The Politics of Hope (1997). Morality (2020)

"Morality" (2020). Introduction. The move from 'We' to "I".

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4nk_rDFQAw minute 2:54

All countries and cultures have three basic institutions. **There is the economy**, which is about the creation and distribution of wealth. **There is the state**, which is about the legitimisation and distribution of power**. And there is the moral system**, which is the voice of society within the self; the 'We' within the 'I'; the common good that limits and directs our pursuit of private gain. It is the voice that says No to the individual 'Me' for the sake of the collective 'Us'. Some call it conscience. Freud called it the superego. Others speak of it as custom and tradition. Yet others call it natural law. Many people in the West spoke of it as the will and word of God.

Whatever its source, morality is what allows us to get on with one another, without endless recourse to economics or politics. There are times when we seek to get other people to do something we want or need them to do. We can pay them to do so: that is **economics**. We can force them to do so: that is **politics**. Or we can persuade them to do so because they and we are part of the same framework of virtues and values, rules and responsibilities, codes and customs, conventions and constraints: that is **morality**.

Morality is what broadens our perspective beyond the self and its desires. It places us in the midst of a collective social order. Morality has always been about the first-person plural, about 'We'. "Society', said Lord Devlin, 'means a community of ideas; without shared ideas on politics, morals, and ethics, no society can exist." Society is constituted by a shared morality.

Morality achieves something almost miraculous, and fundamental to human achievement and liberty. **It creates trust.** It means that to the extent that we belong to the same moral community, we can work together without constantly being on guard against violence, betrayal, exploitation or deception. The stronger the bonds of community, the more powerful the force of trust, and the more we can achieve together.

… Starting in the 1960s, that changed. First came the liberal revolution: it is not the task of law to enforce a shared morality, Morality gave way to autonomy, with the sole proviso that we did not do harm to others. Then, in the 1980s, came the economic revolution: states should minimally interfere with markets. Then, in the 1990s and gathering pace ever since, came the technological revolution: the Internet, tablets, smartphones and their impact on the global economy and the way we communicate with one another. Social media in particular has changed the nature of interpersonal encounter.

Each of these developments has tended to place not society but **the self** at the heart of the moral life. It is not that people became immoral or amoral. That is palpably not so. We care about others. We volunteer. We give to charity. We have compassion. We have a moral sense. But our moral vocabulary switched to a host of new concepts and ideas: autonomy, authenticity, individualism, self actualisation, self-expression, self-esteem.

… But now our children and grandchildren are paying the price of abandoning a shared moral code: divided societies, dysfunctional politics, high rates of drug abuse and suicide, increasingly unequal

economies, a loss of respect for truth and the protocols of reasoning together, and the many other incivilities of contemporary life.

… When morality is outsourced to either the market or the state, society has no substance, only systems. And systems are not enough. The market and the state are about wealth and power, and they are hugely beneficial to the wealthy and the powerful, but not always to the poor and the powerless. The rich and strong will use their power to exploit the rest, financially, politically and, as we know after the rise of the #MeToo movement, sexually also. Thucydides tells us that the Athenians told the Melians: 'the strong do what they want, while the weak suffer what they must'. The same, it often seems, is true today. When there is no shared morality, there is no society.

Self Help

I am, I admit, a long-time devotee of self-help books. I have felt the fear and done it anyway. I have refrained from sweating the small stuff. I have experienced the life-changing magic of tidying. I know the power of now. I'm OK and you're OK. And I no longer sit who moved my cheese. I have read more books on happiness than I can count, shelf-loads of them. And my commitment stretches way back to the classics of the genre. I have even read the very first: Samuel Smiles's Self Help (1859), with its no-nonsense opening: 'Heaven helps those who help themselves."

So I don't mean any criticism of such books, still less of those who read them, but one thing has always puzzled me from the outset. The obvious thing. Self, surely, is where it begins, not where it ends. It's the problem, not the solution. If I look back at my life, I discover that it was always someone else who set me on a new trajectory. I suspect the same is true for most people. Someone who was there when we needed it, who listened as we poured out our problems, who gave us the encouraging word when we were about to give up, who believed in us more than we believed in ourselves. Or maybe it was actually someone who looked us in the and told us the honest truth: that we were self-obsessed, eye that we were wallowing in our emotions, that instead of thinking about how to develop the mindset to achieve great things, we should stop reading and start doing. Help, I have found time and time again, comes not from the self, but from others.

