

Love Thy Neighbor

The evolution of in-group morality

by John Hartung

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.
- Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, 1670

Abstract: The world's major religions espouse a moral code that includes injunctions against murder, theft, and lying - or so conventional 19th- and 20th-century Western wisdom would have it. Evidence put forth here argues that this convention is a conceit which does not apply to the West's own religious foundations. In particular, rules against murder, theft, and lying codified by the Ten Commandments were intended to apply only within a cooperating group for the purpose of enabling that group to compete successfully against other groups. In addition, this in-group morality has functioned, both historically and by express intent, to create adverse circumstances between groups by actively promoting murder, theft, and lying as tools of competition. Contemporary efforts to present Judeo-Christian in-group morality as universal morality defy the plain meaning of the texts upon which Judaism and Christianity are based. Accordingly, that effort is ultimately hopeless.

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A Look in the Mirror

Southern Baptists counted the number of people expected to go to hell from Alabama - a whopping 46.1% or 1.86 million souls. The New York Times (1993) explained how: "The study took each county's population and subtracted from it the membership of all churches. After that, Baptist researchers used a secret formula to estimate how many people from different denominations and faiths were probably going to heaven." Newsday (1993) reported that based on this calculation "a higher percentage of Methodists are saved than are Roman Catholics" and that "virtually everyone not belonging to a church congregation was counted among the lost."

And according to the New York Times, when thousands of the world's clerical leaders gathered at the second World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago one hundred years after the first such gathering in 1893, "Evangelical and fundamentalist Christian churches that are embraced by many Americans shunned the gathering on theological grounds, and the established centrist and liberal denominations, like the Episcopalians and Methodists that have usually supported interfaith talks, were scarcely visible."

Eastern Orthodox Christians came but left en masse when they found themselves in the company of "neopagans," and Jewish groups withdrew when the Nation of Islam showed up. Sikhs and Hindus stayed

but tried to push each other out of the convention center (physically), and the Dalai Lama astutely concluded "Nonsense!" in response to his own question: "If we have conflicts in the name of religion, can we help resolve other problems?" (Steinfels, 1993, p. 93).

Nonsense indeed, but finger pointing can be useful if one is facing a mirror. If each of the world's families tends to its own backyard before the neighborhood inspection begins, we may all be able to live together. To that end, we in the West should inspect Judaism and its demographically dominant offshoot, Christianity, before criticizing other religions.

Who Is Thy Neighbor?

When grade school twins help each other put a puzzle together, same-sex fraternal twins use the word 'I' a lot, pull the puzzle away from each other, tussle over pieces that look like they will fit, take a long time to get the job done, and are not particularly pleased with the result. In distinction, identical twins use 'we' a lot, keep the puzzle between themselves, hand each other fitting pieces, get the job done quickly, and seem pleased with their accomplishment (Segal, 1984).

Evolutionary theorists argue that identical twins will naturally treat each other according to the gold standard of morality: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." In kin selection terms, such twins have no room for conflict because their "degree of relatedness," or "r" is 100% ($r = 1$) (Hamilton, 1964). Their self-interests are identical with their concern for each other because each twin is as genetically related to their twin's offspring as they are to their own offspring. For identical twins, to help thy other is to help thyself.

The phrase *Love thy neighbor as thyself* comes from the Torah.⁽¹⁾ The word *Torah* means law and *the Torah* is *the Law*. If Moses had been transmitting the word of his god to modern biologists he might have said "Love your neighbor as if $r = 1$ - as if all of your genes are identical." According to the ancient Israelites' autobiographical ethnography, this was the general principle from which prohibitions against murder, theft, and lying were derived. But who qualifies for this apex of morality? Who is thy *neighbor*?

Most contemporary Jews and Christians, who both have the highest regard for the god of the Torah, answer that the law applies to everybody, as spelled out in the following excerpt from a Christian-authored promotion for the *Committee for Judaism and Social Justice* (Walz, 1992; for a more elaborate but ideologically identical interpretation, see Hefner, 1991):

"It is upon the Biblical command to 'love your neighbor as yourself' - starting in the family and extending to the community, the business world and ultimately international affairs - that the Committee for Judaism and Social Justice is depending for its growth."

But when the Israelites received the love law, they were isolated in a desert.⁽²⁾ According to the account, they lived in tents clustered by extended families, they had no non-Israelite neighbors, and dissension was rife. Internecine fighting became rather vicious, with about 3,000 killed in a single episode (Exodus 32:26-28).⁽³⁾ Most of the troops wanted to "choose a [new] captain and go back to Egypt" (Numbers 14:4). But their old captain, Moses, preferred group cohesion.

If we want to know who Moses thought his god meant by neighbor, the law must be put into context, and the minimum context that makes sense is the biblical verse from which the love law is so frequently extracted. Here are four translations of Leviticus 19:18:

,Äç Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. - First Jewish Publication Society translation (JPS '17) and the King James Version (KJV).

,Äç You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. - Revised Standard Version (RSV).

,Äç You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself. - TANAKH (JPS '85).

In context, neighbor meant "the children of thy people," "the sons of your own people," "your countrymen" - in other words, fellow in-group members.

Thou Shalt Not Kill Who?

Specific laws which follow from the love law can be better understood by keeping the ingroup definition of neighbor in mind. Consider the proto-legal portion of The Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:17-21; JPS '17 & KJV):

Thou shalt not kill.

Neither shalt thou commit adultery.

Neither shalt thou steal.

Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour

Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

And add the realization that the scrolls from which these words were translated have no periods, no commas, and no first-word capitalization. Decisions about where sentences and paragraphs begin and end are courtesy of the translator. Accordingly, instead of being written as five separate paragraphs of one sentence each, without changing any of the words, Deuteronomy 5:17-21 could be translated:

Thou shalt not kill, neither shalt thou commit adultery, neither shalt thou steal, neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour. Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Here the question, "Thou shalt not kill who?" is answered "Thou shalt not kill thy neighbor - the children of thy people, your countrymen" ,ÄŹ your fellow in-group member.

How unconventional is this interpretation? Not very. The rabbis of the Talmud determined that an Israelite was not liable for murder unless he intentionally killed a fellow Israelite. Indeed, if an Israelite intended to

kill a non-Israelite, but killed an Israelite by mistake, he was not guilty of murder. The law (Mishna) is explicit in this regard (Sanhedrin 79a):

If he intended killing an animal but slew a man, or a heathen and he killed an Israelite, he is not liable.

And the discussion (Gemara) of this law gives a clear example:

This excludes [from liability] the case of one who threw a stone into the midst of a company of Israelites and heathens. How is this? Shall we say that the company consisted of nine heathens and one Israelite? Then his non-liability can be inferred from the fact that the majority were heathens.

So if a defendant admits to having killed a fellow in-group member by throwing a stone, his plea of innocence should be accepted if there is reason to believe that he was aiming at an out-group member. In this regard, the rabbis of the Talmud, who are traditionally designated the Sages, took an extraordinarily lenient view of what would constitute evidence of intent, extending credibility to a perpetrator even if there was only one out-group member in the company of nine in-group members (Sanhedrin 79a, Baba Kamma 44b):

And even if half and half, when there is doubt in a capital charge, a lenient attitude must be taken! ... if there were nine Jews and one heathen ... still, since there was among them one heathen, he was an essential part of the group, and essential part is reckoned as equivalent to half, and where there is doubt in a criminal charge the accused has the benefit.

As one might expect, the law for inadvertent killing was not symmetrical. If an outgroup member accidentally killed an in-group member, he was guilty of Murder One. Maimonides, whose summarizations and condensations of the Torah and the Talmud are generally accepted as authoritative, put the point succinctly (Book of Torts 5:5:4):

If a resident alien slays an Israelite inadvertently, he must be put to death in spite of his inadvertence.

The Book of Judges (Maimonides, 5:9:4) confirms this:

A Noahide [non-Jew] who kills a person, even if he kills an embryo in the mother's womb, is put to death. So too, if he kills one suffering from a fatal disease ... he is put to death. In none of these cases is an Israelite put to death.

Who Is Human?

The Sages perceived their god as having given his people a special fierceness. As explained by Rabbi Simeon, "There are three distinguished in fierceness: Israel among the nations, the dog among animals, and the cock among birds" (Bezah 25b). The Yanomamo Indians, who inhabit the headwaters of the Amazon, traditionally believe that they are fierce, and that they are the only fully qualified people on earth. The word Yanomamo, in fact, means *man*, and non-Yanomamo are viewed as a form of degenerated Yanomamo (Chagnon, 1992). A similar theme runs throughout Judeo-Christianity. Although many Jews have been killed by Christians who perceived their god to have changed his choice, the original theme of *God's chosen people* was developed in the Torah and promoted a not-fully-human perception of outgroup members.

Maimonides had a penchant for omitting rulings and opinions that were not politically correct by 12th-century standards, yet he was often more explicit than the Talmud, especially when stating rules that the Sages assumed would be taken for granted. Consider his exegesis of the intent of the commandment against murder (Torts 5:1:1, 5:2:11):

If one slays a single Israelite, he transgresses a negative commandment, for Scripture says, Thou shalt not murder. If one murders willfully in the presence of witnesses, he is put to death by the sword ... Needless to say, one is not put to death if he kills a heathen.

