא ריפוי דתנא ביה קרא למה לי מיבעי ליה לכדתנא דבי ר' ישמעאל דתניא דבי ר' ישמעאל אומר) שמות כא, יט (ורפא ירפא מכאן שניתן רשות לרופא לרפאות

The Gemara asks: **And according to the opinion of the latter Rabbis in the *baraita*, who say: Anyone who is liable to pay compensation for loss of livelihood is liable to pay compensation for medical costs, and anyone who is not liable to pay compensation for loss of livelihood is not liable to pay compensation for medical costs, why do I need, i.e., how do I account for, the fact that the verse repeated the obligation to pay medical costs?** The Gemara answers: **It is necessary for that which the school of [Rabbi Yishmael](#) taught. As it is taught in a *baraita* that the school of [Rabbi Yishmael](#) says:** When the verse states: **"And shall cause him to be thoroughly healed [*verappo yerappe*]" ([Exodus 21:19](#)), it is derived from here that permission is granted to a doctor to heal, and it is not considered to be an intervention counter to the will of God.**

6. רמב"ן על התורה, ויקרא פרק כ"ו

וזו היא כונתם באמרם (שם) ורפא ירפא מכאן שנתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות, לא אמרו שנתנה רשות לחולה להתרפאות, אלא כיון שחלה החולה ובא להתרפאות כי נהג ברפואות והוא לא היה מעדת השם שחלקם בחיים, אין לרופא לאסור עצמו מרפואתו, לא מפני חשש שמא ימות בידו, אחרי שהוא בקי במלאכה ההיא, ולא בעבור שיאמר כי השם לבדו הוא רופא כל בשר, שכבר נהגו.

This is also the intent of the Rabbis' interpretation: *"And he shall cause him to be thoroughly healed."*⁶⁵ *Exodus 21:19*. From here [you deduce the principle] that permission has been given to the physician to heal." They did not say that "permission was given to the sick to be healed" [by the physician], but instead they stated [by implication] that since the person who became sick comes [to the

physician] to be healed, because he has accustomed himself to seeking medical help and *he was not of the congregation of the Eternal whose portion is in this life*. the physician should not refrain from healing him; whether because of fear that he might die under his hand, since he is qualified in this profession, or because he says that it is G-d alone Who is the Healer of all flesh, since [after all] people have already accustomed themselves [to seeking such help]

7. רש"י מסכת בבא קמא דף פה עמוד א

נתנה רשות לרופאים לרפאות - ולא אמרינן רחמנא מחי ואיהו מסי.

Permission is granted to physicians to heal – and we don't say, "God made him sick and they will heal?"

8. Grotesque in the Garden, Hud Hudson

Here is a final way of seeing the difficulty—in *a single thought*: If there really is a morally obligating reason for God to deceive me, then I am deceived, for He always does what He ought. If there is no morally justifying reason for God to deceive me, then I am not deceived, for He never does what He ought not. If there is a morally justifying reason for God to deceive me, then either I am or am not deceived depending on His other purposes. Pitifully, I am utterly in

the dark about which of those three antecedent conditions is satisfied. And thus the darkness expands so that I am also utterly in the dark about whether I am deceived in the most comprehensive, irresistible and undetectable fashion.

I begin to fear that this way lies madness for anyone who accepts that there is a being possessed of nearly unlimited power to deceive and who will use that power when morality demands or when His inscrutable purposes served by doing so do not conflict with what morality demands. What began as a sensible, modest, and well-contained strategy for opposing presumptuous atheistic reasoning from episodes of evil has transformed into a near global catastrophe threatening to undermine the reasonableness of our views in nearly all matters, great and small.

And I am left with the question of what to do. What is my proper role? Which way do I turn? I cannot doubt His existence, His goodness, His knowledge, or His power—my nature doesn't permit it. I cannot conceive myself His equal even in the absurdly restricted task of understanding the morally justifying reasons for a cyclone or for His hiddenness. I am in the dark about whether my or your massive deception might likewise be an evil which is well compensated for by a good which I can neither recognize as a good nor even have the capacity to entertain should its complexity outrun my representational powers.

These have been the thoughts of a philosopher who has spent his life in the dark.

9. מנחות כ"ט:

חזר ובא לפני הקב"ה אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם יש לך אדם כזה ואתה נותן תורה ע"י אמר לו שתוק כך עלה במחשבה לפני אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם הראיתיני תורתו הראני שכרו אמר לו חזור [לאחורך] חזר לאחוריו ראה ששוקלין בשרו במקולין אמר לפניו רבש"ע זו תורה וזו שכרה א"ל שתוק כך עלה במחשבה לפני

Moses returned and came before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and said before Him: Master of the Universe, You have a man as great as this and yet You still choose to give the Torah through me. Why? God said to him: Be silent; this intention arose before Me. Moses said before God: Master of the Universe, You have shown me [Rabbi Akiva's](#) Torah, now show me his reward. God said to him: Return to where you were. Moses went back and saw that they were weighing [Rabbi Akiva's](#) flesh in a butcher shop [*bemakkulin*], as [Rabbi Akiva](#) was tortured to death by the Romans. Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, this is Torah and this is its reward? God said to him: Be silent; this intention arose before Me.