Brachot 5a

Rabbi Hiyya ben Abba fell ill and Rabbi Johanan went in to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him. Rabbi Johanan once fell ill and Rabbi Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not Rabbi Johanan raise himself? — They [the Rabbis] replied: "The prisoner cannot free himself from jail."	רבי חייא בר אבא חלש על לגביה ר' יוחנן א"ל חביבין עליך יסורין א"ל לא הן ולא שכרן א"ל הב לי ידך יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה. ר' יוחנן חלש על לגביה ר' חנינא א"ל חביבין עליך יסורין א"ל לא הן ולא שכרן א"ל הב לי ידך יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה אמאי לוקים ר' יוחנן לנפשיה אמרי אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים

Rabbi Sacks. Celebrating Life. pg.47-8

Poor Kohelet. He was the man who wrote Ecclesiastes. Tradition has long identified him with King Solomon. He was, we recall, the man who had it all and discovered it was not enough. Palaces, gardens, wives, wealth - all promised happiness. None delivered. The more wealth, the more worry. The more knowledge, the more weariness of spirit. In the end all he could say was, 'Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless.'

We recognize Kohelet. He is the billionaire with the private jet, the apartment on Fifth Avenue, the holiday home in Cap Ferrat, the Armani suits and the expensive wife, who discovers that it all adds up to less than the sum of the parts. The route to happiness turns out to be harder than taking the waiting out of wanting.

Kohelet forgot something that I discovered by chance… Someone had written to the [Lubavicher] Rebbe in a state of deep depression. The letter went something like this. 'I would like the Rebbe's help. I wake up each day sad and apprehensive. I can't concentrate. I find it hard to pray. I keep the commandments, but I find no spiritual satisfaction. I go to the synagogue but I feel alone. I begin to wonder what life is about. I need help.'

The Rebbe wrote a brilliant reply that did not use a single word. All he did was this: he circled the first word of every sentence and sent the letter back. The disciple understood. The Rebbe had answered his question and set him on the path to recovery. The ringed word was 'I'.

It is hard to translate a biblical text from classical Hebrew into contemporary English and still preserve the nuances of the original, but Kohelet's problem was the same as that of the letter-writer above. 'I built for myself... I planted for myself... I acquired for myself...' In Hebrew the insistence on the first person singular is striking, reiterated, discordant. There is no other book in the Bible that uses the word 'I" so many times as do those first chapters of Ecclesiastes. Kohelet's problem was that he kept thinking about himself. It made him rich, powerful, a great success. As for happiness, though, he did not have a chance. Happiness lives in the realm called Not-I."

Identity Politics **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv5_nGHpKzE&ab_channel=PhilosProject**
Minute 17:00

Safe Space

Bava Metzia 84a

נח נפשיה דר' שמעון בן לקיש והוה קא מצטער ר' יוחנן בתריה טובא אמרו רבנן מאן ליזיל ליתביה לדעתיה ניזיל רבי אלעזר בן פדת דמחדדין שמעתתיה

Ultimately, **Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish,** Reish Lakish, **died. Rabbi Yoḥanan was sorely pained over** losing **him. The Rabbis said: Who will go to calm** Rabbi Yoḥanan's **mind** and comfort him over his loss? They said: **Let Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat go, as his statements are sharp,** i.e., he is clever and will be able to serve as a substitute for Reish Lakish.

אזל יתיב קמיה כל מילתא דהוה אמר רבי יוחנן אמר ליה תניא דמסייעא לך אמר את כבר לקישא בר לקישא כי הוה אמינא מילתא הוה מקשי לי עשרין וארבע קושייתא ומפריקנא ליה עשרין וארבעה פרוקי וממילא רווחא שמעתא ואת אמרת תניא דמסייע לך אטו לא ידענא דשפיר קאמינא

Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat **went and sat before** Rabbi Yoḥanan. With regard to **every matter that Rabbi Yoḥanan would say,** Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat would **say to him:** There is a ruling which **is taught** in a *baraita* **that supports your** opinion. Rabbi Yoḥanan **said** to him: **Are you** comparable **to the son of Lakish?** In my discussions with **the son of Lakish, when I would state a matter, he would raise**

twenty-four difficulties against me in an attempt to disprove my claim, **and I would answer him with twenty-four answers, and the *halakha* by itself would become broadened** and clarified. **And** yet **you say** to me: There is a ruling which **is taught** in a *baraita* **that supports your** opinion. **Do I not know that what I say is good?** Being rebutted by Reish Lakish served a purpose; your bringing proof to my statements does not.