In most recent translations of Maimonides' Codes, the words "single Israelite" are replaced by "human being" in the above passage (e.g., translation by Klein, 1954, p. 195 and note 1, p. 273), and the clarification regarding heathens is relegated to the editing room floor (e.g., Chavel, 1990). This suggests an effort to convert in-group morality into general morality by strategically mistranslating and editing original documents. However, in Maimonides' handwritten manuscript referred to as *The Oxford Codex*, the text reads "single Israelite" as distinct from "human being" and cannot be translated otherwise unless a translator accepts the Talmudic argument that only in-group members qualify as human beings. Even then, such an ideological translation requires taking the liberty of inserting this understanding without putting readers on notice that the translation is not literal.

The Sages were quite explicit about their view that non-Jews were not to be considered fully human. Whether referring to "gentiles," "idolaters," or "heathens," the biblical passage which reads "*And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God,*" (Ezekiel 34:31; KJV) is augmented to read (italics in original): "*And ye my flock, the flock of my pastures, are men; only ye are designated 'men'*" (Baba Mezia 114b). Or: "*And ye My sheep the sheep of My pasture, are men; you are called men* but the idolaters are not called men.*" [Footnote in original: "**. . . only an Israelite, who as a worshipper of the true God, can be said to have been like Adam, created in the image of God. Idol worshippers, having marred the Divine image, forfeit all claim to this appellation*" (Yebamoth 61a).] Or, again with explanation from a footnote (parentheses and italics in original):

...in the case of heathens; are they not in the category of adam? - No, it is written: *And ye my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are adam (man).** Ye are called *adam* but heathens are not called *adam*. [Footnote reads:] *... The term *adam* does not denote 'man' but Israelite. The term *adam* is used to denote man made in the image of God and heathens by their idolatry and idolatrous conduct mar this divine image and forfeit the designation *adam* (Kerithoth 6b).

Indeed, the Hebrew word *adam* appears 106 times in the Torah, referring to the character Adam only 14 times. The other 92 occurrences of the word *adam* translate as *man* or *men*, usually referring to Israelites generally, as distinct from designating gender.

East of Eden

According to the distinction made in the Talmud between *adam* and other terms for humans, the original conceptualization appears to have been that the god of the Israelites created them in his own image. This explains how it could be the case that their god created man (*adam*) in his own image while other people (non-*adam*) were simultaneously alive east of Eden in the land of Nod - where Cain went after killing Abel, found a wife, and founded a city (Genesis 4:16-24). The word *adam* is not used for *man* when referring to persons in Nod (Genesis 4:23).

In fact, the most frequently used biblical Hebrew words for man/men are *'iysh* and *'enowsh*, occurring 428 times in the Torah. All occurrences of *man* being created in the image of god occur as *adam*, but people who were conquered by the Israelites are not referred to as *adam*, with the exception of two passages which also involve cattle. These exceptions are rhetorically questioned in the Talmud, where the Sages explain that "This is used in opposition to cattle," by which they meant, "In contrast to cattle, idolaters also may be described as *adam* (men)" (parentheses in original, Kerithoth 6b, Yebamoth 61a).

A strained and self-serving defense of these passages is presented by the 20th-century editors/translators of the Soncino Press edition of the Talmud, asserting that the restricted use of *adam* only applies within the context of ritual defilement, and that distinguishing "gentiles," "heathens," and "idolaters" as not in the category of *adam*, "loses all harshness when it is remembered that it is simply a Talmudic idiom denoting 'inhuman,' and that its author was Rabbi Simeon, who had been so bitterly persecuted by the Romans" (Baba Mezia 114b, p. 651, n. 7).

There are a number of difficulties with this explanation. Among them is the fact that Rabbi Simeon, son of Yohai, was among the most authoritative, most cited (over 700 times just within the Talmud), and most respected Sages of Judaism; rabbis at large accepted and promulgated his view on this point; non-Jews are referred to as not fully human in contexts other than ritual defilement; and designating one's victims as "inhuman" is not "simply an idiom" - on the contrary, such designation has been a critically important propaganda accomplishment for most of the world's most immoral military enterprises and by in-groups of all stripes. [\(3a\)](#) Aldous Huxley said it succinctly on the eve of World War II (1937, p. 101): "The propagandist's purpose is to make one set of people forget that the other set is human. By robbing them of their personality, he puts them outside the pale of moral obligation." [\(3b\)](#)

The Evolution of Cooperation

Have you ever watched a flock of birds dart across the sky like an animated cloud, turning on a dime, in unison, through three-dimensional space? Before the mid-1960s we knew what flocking birds were up to - they were surveying their breeding territory in order to assess its nutritional abundance. That way each female could adjust the number of eggs that she would lay, her objective being to prevent over-exploitation of the environment. How could natural selection produce such a morally sound arrangement? Simple, by group selection - birds that overcrop their territory would eat themselves into oblivion, leaving only environmentally conscientious groups to perpetuate their kind. Domestic sheep are a counter example. If not herded along, sheep will crop all edible plants beyond recovery. That's the main reason that shepherds have jobs - because left to their own devices, or lack thereof, sheep would decimate otherwise renewable

resources.

In 1966 George Williams published a book that initiated the demise of the notion that organisms evolve by group selection. Williams perceived three main problems: First, what would happen if a mutation caused an individual female in an environmentally-conscientious group to have as many offspring as she was able? Answer: that mutation would spread. Second, what would happen if there were any appreciable amount of migration between less conscientious groups and more conscientious groups? Answer: conscientious groups would lose their conscience. And third, if the mutation and migration problems could be solved, how long would it take for a gene to go from a low frequency to a substantial frequency by group selection? This depends upon the rate at which whole groups fission and become extinct. Proper models show that both rates need to approach the rate at which individuals are born and die. For whole groups, such rates are orders of magnitude beyond realistic.

Nevertheless, people like the idea of group selection. It could, if it worked, create natural harmony, and even imply that humans in a natural state will naturally cooperate - sacrificing self-interest for the good of the group. Accordingly, wishful thinkers have been jerrybuilding group selection models ever since Williams found the idea to be theoretically untenable (e.g., Wilson and Sober 1994). But skeptics continue to dash group-selection hopes with clearer logic and empirical evidence of individual selection (cf Alroy & Levine, 1994; Cronk, 1994; Dawkins, 1976, 1994; Nesse, 1994; Smith, 1994; Williams, 1992).

The cleanest tests have come from ornithologists. Birds, having birdbrains, are not good at knowing which eggs are their own and which came from somewhere else (that's why mockingbirds and cowbirds can make a living as brood parasites - laying eggs in other birds' nests). This means you can put a fifth egg in a nest of four eggs and see what happens. The birds will hatch and try to feed all five chicks, but more often than not, they will only fledge three, while nests left with four eggs fledge four chicks. Flocking aside, individual birds lay the number of eggs that will maximize their reproductive success (for a review see Trivers, 1985).

So why do individuals cooperate if there is no group selection? Two answers helped filled the gap and form the foundation of contemporary evolutionary theory: *inclusive fitness* (Hamilton, 1964) and *reciprocal altruism* (Trivers, 1971). For the purpose of calculating how fast a gene can spread, inclusive fitness is the realization that an individual's total reproductive success should include his or her effects on the success of individuals who also carry the gene in question - i.e., relatives. So we expect relatives to cooperate. In humans, this covers everything from mothers nursing infants to nepotism in politics and industry.

Reciprocal altruism is "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." In humans this covers everything from two individuals sharing a load to groups of individuals hunting Woolly Mammoths, to groups of people hunting other groups of people. The key ingredient here is payoff - reciprocal altruism works if each individual's share of benefits is more than could have been obtained by not cooperating. A great hue and cry has gone up that inclusive fitness and reciprocal altruism are not real altruism - not really moral behavior. That is absolutely correct. As put by Trivers (1971, p. 1): "Models that attempt to explain altruistic behavior in terms of natural selection are models designed to take the altruism out of altruism."

Unfortunately, cooperation based on kin selection and reciprocal altruism can be difficult to distinguish from cooperation based on group selection - but there are telltale signs. Largescale reciprocal altruism usually entails hierarchies (pecking orders, dominance ranks), markedly unfair distribution of group-derived benefits (according to rank), and in humans, rules and laws that compel cooperation. Indeed, human systems of reciprocal altruism often include individuals, like slaves, who would do better on their own but who do not have that option.

Like most ancient peoples, the Israelites had stringent hierarchies, vastly disproportionate distribution of

wealth, many slaves, and many laws that compelled cooperation. Some of those laws were simply tests of loyalty, as distinct from enforcing cooperation per se, but they were taken very seriously. Consider the punishment for working on a Saturday (Numbers 15:32-36):

While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him in custody because it had not been made plain what should be done to him. And the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the LORD commanded Moses.

More severe decrements to inclusive fitness were reserved for low-ranking individuals who took a larger slice of the pie than they had been allotted, especially if that slice had been allotted to a dominant male. When Achan, one of Joshua's soldiers, put a captured 50-shekel bar of gold into his tent instead of putting it in the collection plate (Joshua 7:24-25, italics added): "Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan ... *and his sons and daughters* ... and all Israel stoned him with stones; they burned *them* with fire, and stoned them with stones." These are not the hallmarks of a group that evolved its ability to cooperate through group selection.

Evolutionary Ethics

Moral behavior can be active or passive. If you refrain from stealing when you could get away with it, you have been passively moral. When you help someone at a cost to yourself, you have been actively moral. If natural selection proceeded by differential reproduction of groups, as opposed to differential reproduction of individuals, individuals within replicating groups might treat each other as if $r = 1$ were their default program. But unfortunately, genes that cause self-sacrifice are sacrificed by natural selection.