10. Out of the Whirlwind, p. 102

Yes, the topical Halakhah has evolved an *ethic* of suffering instead of a *metaphysic* of suffering. While the metaphysic is out to discover the ontological objective reason of suffering from within, the ethic posits meanings from within and without. It is concerned not so much with pathos as such but with the pathetic mood of the person in distress, with the assimilation of pain into the total I-awareness, with man's response to adversity and disaster. This is the difference between a metaphysic and an ethic of evil. The metaphysic seeks to justify evil or deny its reality. The ethic of suffering seeks the transformation of an alien *factum* which one encounters into an *actus* in which one engages, the succumbing to an overwhelming force into an experience impregnated with directedness and sense.

11. Halakhic Man, p. 41

Halakhic man...fights against life's evil and struggles relentlessly with the wicked kingdom...See what many religions have done to this world on account of their yearning to break through the bounds of concrete reality and escape to the sphere of eternity...Had they not desired to unite with infinity and to merge with transcendence, then they might have been able to do something to aid the widow and orphan...

12. To Heal A Fractured World, R. Jonathan Sacks, pp. 22-3

"Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God" (Exodus 3:6). Why was he afraid? Because if he were fully to understand God he would have no choice but to be reconciled to the slavery and oppression of the world. From the vantage point of eternity, he would see that the bad is a necessary stage on the journey to the good. He would understand God but he would cease to be Moses, the fighter against injustice who intervened whenever he saw wrong being done. "He was afraid" that seeing heaven would desensitize him to earth, that coming close to infinity would mean losing his humanity.

13. “Rosh Hashana: A Breath of Life,” R. Jonathan Sacks

Why, if we believe the soul is immortal, that there is life after death and that this world is not all there is, do we not say so more often and more loudly? Because since civilization began, heaven has too often been used as an excuse for injustice and violence down here on earth. What evil can you not commit if you believe you will be rewarded for it in the world to come? That is the logic of the terrorist and the suicide bomber. It is the logic of those who burned “heretics” at the stake in order, so they said, to save their immortal souls. Against this horrific mindset the whole of Judaism is a protest.

14. תורת האדם שער הגמול

ואם תשאל עלינו כיון שיש ענין נעלם במשפט, ונצטרך להאמין בצדקו מצד שופט האמת יתברך ויתעלה, למה תטריח אותנו ותצוה עלינו ללמוד הטענות שפירשנו והסוד שרמזנו, ולא נשליך הכל על הסמך שנעשה בסוף שאין לפנינו לא עולה ולא שכחה אלא שכל דבריו במשפט

זו טענת הכסילים מואסי חכמה, כי נועיל לעצמנו בלמוד שהזכרנו להיותנו חכמים ויודעי אלהים יתברך מדרך האל וממעשיו, ועוד נהיה מאמינים ובוטחים באמונתנו בנודע ובנעלם יותר מזולתנו, כי נלמוד סתום מן המפורש לידע יושר הדין וצדק המשפט

וכן חובת כל נברא עובד מאהבה ומיראה לתור בדעתו לצדק המשפט ולאמת הדין כפי מה שידו משגת, והם הדרכים שפירשנו מדרכי חכמים, כדי שתתישב דעתו בענין ויתאמת אליו דין בוראו כמצדיק מה ששייגו, ויכיר הדין והצדק במה שהוא נעלם ממנו...

ועל ענין זה הנזכר אמר אליהוא אשא דעי למרחוק ולפועלי אתן צדק, רוצה לומר שישא דעו עד סוף השגת הדעת לתת טעם וטענה במשפט האלהים, ואחרי כל זה יתן צדק לפועלו יתברך, כי מן הטעם המושג בדעתו יוכיח על הרחוק והנעלם שהצדק עמו והיושר במפעליו.

Since there is a hidden matter in His judgment and we must believe in His righteousness insofar as He is the true judge, why do you trouble us and command or instruct us to learn the claims that we have explained and the secrets to which we have alluded? Why do we not hinge everything on the support we will arrive at eventually, that there is no iniquity or forgetfulness before Him, but rather all His ways are just?

This is the claim of fools, despisers of wisdom. For through the above-mentioned study, we will benefit ourselves by becoming wise people and knowers of God, may He be Blessed, from His ways and deeds... Likewise, it is the obligation of every creature who serves out of love and fear to investigate in order to make [His] justice right and to show the judgment true, according to his ability. . . in order that his mind become composed in this matter, and the verdict of his creator will appear true to him in what he is able to understand, and he will acknowledge the judgment and the righteousness in what is hidden from him...

And regarding this that we have mentioned Elihu said “I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker,” i.e. he will fetch his knowledge as far as the intellect could go, to give a rationale and explanation regarding God’s judgment, and after all that he justifies His maker, since from the rationale he can comprehend he will prove regarding that which is far and hidden, that justice is with Him and righteousness is in His ways