הוה קא אזיל וקרע מאניה וקא בכי ואמר היכא את בר לקישא היכא את בר לקישא והוה קא צוח עד דשף דעתיה [מיניה] בעו רבנן רחמי עליה ונח נפשיה

Rabbi Yoḥanan **went around, rending his clothing, weeping and saying: Where are you, son of Lakish? Where are you, son of Lakish?** Rabbi Yoḥanan **screamed until his mind was taken from him,** i.e., he went insane. **The Rabbis** prayed and **requested** for God to have **mercy on him** and take his soul, **and** Rabbi Yoḥanan **died.**

Regents Park. Society

Politics of Hope (1997), page 41-44

NOT FAR FROM where we live, in north-west London, is Regent's Park… At most times of the day it is full of people, relaxing, talking, drinking coffee, reading the papers, jogging, walking, exercising the dog, meeting friends, or just enjoying the sight of other people enjoying themselves. **The point about it is that it is a public place. It is somewhere where we can all go, on equal terms.** It is surrounded by private homes, places where I and most of the people who love the park know we could never afford to live however much we would like to do so. But that regret is tempered by the fact that something far more magnificent, the park itself, is ours. In it we are equal citizens. And because we enjoy it and want it to be there, we keep to the rules, usually without having to be told. We keep radios quiet, dogs on a lead, put our litter in the baskets, return a passing stranger's smile and otherwise respect people's privacy. That is part of what makes it a gracious place.

For me the park is a metaphor for a concept I have been inching towards without yet spelling it out, namely society.

… Society needs social virtues , much as our enjoyment of the park depends upon its users respecting it and the other people who use it. When these habits break down, we need not just law but collective resolve – many people deciding together to save something they love.

The Family. Politics of Hope pg. 44-50 (1997)

Consider a family: father, mother and children. They live, eat and relax together, though each wants times and spaces where they can be alone. There are certain rules which bind them together, without which they would find it difficult to get along. Let us suppose that they include such things as this: that on at least some nights of the week they eat together, that not everyone talks at once, that there is a roughly equitable sharing of responsibilities for cutting the grass, doing the dishes, feeding the cat and making the beds, and that when mum or dad say that it's time to go to bed, there are rituals of protest followed by reluctant obedience. Sometimes the rules break down, as they do in every family. There are arguments, 'scenes', minor rebellions. These are followed by the routines of reconciliation someone says 'Sorry', he or she is forgiven, order is restored, and love reaffirmed. In this sequence of everyday transactions we witness, in miniature, the making and sustaining of the moral life.

The family is made up of individuals. But it exists because each is willing to place limits on the pursuit of his or her own desires.

… Deep beneath the surface of this family are certain fundamental concepts: **fidelity, loyalty, responsibility, authority, obedience, justice and compassion.** Together they define the relationships of the parents and children to one another. They frame a series of expectations: that neither husband nor wife will commit adultery, that when the children are young they will do what they are told, sometimes (though as rarely as possible) without fully understanding why, that parental requests will be consistent, fair and in the long-term interests of the children, and that the members of the family will not walk out on one another or ignore a cry for help. Except in extreme situations, **these things do not need to be spelled out, because the family is a social institution. It is not something its members have invented, any more than they have made the language they speak. It is something they have inherited from the culture - from habit or custom, or the example of their parents, or possibly religious teaching**. But when one of the basic rules is broken, there is a breach in the wall of trust, and unless it is mended the family will not be the same again.

The family is often thought of as belonging to the sphere of private life, but it is easy to see how it is the birthplace of the social virtues. It teaches us that the space we seek to create for ourselves is dependent on our being able to rely on other people with whom we have to establish relationships of predictability and mutuality.