That is not to say that groups have no effect. Imagine a gene for the ability to shoot straight - whether a sling shot or a gun shot. A gene like that could spread within a breeding group by individual selection and give that group a serious advantage in competition against other groups. So it is that gene frequencies can change in consequence of group-group competition, but only because the winning group already had more of the genes which caused more of its individual members to compete successfully within that group, and they engaged in sufficient reciprocal altruism to generate cooperation. That is, natural selection can generate individuals who behave against their short term self-interest in consideration of other group members if the cost to such in-group moralists is more than compensated by their share of benefits obtained from successful competition with other groups. For example, in-group morality can evolve if cooperation enables a group to wage war against other groups at a net profit. This is not a consequence of group selection as the term has been properly understood, nor is it a foundation for morality as that term is properly understood.

In addition to requiring laws that compel group members to cooperate, the viability of ingroup morality is functionally completed when the converse of those laws is applied, implicitly or explicitly, to out-groups - when "within-group amity" serves "between-group enmity" (Alexander, 1987, p. 95) - i.e., when "Thou shalt not kill or steal from in-group members" is balanced by "Thou shalt kill and steal from out-group members."

Such evolutionary ethics apply to races and nations as well as religions. In 1942, Keith perceived this complementary relationship to be implicit in Hitler's term National Socialism (1947, pp. 10, 14, parentheses not added):

Hitler uses a double designation for his tribal doctrine - National Socialism: Socialism standing for the good side of the tribal spirit (that which works within the Reich) and Nationalism for the ethically vicious part, which dominates policy at and outside the German frontiers ... Hitler is an uncompromising evolutionist, and we must seek for an evolutionary explanation if we are to understand his action.

Genocide

Moses may not have known about natural selection but he transmitted his god's explicit commandment to kill and steal from out-group members as a recurrent major theme.⁽⁴⁾ Two distinct policies were put into effect. First, all members of nations located in the land that was to become Israel were to be killed outright. Subsequently, people in surrounding nations were to be killed unless they agreed to become subservient to Israel. Both policies are given in one passage of Deuteronomy (20:10-18; RSV), with instructions regarding people outside of Israel given first:

When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. And if its answer to you is peace and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you. But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; and when the LORD your God gives it into your hand you shall put all its males to the sword, but the women and the little ones, the cattle, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourselves; and you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the LORD your God has given you. Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not cities of the nations here.

But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded; that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their Gods, and so to sin against the LORD your God.

For prior occupants of the promised land, there can be no doubt that this meant genocide according to the word's modern definition (RSV):

They should be utterly destroyed,⁽⁵⁾ and should receive no mercy but be exterminated as the LORD commanded Moses" (Joshua 11:20).

Utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling" (I Samuel 15:3).

And, as if they had a sense of Hamilton's (1964) inclusive fitness:

You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear. The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath and fire will consume them. You will destroy their offspring from the earth and their children from among the sons of men (Psalms 21:9-10).

There can be no doubt that this commandment was mandatory, as Maimonides explained (Judges 5:4, cf Elba 1995; Lior 1994):

It is a positive commandment to destroy the seven nations, as it is said: *Thou shalt utterly destroy them*. If one does not put to death any of them that falls into one's power, one transgresses a negative commandment, as it is said: *Thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth*.

Moral Fallout

The Israelites' campaign to carry out their god's commandment to commit genocide against the native inhabitants of Canaan-cum-Palestine took several generations. It began with Joshua's massacre at Jericho. Contrary to the Christian song "Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho," according to scripture there was no battle at all. It was a siege, at the end of which all of the city's inhabitants were killed except Rahab the prostitute (she and her family were spared in exchange for helping Joshua plan his strategy, Joshua 6:16-17, 19, 21, 24, RSV):

Joshua said to the people, "Shout; for the LORD has given you the city. And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction ... But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD." ... Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and asses, with the edge of the sword ... And they burned the city with fire, and all within it; only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

The half-life and penetrance of such cultural legacies are often under-appreciated. Some 3,000 years after the fall of Jericho, Israeli psychologist George Tamarin (1966, 1973) measured the strength of residual in-group morality. He presented Joshua 6:20-21 to 1,066 school children, ages 8-14, in order to test "the effect of uncritical teaching of the Bible on the propensity for forming prejudices (particularly the notion of the 'chosen people,' the superiority of the monotheistic religion, and the study of acts of genocide by biblical heroes)." The children's answers to the question "Do you think Joshua and the Israelites acted rightly or not?" were categorized as follows: " 'A' means total approval, 'B' means partial approval or disapproval, and 'C' means total disapproval." Across a broad spectrum of Israeli social and economic classes, 66% of responses were "A," 8% "B," and 26% "C." The "A" answers tended to be as straightforward as they were numerous (Tamarin, 1966):

,Äç In my opinion Joshua and the Sons of Israel acted well and here are the reasons: God promised them this land and gave them permission to conquer. If they would not have acted in this manner or killed anyone, then there would be the danger that the Sons of Israel would have assimilated among the "Goyim."[\(6\)](#)

,Äç In my opinion Joshua was right when he did it, one reason being that God commanded him to exterminate the people so that the tribes of Israel will not be able to assimilate amongst them and learn their bad ways.

,Äç Joshua did good because the people who inhabited the land were of a different religion, and when Joshua killed them he wiped their religion from the earth.

Tamarin (1973) noted that:

"C" classification [total disapproval] was accorded to all answers formally rejecting genocide, either on ethical or utilitarian grounds. This does not mean that all "C" responses reveal non-discriminatory attitudes. For example, one girl criticized Joshua's act, stating that "the Sons of Israel learned many bad things from the Goyim." ... Another extremely racist response is that of a 10-year-old girl disapproving the act, stating, "I think it is not good, since the Arabs are impure and if one enters an impure land one will also become impure and share their curse."

Other "C" misgivings included (1966):

,Äç I think Joshua did not act well as they could have spared the animals for themselves.

,Äç I think Joshua did not act well as he should have left the property of Jericho; if he had not destroyed the property it would have belonged to the Israelites.

In contrast to the established difference between boys and girls in propensity toward violence and approval of violence in general, with regard to biblically commanded genocide Tamarin found that "Contrary to our expectation, there was no difference concerning this most cruel form of prejudice, between male and female examinees" (1973). Less surprising, but more alarming, nearly half of the children who gave "total approval" to Joshua's behavior also gave "A" responses to the hypothetical question: "Suppose that the Israeli Army conquers an Arab village in battle. Do you think it would be good or bad to act towards the inhabitants as Joshua did towards the people of Jericho?" Tamarin (1966) received such responses as these:

,Äç In my opinion this behavior was necessary, as the Arabs are our enemies always, and the Jews did not have a country, and it was necessary to behave like that towards the Arabs.

,Äç It would have been good to treat the Arabs as Joshua and his soldiers did, as they are Arabs; they hate and retaliate against us all the time, and if we exterminate them as Joshua did, they won't be able to show themselves as greater heroes than we.

,Ä¸ I think it was good because we want our enemies to be conquered, and to widen our frontiers, and we would kill the Arabs as Joshua and the Israelites did.

Some respondents disapproved of Joshua's campaign (answer "C"), but approved of similar acts if committed by Israeli soldiers. One girl disapproved of Joshua "because it is written in the Bible, 'don't kill'," but she approved of the conjectured Israeli Army action, stating "I think it would be good, as we want our enemies to fall into our hands, enlarge our frontiers, and kill the Arabs as Joshua did."

As a control group, Tamarin tested 168 children who were read Joshua 6:20-21 with "General Lin" substituted for Joshua and a "Chinese Kingdom 3000 years ago" substituted for Israel. General Lin got a 7% approval rating, with 18% giving partial approval or disapproval, and 75% disapproving totally.

We withhold judgment on the moral blindness of children because they are in a formative stage, but we should not withhold judgment of adults, especially influential adults, for the moral blindness that they inflict upon others. In that regard, consider Ellie Wiesel's portrait of Joshua (1981), which ends, "Poor Joshua, glorious Joshua. He was forced to win so many battles -- with no one around to say thank you. Except God."

The Evolutionary Point

Over 400 cities are detailed by name as having been "utterly destroyed" by the Israelites. The campaign lasted some 170 years and ended with David's victory at Jerusalem, where the Jebusites had managed to defend their city against every Israelite leader from Joshua to Saul. The account of the second city to fall, Ai, poignantly juxtaposes the distinction between in-group sanction against, and the out-group sanction of, homicide. According to scripture, after a moderately heavy day of killing 12,000 people, Joshua carved the Ten Commandments in stone, including "Thou shalt not kill," while his troops were gathered around a campfire (Joshua 8:24-25, 30-32; RSV):

When Israel had finished slaughtering all the inhabitants of Ai ... and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword ... all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand, all the people of Ai ... then Joshua built an altar and they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord ... And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses.

These verses are not generally focused upon in Bible Study classes, but when inquiries are made about Jericho, Ai, or Jerusalem, Jewish and Christian theologians stress the view that their heroes were far from perfect, but their ideals were close to perfect (or perfect, having come from their god), and it is those ideals that constitute the take-home message. This is plain wrong. Joshua was not even guilty of contradiction, much less hypocrisy, because the law that applied to out-group members was the antithesis of the law that applied to in-group members.[\(7\)](#)

The point, however, is not that such phenomena were unique to the ancient Israelites. Far from it. Indeed, given the ubiquity of in-group/out-group double standards around the globe and throughout history, the propensity for in-group morality appears to be an attribute of human nature.

A Light Unto The Nations

Israel's glory-days reached their apex during the reign of Solomon, David's son, who inherited "all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt" (I Kings 4:21). Solomon spent most of his time enjoying the spoil of his enemies (Deuteronomy 20:14), including "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (I Kings 11:3, RSV) ... and massive protection payments (I Kings 10:14-15):

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, besides that which came from the traders and from the traffic of the merchants, and from all the kings of Arabia and from the governors of the land.

Since 666 talents is about 60,000 pounds of gold, this is almost certainly an exaggeration, but is still three times the amount that Attila the Hun was able to extort from Rome per annum prior to sacking it for late payment.

After Solomon's reign the Kingdom of Israel split in two. Civil war between the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms so weakened Jerusalem that nations which had been sending tribute began to send troops instead. During a siege of the city by Syria, in-group morality fell to its nadir. Everyone is familiar with the story of Solomon's wisdom - how he threatened to chop a baby in half in order to discover which of two claimants was its real mother (I Kings 3:16-28) - but like the story of Ai, Bible Study classes seldom focus on a similar dispute that was brought to one of Solomon's successors (II Kings 6:26-30):

Now as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!" ...And the king asked her, "What is your trouble?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son." When the king heard the words of the woman he rent his clothes.

The picture became so bleak for so long that a most desperate hope grew among the faithful. Israel's god would send a messiah. That man would restore the Kingdom and Israel would reign over all the nations on earth. Perhaps the best disguised theme in the Bible, the most spun by both Christian and Jewish exegetical spindoctors, is the *Light Unto the Nations*. The light was to be Israel and nations outside of the genocide zone were to be caused to see the light in consequence of being conquered by Israel. Those nations would then realize that the god of Israel is stronger than their gods, and, most important, they would then worship Israel's god through Israel - that is, once again, by paying tribute to Israel.

This ultimate in-group fantasy is explicated throughout the Bible, but is put most pointedly in Psalms and Isaiah (RSV):

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psalms 2:8-9). And the [diaspora Jewish] peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the

house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves (Isaiah 14:2). Thus says the LORD: "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabians, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying: 'God is with you only, and there is no other, no god besides him (Isaiah 45:14). I will give you as a light unto the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising ... Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you ... your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut; that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste (Isaiah 60:1-12).[\(8\)](#)

And when was this to happen? As soon as Israel could stop internecine fighting - as soon as it could get its in-group morality back on course. Then the Messiah would come and bring The Kingdom of God to earth. The objective was not to leave earth for heaven, it was to have heaven on earth - to restore the kingdom of David.

Onward Christian Soldiers

There is a tendency for Judaism's reculant evangelical sect, Christianity, to perceive its renegotiated contract with its god - the New Testament or New Covenant - as morally superior to the original covenant. Two thousand years of history suggest that this delusion has served military and colonial ambitions well. Thomas Paine perceived a "wretched contrivance" (1794, pp. 12, 180, 183):

Some Christians pretend that Christianity was not established by the sword; but of what period of time do they speak? It was impossible that twelve men could begin with the sword; they had not the power; but no sooner were the professors of Christianity sufficiently powerful to employ the sword, than they did so, and the stake and fagot, too ... Those who preach this doctrine of loving their enemies are in general the greatest persecutors, and they act consistently by so doing; for the doctrine is hypocritical, and it is natural that hypocrisy should act the reverse of what it preaches.

Indeed, for a religion that prides itself on its contradictions and imponderables - like a Holy Ghost who is indefinable by definition and simultaneously one and the same entity as the god of the Israelites and that god's son - Christianity might have done a better job at disguising its own savior's antipathy toward out-group members, especially since the vast majority of Christians would have qualified as out-group members by Jesus' reckoning. Consider the attitude displayed in the following account of an encounter with a left-over Canaanite (Matthew 15:21-28; RSV):

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is

not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

The assumptions that lie behind the miracle are revealing. They suggest that native inhabitants were tolerated if they perceived themselves as dogs compared to in-group members.⁽⁹⁾ This made sense because Jesus wanted to restore the Kingdom of David, and it would not do to have thousands of pounds of gold flowing in from foreign nations if in-group members had to sweep their own streets and empty their own bed pans. Day labor would be needed and the option of importing Romanians, Thais, and Filipinos was not yet available (Goell, 1994). Local domestics, satisfied with crumbs that fall from their masters' tables, would be perfect.

Essentially the same story is told in Mark (7:24-30), with the Canaanite changed to a Greek, suggesting that Jesus discriminated against out-group members on an equal opportunity basis.

The New In-Group Judaism

According to the Gospels, Jesus' declared mission was to reform Judaism, to bring back the spirit of in-group morality that seemed to have given way to sanctimony, observance of rituals, and rigid class distinctions in the face of Roman domination. He stated this repeatedly, even instructing his disciples to avoid out-group members when taking his message to in-group members (e.g., Matthew 10:5-6; RSV): "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Jesus often used the words neighbor and brother without explicitly indicating that he meant fellow Jews whom he sought to unify. (For a sympathetic and particularly well-informed perspective on Jesus and his mission within the context of 1st century Israel, see Vermes, 1973). Ironically, gentile Christians generally infer themselves to be included by these terms, even though many passages make it clear that they were not. For example, consider Matthew 18:15-18, in which Jesus explained to his disciples that Jews who sin against fellow Jews and cannot be made to see the error of their ways should be considered as gentiles because, like gentiles and tax collectors (Jews who collected taxes for the gentile government), they were going to be rejected from heaven (RSV, see also Matthew 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 10:16-21):

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The purpose of re-forming Judaism was stated over and over by Jesus. It was to bring his god's kingdom to earth - to either be the Messiah himself or to usher him in (see Vermes, 1973, regarding both the strength of the former conviction and the ambivalence of the latter. Jesus' self-image as the Messiah waxed and waned, but it is clear that he would have been outraged by the suggestion that he was the god to whom he prayed - per Christianity). After so many centuries of foreign domination, Jesus wanted to bring his group back together, to forge them into a unit even more cohesive than that formed by Moses, primarily by emphasizing

the need for active morality between in-group members, as distinct from the earlier emphasis on passive morality. This active in-group morality extended to nine repetitions of "love thy neighbor," to the Golden Rule (Jesus' twice-used paraphrase of "love thy neighbor" - "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them"),⁽¹⁾ and even to "turning the other cheek" to fellow Jews who might thereby be persuaded to join the cause (Matthew 5:39).

The cause was the plan, or the word, and the word was holy. Jesus was very concerned that the holy plan not become apparent to out-group members, so again he instructed his disciples (Matthew 7:6; RSV): "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine." In this case "dogs" referred to left-over Canaanites and Samaritans (e.g., Matthew 15:21-28 above) and "swine" referred to people who eat pork - that is, gentiles. Pearls were the pearls of wisdom about how to treat in-group members. As such, Matthew 7:6 was the 1st century equivalent of saying in America today "Go tell the plan to the White people, but what ever you do, don't tell the niggers and the spics." Ugly language indeed, but it is commonly sold and bought among Christians as some kind of poetry, not least of all by those who are upset about the coarseness of lyrics in rap music.

Jesus' prospects for accomplishing the plan were buoyed by the claim that he was the direct descendant of King David "according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3), the underdog who extended the borders of Israel throughout the Middle East (Luke 1:31-33; RSV):

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob [Israel] for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Jesus' appeal was effective among the hopeless because he held out their greatest hope - the ultimate in-group aspiration (Acts 1:6-8; RSV; see also Luke 2:32; 24:21; 24:44; 24:49; and Revelations 1:5-7; 11:17-18):

They asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

He wanted to make Isaiah's dream come true (see Matthew 3:3; 4:4; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23; 12:38-41) - to bring the Kingdom of God to earth, to fulfill his god's promise to Abraham, ^Ä a less innocent promise than it is generally interpreted to be because the word "bless" in Genesis 26:4 is euphemistically translated. The transliterated Hebrew word is "barak" which is a primary word meaning to kneel (for barak translated kneel down or kneel, see Genesis 24:11; II Chronicles 6:13; Psalms 95:6; for barak translated as curse or cursed, see Job 1:5; 1: 11; 2:5; 2:9). A person, or nation, is "blessed" consequent to acknowledging subordination, by kneeling before the god, person, or nation that confers the blessing (italics and brackets added, RSV; see also Genesis 12:2-3; 18:18; 22:18; 28:14 and 26:4):

"I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all

these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall *bless* [kneel] themselves."

But under the requirement of having to kneel before Rome, Kingdom Come was not a practical idea for 1st century Jews. Nor was it, in any moral sense, a good idea. Indeed, it was a dangerous idea for Jesus' own in-group. It especially threatened those who had made an accommodation with the Romans - those who had knelt before Rome and were receiving the bulk of the blessings - and they had Jesus crucified for promoting it.

Rewriting the Script

So where did Christian universalism come from? It came from the Israelite Saul, who changed his name to Paul, and pronounced himself to be his Messiah's apostle to the gentiles. Like Paul's name change, his universalization of Jesus' message was more than a little convenient, since Paul had been kicked out of Israel and found himself irretrievably among gentiles. In addition to being an exigent personal accommodation, Paul's offer of honorary in-group status to out-group members was inextricably linked to the message that Israel's Messiah would be back very soon - certainly within a couple of years, probably within a few months, and quite possibly within a few weeks. In other words, the offer was good for a limited time only.