Politics of Hope pg 15

We can create families, communities, even societies, around the ideals of love and fellowship and **trust**. In such societies, individuals are valued not for what they own or the power they wield but for what they are. They are not immune to conflict or tragedy, but when these strike, the individual is not alone. He or she is surrounded by networks of support, extended families, friends and neighbours. These relationships do not simply happen. Much of the energy of communities such as these is dedicated to ensuring that they happen, through education, social sanction, and careful protection of human institutions. Children are habituated into virtues and rules of conduct. They learn to value the 'We' as well as the 'I', and this is rarely easy to achieve. But the rewards of such an order are great. It creates an island of interpersonal meaning in a sea of impersonal forces. It redeems individuals from solitude. Morality is civilisation's greatest attempt to humanise fate.

The power of this vision is that it locates **the source of action within ourselves**. It restores the dignity of agency and responsibility. It leads us to see our lives not as the blind play of external causes - the genome, the free market, international politics, the march of technology - but as a series of choices in pursuit of the right and good, choices in which we are not left unguided but for which a vast store of historical experience lies at our disposal**. It reminds us that the acts we perform, the decisions we take, make a difference:** to our family, to our friends and associates, to our sense of a life well lived. It teaches us to cherish and sustain the relationships - marriage, the family, friendships, communities which give us strength as we face the uncertainties of an open future. It removes the randomness of a life lived in border skirmishes between our desires and those of others. It allows us to see ourselves as on a journey, begun by those who came before us and whose histories we share, to be continued by those who come after us of whose hopes we are the guardians…

Covenant. Politics of Hope

One of the key differences between a society based on contract and one built around the idea of covenant, is what holds it together. **A social contract is maintained by an external force, the monopoly within the state of the justified use of coercive power. A covenant, by contrast, is maintained by an internalised sense of identity, kinship. loyalty, obligation, responsibility and reciprocity.** These promptings cannot always be taken for granted and have to be carefully nurtured and sustained. Hence the centrality, within covenantal associations, of education, ritual, sacred narratives, and collective ceremony.

A social contract gives rise to the instrumentalities of the state - governments, nations, parties, the use of centralised power and the mediated resolution of conflict. It is the basis of political society. A covenant gives rise to quite different institutions families, communities, peoples, traditions, and voluntary associations. It is the basis of civil society. This is one way of understanding the difference between man as a political animal and man as a social animal.

So there are two stories about human associations, one told in our political classics, the other in our great religious texts. Clearly they are not mutually exclusive. Civil society requires the institutions of politics for the resolution of its conflicts and the maintenance of peace and defence. Political society, according to most of its theorists, needs the undergirding of civil virtue. Both stories represent enduring truths about the human situation and both need to be told if people are to live together peaceably for any length of time. To **some extent they represent a difference of emphasis within the Greek and Jewish traditions…**

The driving force of the biblical drama is not self-interest but something else, for which the Hebrew word is *hesed,* usually translated as 'compassion' (a key word of politics of a certain kind). More accurately, though, *hesed* should be translated as **covenantal obligation**. It means the duties and responsibilities that flow from identification and belonging, the kind of relationship that exists between husbands and wives, or parents and children.

What constitutes society, on this view, is not a contract but a covenant (brit). One difference between them is that those bound by a covenant are 'obligated to respond to one another beyond the letter of the law rather than to limit their obligations to the narrowest contractual requirements.

Another is that covenants have a moral component … parties can disengage from a contract when it is no longer to their mutual benefit to continue. A covenant binds them even perhaps especially in difficult times. This is because a covenant is not predicated on interest, but instead on loyalty, fidelity, holding together even when things seem to be driving you apart. This helps us understand the significance of another key word in Judaism, *emunah*, often, and wrongly, translated as 'faith. Faith is a cognitive or intellectual attribute. Emunah is a moral one. … It means 'faithfulness'.

Morality page 64: "The Hebrew word *Emunah*, often translated simply as 'faith', really means faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, steadfastness, not walking away when the going gets tough, trusting the other and honouring the other's trust in us.

The prophets understood the relationship between humanity and God in terms of the relationship between bride and groom, wife and husband. Love thus became the basis not only of morality but also of theology. Faith is like marriage. This is what Hosea meant when he said in the name of God:

> I will betroth you to me forever;

> I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
> I in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness,
> and you will know the Lord (Hos. 2:21-22).

Marriage is fundamental to society because throughout history it has been the most fundamental way in which we recognise something beyond the 'I' of self-interest, namely the 'We' of the common good, cooperative relationships, shared identity and collective responsibility.

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