Paul's message, and that of his colleague Peter, included: don't get married; if you are married, don't have children ... maintain the status quo even if you are an oppressed slave or an oppressed woman, even if you suffer beatings, behave submissively, because Jesus will be back any day and everything will change ... withstand your suffering, no matter how unjust, be good, and he will take care of you when he gets here ... etc. For example (I Peter 2:18-21; see also I Corinthians 7:24-40; Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; and I Peter 3:1-6):

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing. For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

That is, if your master beats you for an offense that you did not commit, this is your opportunity to be Christ-like. Just take it, have faith, and you will soon be rewarded. Peter and Paul were the characters who appear in modern cartoons as bedraggled naysayers holding signs that warn Repent! The End Is Near. Reading these injunctions in the context of the perceived immediacy of the pending apocalypse suggests that if one could go back in time to tell gentile converts that the returning Messiah would be late by at least 2,000 years, they would have put these prototype Christian missionaries on the first boat back to Israel.

It All Comes Out In The End

Paul's historical revisionism aside, Jesus' plan, his message, and his prophecy are reissued in the Revelation to John (RSV):

He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I [Jesus] will give him power over the nations and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father (2:26-27) ... And I [John] heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel (7:4) ... they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads; they were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them (9:4-5).

Jesus' angels could not kill the goyim because they were needed to occupy the countries that would pay tribute to Israel when the Kingdom of David was restored. But apparently, in contrast to the Canaanite woman who was on her knees to save her daughter, the goyim would need a bit of softening up.

Jesus was to have his own rod of iron, and because his hands would be occupied with that, a sort of stiletto sword would come out of his mouth (19:14-16):

From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

It is the miracle of the holy trinity - Jesus' ability to be both a god and a man - that enabled him to be simultaneously David's heir on earth (King of kings) and the ascendant god in heaven (Lord of lords). The difficulty of where this would leave him vis-a-vis his father is resolved by the article of faith that they were one and the same.

More than a few men of the cloth have been bothered by parishioners who take it upon themselves to engage in unsupervised reading of the Book of Revelation. The forward-looking concern is this: 144,000 may have looked like a hefty number 2000 years ago, but haven't all of those slots been filled by now? Is there still room in Kingdom Come? Unfortunately, this question completely misconstrues Jesus' message. The Kingdom is not taking reservation from gentile Christians or even from Jewish Jews. All slots are reserved for a small subset of original in-group members - Israeli Jews for Jesus. The Good News is that many seats are still available, probably about 143,000.

The original covenant was an exclusive contract. Although he occasionally threatened to destroy them for insufficient fealty, the god of the Israelites never wavered in his insistence that they were his chosen people. The new covenant was for Jews who would follow the messiah and recreate the empire of the original chosen people. Jesus would have turned over in his grave if he had known that Paul would be taking his plan to the pigs.

If You Can't Enjoin' em, Beat' em

As it happened, Paul's rendition of Jesus' message was like Elvis Presley's rendition of Carl Perkins' "Blue Suede Shoes" - it took over. Paul's new target audience, gentile Christians, became an inordinately powerful in-group. Unlike Judaism, out-group members were encouraged to join, or were compelled to join, but payback for following the rules was to be reaped in heaven. Pie in the sky was Paul's hook. Meanwhile, in this life, the proceeds of wars and tithes to the Church were shared disproportionately by supportive

government officials and Church dignitaries, who were often one and the same persons. Keith put his finger on this *modus operandi* (1947, p. 65; cf Alexander 1987:175): "[T]he area of the world over which the Prince of Peace is alleged to preside is the most nationally minded part of the world - the part where fierce war is endemic. Christianity has not conquered nationalism; the opposite has been the case - nationalism has made Christianity its footstool."

Ironically, being a good Christian, Keith did not understand that nationalism's footstool was built for just that purpose by its original carpenter, albeit for a different in-group. Contemporary Christians tend to be aware of this footstool effect in reference to the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition, but Americans tend to forget that their forefathers thought of the United States as God's New Israel (Cherry 1971, p. vi, capitalization per original):

It has been often remarked that the people of the United States come nearer to a parallel with Ancient Israel than any other nation upon the globe. Hence OUR AMERICAN ISRAEL is a term frequently used; and common consent allows it apt and proper (Abiel Abbot, Thanksgiving sermon, 1799).[\(10\)](#)

Reverend Abbot's analogy was as functional as it was apt, leading to a colonial highwater mark for in-group morality. Consider the following account of Sagoyewatha's words ("Red Jacket," Chief of the Seneca) to the Reverend Cram from the Boston Missionary Society, at a meeting between the chiefs and warriors of the Six Nations and missionaries from the Great Awakening, at Buffalo Creek, in 1805 (Stedman and Hutchinson 1889, pp.36-38):

You say that you are sent to instruct us how to worship the Great Spirit agreeably to His mind, and, if we do not take hold of the religion which you white people teach, we shall be unhappy hereafter. You say that you are right and we are lost. How do we know this to be true? We understand that your religion is written in a book. If it was intended for us as well as you, why has not the Great Spirit given to us, and not only to us, but why did He not give to our forefathers the knowledge of that book, with the means of understanding it rightly? We only know what you tell us about it. How shall we know when to believe, being so often deceived by the white people?

Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agreed, as you can all read the book?

Brother, the Great Spirit has made us all ... we do not wish to destroy your religion or take it from you. We only want to enjoy our own ... you say you have not come to get our land or our wealth but to enlighten our minds ... you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again of what you have said.

Brother, you have now heard our answer to your talk, and this is all we have to say at present. As we are going to part, we will come and take you by the hand and hope the Great Spirit will protect you on your journey and return you safe to your friends.

Stedman and Hutchinson describe what happened next:

As the Indians began to approach the missionary, he rose hastily from his seat and replied that he could not take them by the hand; that there was no fellowship between the religion of God and the works of the devil.

This being interpreted to the Indians, they smiled, and retired in a peaceable manner.

Deuteronomic Deja Vu

The strategic practicality of killing locals and bringing slaves from afar was not lost upon God's New Israelites. Because they were already there, Indians could not be pulled out by their roots, transported halfway around the world, and terrorized into servitude as thoroughly as Africans. Once again, in-group morality worked its magic. African slaves were difficult to manage before they were converted, but upon seeing the light, their spirit was chained to the bottom rung of an in-group ladder (Maier, 1993):

American-born masters took greater interest in American-born slaves than in Africans, who seemed to them wild, and controllable only by the threat of harsh punishments. Gradually a "new paternalism developed among owners that softened their relationships with slaves, increased their attention to slaves' material welfare and helped undercut an older opposition to the Christianization of slaves. It also led masters to intervene in the lives of their slaves to an extent unknown in other similar systems of servitude, and fostered an extreme hostility toward signs of independence in their slave "children."

Although a perceptive critic of modern Israel, Patrick Buchanan would have felt at home in OUR AMERICAN ISRAEL. In God's New Israel, Buchanan's forthrightness would have been appreciated by slavers and the Reverend Cram alike: "Our culture is superior because our religion is Christianity and that is the truth that makes men free" (1993).

Freedom, Fidelity, and Evil

Discussing religious freedom, comedian-cum-exegete Steve Allen (1990, p. xxix) quipped, "my freedom to swing my arms about stops at the point of another's nose." Allen was right, but naive advocates of religious freedom ignore "the ethically vicious part" (Keith, 1947, p. 10), pretend that it does not exist, and/or suggest that believers will pick out the good and leave the bad. This too is plain wrong, and it houses a Judeo-Christian self-deception that Thomas Paine warned us about (1794, p. 8):

>Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what one does not believe. It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief [belief professed] to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime.

By "believing what they do not believe," or professing "to believe it deeply, even if they cannot describe the it that they believe" (Williams, 1994), most contemporary Christians and Jews unwittingly support in-group morality. They do so by revering the Bible as a source of universal moral values, even though few have actually read it - as distinct from having actually read it and in consequence lending it credence as a source of moral values. This is backwards, and for the few believers who have read the Bible, it is not enough to simply assert that true Judaism and Christianity are other than what is stated in their book.

There is a stark contradiction between abhorring genocide and paying homage to a god who commanded his followers to commit genocide. There is a deep structural discrepancy between outrage over persecution of people because of their religious beliefs and simultaneous reverence for scriptures that condemn non-co-religionists to death and damn them to hell. But humans have a unique ability to be evil. If *evil* is bad put forth as good, wrong put forth as right, injustice put forth as justice, and hate disguised as love, then institutions of religion that perpetuate in-group morality, whether up front or in the guise of "they're OK but don't marry one," are evil. And those who decry in-group morality while holding on to the self-image of being Protestant or Catholic or Orthodox or Conservative or Reformed, give overt in-group moralists the very fibre that sustains them.

The Bible is a blueprint of in-group morality, complete with instructions for genocide, enslavement of out-groups, and world domination. But the Bible is not evil by virtue of its objectives or even its glorification of murder, cruelty, and rape (Hartung, ms2). Many ancient works do that - The Iliad, the Icelandic Sagas, the tales of the ancient Syrians and the inscriptions of the ancient Mayans, for example - but no one is selling the Iliad as a foundation for morality. A wolf, no matter how big and bad, cannot be evil. In distinction, a wolf in sheep's clothing is pure evil. Therein lies the problem. The Bible is sold and bought as a guide to how people should live their lives. And it is, by far, the world's all-time best seller. But the effort to make the Bible a universal guide to morality is impossible, because although orally transmitted myths can make 180 degree turns across a series of generations and get away with claims to authority based on antiquity, distortions and selective dismissals of written myths can only, at best, fool most of the people most of the time.

Where Will It End?

History is replete with in-groups that have disintegrated from within after running out of enemies to parasitize and defend against. Like a full balloon in a vacuum chamber, as outside pressure is reduced, they burst. Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency, has perceived this problem and put it bluntly (Haberma, 1995): "And if real peace does come to Israel, the question will be asked: Can we, and how do we, survive without an external enemy?"

Evolutionists have not been able to devise a model for converting in-group morality into general morality. Because in-group morality does not evolve by group selection, it does not involve selfless altruism. As put by Irons, "All forms of evolved altruism must be discriminate in terms of costs and benefits. The benefits must outweigh the costs, and both must be measured in terms of reproduction of the altruist's genes" (1991). If a group loses in competition with other groups, its members lose the advantage of having been in-group moral. Similarly, and somewhat paradoxically, if a group wins against all competing groups, its members lose the advantage of continuing to be in-group moral, because in-group morality can only be maintained at the expense of out-groups. As put by Alexander (1987, p. 261):

Only in humans are war and other forms of intergroup competition the central aspects and

driving forces of social existence. Only humans have embarked upon a virtually unchecked arms race involving cooperative efforts of millions of individuals on the opposing sides.

Only these facts, I believe, can explain why individual people more or less continually treat their fellows as adversaries and competitors, to be manipulated and deceived and used when possible. Only these facts can explain the particular ways in which humans cooperate - within groups of expanding sizes and complexities, and so intensively as to deny even to themselves their manipulations and deceptions.

This lose-lose situation could be salvaged by an invasion from outer space, a favorite theme of fiction writers, because the world could unify to defend against a common out-group, but short of that, we must devise artificial foundations for morality.

Of course, our ability to self-destruct through nuclear war and ecological disaster may be the equivalent to an invasion from outer space. Whether we can collectively realize the urgency of this threat and unify to save ourselves from ourselves, is a question that historians and environmentalists ponder without optimism. Nevertheless, humans are the first species with enough foresight to apprehend their own extinction and its probable cause. We are also the first species capable of conceptualizing everyone who is alive, and everyone who is yet to be born, as our neighbors. This makes hope a not entirely irrational emotion. From Moses to Jesus to Jim Jones, the phenomenon of religion proves that humans are capable of being unified by irrational beliefs. Substituting rational beliefs may even strengthen our ability to unify.

The Good News - Bad News

Humans are also capable of judging when relationships and circumstances are fair and just - in the abstract. That is, as an epiphenomenon of reciprocal altruism and intense selection for the ability to assess our self-interest in deals that we make with each other (Trivers, 1971), we are naturally rather good at judging the fairness of relationships in which we have absolutely zero self-interest. That ability enables us to make and determine the justice of abstract rules and laws. This "knowing good and evil" was recognized by the authors of the creation story as a unique human attribute - attributed to Eve's daring defiance of her god's order to not eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9; 3:22).

In addition, in order to present an effective social self (cf. Hartung, 1988), each of us has been selected to maintain the self-deception that I am inherently fair and just but other people need to be regulated in that regard. Accordingly, and most fortunately, most of us are willing to support systems of justice that catch and punish those other people who break fair laws. And of course, when we do that, we set a trap for ourselves - because each of us is other people to other people, and our self-deceptions about our own behavior will not withstand their scrutiny. This is the Good News trap.

Unfortunately, our propensity to be scrupulous when it pays self-image dividends invariably causes some clerics, some philosophers, some modelers, (e.g., Frank, 1988, 1994) and some muddlers (e.g., Wilson & Sober, 1994) to argue that humans are inherently moral, and that if we could just create the right environment, our natural moral propensities would flourish independent of the rule of law and the threat of punishment. This is the Bad News trap. Hume (1750) would have had it right if he had argued that is cannot be derived from ought, rather than the other way around.

Moralistic wishful thinking endangers our ability to take advantage of those few serendipitous epiphenomena of natural selection which, when properly organized, can cause us to behave as if we were inherently moral. Fair laws fairly applied are the key. That is, the effectiveness of laws can be enhanced by

severe punishment and a high probability of being caught, but only fairness appeals to our "knowing good and evil" - and only fairness gives laws the practical force to create an environment that makes moral behavior adaptive.

Nevertheless, the question remains, why bother?

An answer will be proffered in the next issue of Skeptic, where an exploration of the enlightened animism of modern physics and cosmology will be used to derive the premise that existence is contingent upon continuing consequence, such that life does not meaningfully exist if the universe unfolds in a manner that leaves no evidence that living matter did exist. It follows from that premise that we meaningfully exist only if we contribute to the evolution of life forms that continue to contribute to the evolution of life forms, forever. Because that is possible and inherently desirable, the struggle for existence derives values from knowledge - what ought to be from what is, and why we ought to bother.

Notes

1. Leviticus 19:18; see also repetitions by Jesus in Matthew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39, Mark 12:31; 12:33 and Luke 10:27, other repetitions in the New Testament (Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14; and James 2:8), and Jesus' twice-used paraphrase in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31. [\[Back\]](#)

2. Many archeologists doubt that the Israelites were even in Egypt, that the Exodus ever occurred, that Moses even existed let alone wrote or dictated any part of the Old Testament (Stiebing; Redford). Likewise, biblical scholars and historians are not agreed about the existence of historical Jesus, let alone which (if any) parts of the New Testament accurately reflect his message (Mack; Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar). However, the empirical veracity of biblical stories, or of any story told in earnest, is independent of the messages, both implicit and explicit, that they convey. Throughout this article, those messages are considered valid information. [\[Back\]](#)

3. References to biblical passages are given by book, chapter, verse, and, where relevant, translation. References to talmudic passages are given by tractate and folio (page) number. References to The Codes of Maimonides are given by book, treatise, chapter, and section. Full references for biblical, talmudic, and Maimonidean citations are given at the end under "Primary Sources." [\[Back\]](#)

3a. The Davka Corporation version of the Soncino Press translation of the Talmud on CDROM, which is otherwise faithful to the Soncino Press translation, including its footnotes, simply omits footnote 7 for Baba Mezia 114b. [\[Back\]](#)

3b. The Bush Administration has been more straightforward, or simply less subtle, than the Sages of the Talmud ,ÄŒ labeling its adversaries in Iraq and the broader Middle East "The Bad Guys" (note added 1/17/07). [\[Back\]](#)

4. For examples of the commandment to kill out-group members and boasts of having done so, see: Numbers 21:2-3; 21:34-35; 24:8; 24:19-20; Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:2-6; 3:21; 7:12; 7:16; 7:23-24; 9:3; 11:24-25; 20:16-17; 31:3-5; 33:27; Joshua 2:10; 6:21; 8:2; 8:24-26; 10:1; 10:28; 10:35; 10:37; 10:39-40; 11:11-14; 11:20-21; Judges 1:17; 3:29; I Samuel 15:3; 15:8; 15:15; 15:18; 15:20; and I Chronicles 4:41, any major translation. [\[Back\]](#)

5. Tanakh (JPS '85), although quite similar when not identical to JPS '17 and RSV, and occasionally more clear, often contains subtle differences which de-emphasize the negative, employing euphemisms when a

more straightforward translation would be less obfuscating. For example, in every major English translation of the Bible except TANAKH, the Israelites are frequently commanded by their God to "utterly destroy" another people. Tanakh differs in that it usually translates the Hebrew word *charam* as "proscribe" rather than "utterly destroy" in this context (e.g., "you must proscribe them; the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and...", instead of "you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and..." Deuteronomy 20:17). When this is done the word "proscribe" is footnoted to Leviticus 27:29, which reads, "No human being who has been proscribed can be ransomed: he shall be put to death" - which amounts to the same thing (compare, e.g., RSV, JPS '17 and JPS '85 for Numbers 21:2-3; Deuteronomy 20:17; Joshua 10:1; 10:28; 10:35; 10:37; 10:39-40; 11:11-12; Judges 1:17; I Samuel 15:8; 15:15; 15:20). Nevertheless, Tanakh is inconsistent in this regard, perhaps due to conflicting decisions from the translation's six editors. Accordingly, *charam* is translated "exterminate" in three cases (Joshua 6:21; 8:26; I Samuel 15:18), and "wipe out forever" in one case (I Chronicles 4:41). [\[Back\]](#)

6. For more on the intensity of the fear of assimilation, see Hartung msl. [\[Back\]](#)

7. The passage: "When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him...life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Leviticus 24:19-20 and Exodus 21:23-24; RSV), was just meant to keep revenge from escalating among in-group members. In distinction to an eye for an eye, the rule for out-groups was simply 'everything for nothing' (for an analysis of the history of reactive racism that the in-group nature of Judaism has fomented among diaspora host populations, see Shahak, 1994 and MacDonald, 1995 - and a review of MacDonald 1995 by Hartung 1995). [\[Back\]](#)

8. To trace the development of this theme, see: Genesis 18:18; 18:22; 26:4; 27:29; 28:14; Exodus 23:31; 33:16; 34:24; Deuteronomy 7:14-24; 10:15; 14:2; 15:6; 12:18-19; 28:1; 28:10-13; 32:43; 33:17-29; Joshua 1:3-4; 23:4-5; Second Samuel 8:2-14; 10:19; 12:30-31; 22:44-47; I Kings 4:21; 4:24; 10:14-15; II Kings 3:4; I Chronicles 16:35; 17:21; 9:25-26; II Chronicles 20:29-30; Psalms 2:4-9; 61:6; 89:27; 105:44-45; 110:5-6; 111:6; Isaiah 11:11-15; 14:1-2; 17:12-14; 19:17; 34:1-8; 40:15-17; 41:8-11; 45:14; 45:22-25; 49:1-7; 49:22-23; 54:1-3; 55:5; 59:20-21; 60:116; 61:5-8; 66:10-16; Jeremiah 12:16-17; 30:11; 33:9; 46:28; Ezekiel 28:24-26; 36:6-11; 39:1722; Daniel 2:44; 7:13-14; 7:27; 10:13-14; 12:1-3; 12:7; Joel 1:12-14; 3:2; Obadiah 1:15-17; Micah 4:12-13; 5:5-15; Zephaniah 2:7-9; 2:12-13; 3:19-20; Haggai 2:6-9; Zechariah 1:14-21; 2:8-9; 8:22-23; 9:11-15; 12:5-6; 12:9; 14:1; 14:9-12; 14:16-19; and Malachi 1:2-5. [\[Back\]](#)

9. For additional examples, see Matthew 5:47, 6:7, 6:32, 10:5, 10:18, 18:17, 20:19, 20:25, Mark 10:33, 10:42, and Luke 18:32, 21:24, 22:25. Jesus' view of the Canaanites as dogs was unwittingly echoed by the father of militant Zionism, Ze'ev Jabotinsky: "the human inhabitants of the district... the rabble of the town-laborers ... the fragments of indigenous tribes...resembled homeless dogs ... all looked alike, lacking the characteristics of any known breed," in his novel Samson (1926), which was made into a movie, Samson and Delilah, by Cecil B. DeMille in 1950. [\[Back\]](#)

10. This view is very much alive today. Consider Christian ex-Senator Bob Packwood's tendency to use "we" when discussing Jewish or Israeli history in fund-raising literature, as in (referring to events of 72 BCE), "We were forced out of our own land, forcibly ejected...I don't regard them as occupied territories. I regard them as legitimately Israel's" (Noakes, 1992), or the opening lines of a 1992 speech by then Vice President Dan Quayle to the American Israel Political Action Committee, "Fellow Zionists, Israel and the United States need each other. We benefit from each other and our alliance is unshakable because it rests on two firm pillars - strategic interests and common values" (WRMEA, 1992a), or from Governor-running-for-president Bill Clinton's address to the Jewish Leadership Council, "If I ever let Israel down, God would never forgive me" (WRMEA, 1992b). [\[Back\]](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. John Hartung is Associate Editor of the Journal of Neurosurgical Anesthesiology and Associate Professor of Anesthesiology at the State University of New York. His Ph.D. is in anthropology from Harvard, where he was a student of, and teaching fellow for, Bernard D. Davis, Irven B. DeVore, Paul H. Harvey, William D. Hamilton, Melvin J. Konner, Robert L. Trivers and Edward O. Wilson. About half of Dr. Hartung's 100-some publications are in social science, with the rest in medicine. He can be contacted at: hartung@post.harvard.edu

IN-GROUP V. UNIVERSAL MORALITY

FORUM DISCUSSION

(from SKEPTIC Vol. 4 No. 1, pp 24-31, 1996)

Tending the Religious Garden

Thank you for "Love Thy Neighbor: The Evolution of In-Group Morality" (Skeptic, Vol. 3, #4) by John Hartung. Having long since "lapsed" from my Midwestern Protestant roots and having almost as long sought to combat the divisive seeds sown among my conspecifics by religion (usually of the Judeo-Christian variety in my part of the globe), I intend to rely heavily on Hartung's scholarly effort when "tending my own garden." Nonetheless (and to continue this horticultural metaphor shamelessly), the Panglossian side of me hopes that the present congratulatory note will inspire you to broaden the scope of your tillage in the future to include equally fruitful labors in some of the other fields of organized superstition within and without our Western heritage. -Craig Bowe, Ph.D., Needham, MA

Before You Throw Out The Religious Bathwater

In his article Dr. Hartung accuses Christianity and Judaism of being founded on the concepts of genocide, and bases his argument upon selective quotations from the Bible and other religious tracts. His main thrust is that the moral rules at the heart of both religions applied only within the religious group and that both accept - and even promote - the destruction of people outside their religious group. Therefore, neither religion can be used for universal morality. Dr. Hartung's paper seems to underplay the fact that both religions' mainstreams do indeed believe the moral rules are to be universally applied. It doesn't matter one whit whether they were originally intended to be universal, they are now. If Christians and Jews interpret their religions' proscriptions to be universally applied, they are universal, regardless of whether they were originally meant to be applied only within particular ethnic groups or tribes.

Religions are like any philosophy: they evolve in parallel with a society's social, political, and economic outlook. In the US, the concept of democracy once only extended to Caucasian males with property. Now the same words, and even the original texts, are interpreted to mean that democracy includes women and non-Caucasians, as well as the indigent. While the signers of the Declaration of Independence may not have intended the Rights of Man listed in the text to include non-whites, modern Americans apply it in the more universal manner. Their culture and society have evolved, and their basic concepts have evolved with them. But if we applied Hartung's thesis to the concept of democracy, its application as a universal concept is hopeless because at its formulation it was originally more exclusive. Balderdash.

Second, if Dr. Hartung were correct, then those who commit genocide in modern times should be able to claim they are only upholding Christian or Jewish law. It is interesting that the contrary is more often true.

Of the two great 20th-century Western genocidal governments, neither was Christian or Jewish. One, the Third Reich, was essentially Paganist (and decidedly anti-Christian as well as anti-Semitic), and the other, the Soviet Union, was atheist. Indeed, in looking at nations that have committed genocide in the 20th century, it is noteworthy that many of the most destructive (Kampuchea, Communist China, and the Soviet Union) were officially atheist. However, correlation does not prove causation.

But let us look at just the case of the Third Reich. Leaders of that system actively attempted to suppress Christianity among their followers because they knew that genocide would be difficult for believing Christians to perform. Heinrich Himmler therefore pressured SS officers to leave the Church and created a muddled neoPaganism as their official creed. Hitler is also quoted by Speer as lamenting that Germans were saddled with the weak and timid Christian religion. According to Speer, Hider once even wished Germany had long ago become Islamic, as that religion - in Hider's mind - was more suited to his goals. Odd the religions that, according to Hartung, are so ingrained with genocidal concepts are frequently found so wanting by those who actually commit such heinous acts.

It is easy for skeptics such as ourselves to see all that is wrong with religions. We see them as unscientific and used to justify some of humanity's worst behavior. If such condemnations are warranted, then we cannot omit our praise for what religions, such as Christianity, have given us. For instance, it is a fact that modern democracy arose from Christian states. Democracy, even now, is rare among Islamic nations, and nations with Confucian foundations. In officially atheist states, it does not exist whatsoever. And what of the concepts of individualism, rule of law, the secular government, and human rights? It is no coincidence that these great ideas are associated with the JudeoChristian West. Before throwing out Judaism and Christianity, we should be aware of what might go with them. - Chris Centner, Reston, VA

The Torah and the Yanomamo: A Rabbi Replies to Hartung

It is one thing to bash a religion; it is quite another to trump up charges against a religion and to proceed to substantiate these charges by selectively choosing material that superficially seems to corroborate these charges. The former may be right or wrong; the latter is contrived, deceitful, and morally reprehensible. John Hartung has done the latter in his truth-distorted article. In it he claims that Judaism teaches and preaches what he calls an in-group morality. He selectively cites sources from the Torah-Bible, the Talmud, and Maimonides which, to his mind, support this view.

His understanding of Talmud is so poor that most of the things he mentions have nothing to do with the issues he raises, while some of the things actually disprove his very premises. He proceeds to cast aspersions on the religious leaders of Israel, claiming that they teach the same philosophy as the Yanomamo Indians of South America, namely, that all other besides their own kind are subhuman. In a categorical statement which is utterly baseless, he says, "Rabbis at large accepted his view [a reference to Rabbi Simeon, to whom Hartung has imputed his in-group morality] on the point; non-Jews are referred to as not fully human in contexts other than ritual defilement."

I know little about the Yanomamo, but I do know something about Judaism and Torah. I am the dean of a Rabbinical college and have spent the past 40 years of my life as a student and teacher of Torah. I have studied under three of the greatest Torah scholars of our time, Rabbi Abron Koder, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik, and Rabbi Moses Feinstein, and never have I heard them state or imply that people who are not Jewish are less than human. Hartung's statements are glaringly false and prejudicial, and warrant the censure of every decent human being.

In a case brought before a *Beit Din*, a Jewish court in which three Rabbis preside, the city of Pittsburgh won

a case against an Orthodox religious Jew without even being represented. (A city official was offered the opportunity to represent the city but declined). They won the case solely on the testimony of the religious Jew himself. The court was held in a private room above a Yeshiva in Brooklyn with the three judges and only three other Orthodox Jews present, one of whom was myself. No outsiders were observing the Rabbis. They could have easily rendered a decision favoring their Orthodox in-group member. The case was very complex and there was no clear-cut solution. The decision was dependent on their judgment. They were under no constraint, but their honesty dictated that they rule against their own Jewish Orthodox brother. Their concern was only that their judgment should be just in the eyes of Torah and before God. The Orthodox Jew who consulted the court out of his own volition had to pay the court for their time spent in rendering the decision against himself. He walked away satisfied, knowing that he was doing the right thing according to Talmudic Law and ethic. The city of Pittsburgh applauded the decision and the story was carried on the front page of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Sept. 13, 1995, A-I).

Does this sound as if Rabbis consider gentiles subhuman? Has our society yet reached the level of justice where one can win a case without even being represented? In another case reported in The Wall Street Journal (Sept. 21, 1995, B-1) a gentile took a religious Jew to a Beit Din and was awarded a judgment of over \$100,000. Does this sound like in-group morality?

There is a group of gentiles in Athens, Tennessee who approached me to teach them Torah. They wish to live life according to the Torah's prescription for the non-Jew. I spend hours each week preparing and presenting my classes in Torah and Talmud for them which I give by way of telephone hookup. I receive no financial compensation; I do it because the Torah teaches that one is not permitted to turn away another human being who is searching for knowledge. Other Rabbis have done the same.

Hartung knows nothing of Talmudic analysis. His methods are similar to those of the Nazi historian Julius Streicher who would take statements from the Talmud out of context in order to show that the Rabbis taught that non-Jews are subhuman. It takes years of Torah study to become a Talmudic scholar: one cannot just pick up a Soncino translation of the Talmud and think he understands the intricate issues involved. The Talmud makes it clear that one cannot master its works without a personal teacher.

Do Torah, Talmud and Maimonides preach an in-group ethic? Let us begin our analysis with Torah. In a confused pseudo-intellectual potpourri of science, history and Bible, Hartung tries to prove that Torah teaches love only for the in-group and hatred and oppression for everyone else. What does Torah really say? In Exodus 22:20 we read, "And the stranger you shall not vex nor oppress him because you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This refers even to a gentile stranger who lives under Jewish sovereignty (see Ibn Ezra).

If one analyzes the verse properly, one learns that the prohibition is not only against oppression, which is expressed by the verb *Tilchatzenu*, but also against any sort of verbal abuse which includes any form of unkind speech to the stranger. This is derived from the verb *Tonu*, which according to the Talmud means to cause emotional pain through speech. The latter half of the verse gives a reason for the prohibition, "because you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This teaches that the Jews must identify with the stranger; the Jews must not feel superior to him since they too were strangers (compare Exodus 23:9). In other words, Torah teaches that it is not sufficient to refrain from being unkind to the stranger, one must identify with him as well. Is this an in-group ethic? This injunction is repeated many times throughout the Torah. In Deuteronomy 14:21 the Torah states that Jews may not consume food that is not ritually slaughtered but should give it away gratis to the gentile strangers in their midst. From this verse, as well as from Leviticus 25:35 where the Torah, when mentioning the gentile stranger, states, "and he shall live with you," the Rabbis infer that one must support the gentile stranger and give him financial aid if he has difficulty earning a living (B. Tal. Pesachim 21b, Rashi; Maimonides, Code, Laws of Kings 10:10). Moses taught his people

that their God "loves the stranger to give him food and clothing (Deuteronomy 10:18)." They were taught that they must imitate this divine attribute, "you shall love the stranger" (10:19).

Hartung states that Torah punishes idolatrous nations severely and unfairly since they are an out-group. While it is true that the Torah is severe against idolaters under certain rare circumstances, some of which were prevalent in the early times of the history of Israel, it is equally severe against Jewish idolaters. In Deuteronomy 13:13-19, Moses tells the people, "If you shall hear in one of your cities... wicked persons have gone out from among you...saying, 'let us go and serve other gods...' you shall surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword destroying it utterly and all that is in it...." Again, after the sin of the golden calf, Moses says to his people, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'put every man his sword by his side...and slay every man his brother and every man his friend and every man his relative' (Exodus 32:27). Again, when the people of Israel worshiped the idol Ba'al Pe'or, Moses said, "Slay everyone his men that have attached themselves to Ba'al Pe'or" (Numbers 25:5). Hartung conveniently omitted these sources. It is abundantly clear that it is idolatry that Torah abhors, not the gentile.

The biblical ethic is completely universal. The fathers of the Jewish nation are themselves defined as B'nei Noach, sons of Noah, not as Jews (Letters of Maimonides, Yeshiva University Press, 1977, p. 108). Noah is called righteous and described as walking with God although he was a non-Jew (Genesis 6:9). Jethro, a non-Jew, is treated in the Torah with the greatest respect. Moses bows down to him and kisses him (Exodus 18:7). He entreats him to join the Jewish people on their journey, praising him for his indispensable knowledge (Numbers 10:31).

Contrary to what Hartung says, the word Adam - man - is used in the Torah and not the word Ivri, Hebrew, in order to demonstrate that the Torah's objective is to perfect man qua man, not qua Jew. The Torah makes it perfectly clear that the divine element was imbued by God into Adam, a man, not a Jew. The universal ethic of Torah is quite clear. (The Rabbis say that the reason God saw fit to make all of mankind descendants of one couple was to enable them to identify with each other, fostering harmony, and minimizing strife.)

Only a twisted mind could read Genesis and conclude otherwise. The prophets were sent to other nations, the most famous case being that of Jonah who went to Ninveh to save the Assyrians - gentiles who were some of Israel's worse oppressors.

But what about the Talmud? Were the Rabbis of the Talmud prejudiced against non-Jews? Let us look at some of their statements (B. Tal Sanhedrin, 59a):

Rabbi Meir was wont to say, "From where is it derived that even a gentile who studies Torah is as [honorable as] a high priest? Because the verse in Leviticus 18:5 states, 'And you shall keep my statutes and judgments which a man who shall do shall live by them.' It does not say Priests, Levites or Israelites, but 'a man' this teaches one that even a non-Jew who engrosses himself in the study of Torah is as [honorable as] the high Priest."

The High Priest held the most venerable position in Israel. The Talmud teaches that every Jew must accord a gentile who studies Torah the same sense of human dignity he would accord the High Priest. This statement is recorded in the Talmud three times (B. Tal. Sanhedrin 59a, B. Tal, B. Kama 38a, B. Tal. Avoda Zara 3a). Regarding this Talmudic text, Maimonides, in one of his letters, states the following (Letters, 106-107):

Accordingly, our sages declared "the pious of the nations of the world will inherit a portion in the hereafter" (Tosefta, San. 13), provided they apprehend what is possible to apprehend of the knowledge of the Creator and that they perfected their souls by means of ethical excellence. There is no doubt that one who perfects his soul in the pursuit of ethical conduct and Divine knowledge will gain immortality as the rabbis further point out. "Even a pagan [sic] who studies the Torah of Moses may be considered in the category of a high priest" (B. Tal. B Kam 38). The essence of the matter is that the whole object of the Torah is the perfection of the faculty of the soul to apprehend the Creator.

Rabbis of the Talmud have made themselves exceedingly clear with regard to dealings with gentiles. In Tractate Chullin 94a, the Talmud prohibits a Jew from giving a gift to a non-Jew under false pretexts. When one learns what these false pretexts are, one is amazed. If a Jew has a piece of meat which is not kosher he is not permitted to give it to a gentile, even an idolater, without informing him that it is not kosher. Even though it makes virtually no difference to the gentile whether or not the meat is kosher, the gentile might think that the Jew gave him something which is of greater value to the Jew than it actually is. He then would feel beholden to the Jew to a greater degree than the Jew's gift warrants. In practical terms this means that if a person repackaged an old gift he received and gave it to another person without informing him that this was an old gift he would be in violation of one of the most serious laws of the Torah, fooling another human being. It makes no difference whether that other human being is a Jew, a gentile, or an idolater. This law is mentioned in the Talmud (B. Tal. Chullin 94a) and in Maimonides more than once (Code, Laws Concerning the Human Personality 2:6; Laws of Sales 18:1,3) and is canonized in the Shulchan Aruch, the authoritative code of Jewish Law (Shulchan Aruch, 228:6). According to this same Shulchan Aruch, if one falsifies one's income tax return and cheats the government of even one penny, he is in violation of the commandment thou shalt not steal (369:6,8). How many billions of dollars would be saved for honest tax payers if this one Talmudic ethic were upheld? How many of us live up to this standard of ethic? Does this sound like an in-group ethic?

Hartung has no comprehension of the Talmudic and Maimonidean sources that he quotes. For example, he quotes from Maimonides' Book of Judges 5:9:4, "A Noahide [non-Jew] who kills a person, even if he kills an embryo in the mother's womb, is put to death. So too if he kills one suffering from a fatal disease...he is put to death. In none of these cases is an Israelite put to death." Hartung thinks that this piece of Maimonidean law confirms his supposition that an outgroup member is treated more harshly than an in-group member. To the uninitiated in Talmud this would seem correct. However, once one understands the full context of Maimonides' law one realizes how absurd Hartung's conclusion is. Torah is unique in that it does not believe in evangelism. A gentile need not convert in order to have a relationship with God. He must, however, keep seven basic societal laws, and can attain perfection through the study of Torah, prayer, proper ethical conduct, and the performance of commandments on a voluntary basis. One of the seven societal laws that the non-Jew is bound by is the prohibition against murder. A non-Jewish society which sets up a legal system according to Torah would in its statutes prescribe the death penalty for murder. The killing of an embryo after it reaches a certain stage of growth is considered murder. This is true for Jews as well as non-Jews. The legal systems of the Jew and non-Jew in so far as penalty is concerned, however, are not the same. The gentile system, having only seven laws is more strict in penalty with regard to those seven. The system of the seven laws cannot be broken on any level. And while it is true that in the instance of murder of an embryo the gentile system is more severe, in literally dozens of instances the Jew incurs the death penalty where the gentile does not. On the whole the Torah system is far more strict on the Jew than the non-Jew. This is what Hartung left out. Maimonides is listing the few cases where the gentile system is more severe. Hartung has committed the crime of distortion by taking something out of context and telling only half of the story.

It should be pointed out that while the death sentence is prescribed in many instances in the Torah, it is rarely carried out. There are many limitations placed upon the court's execution of the death penalty. The Torah system does not believe it should be a simple matter to take human life. The Torah frowns on the idea of one human judging another. Only God can truly judge man. The Torah society resorts to human intervention through the judicial process only when absolutely necessary.

In general, the Talmud contains two systems of law. One is referred to as Dinai Adam, human law, and the other is referred to as Dinai Shamaim, God's law. While it is true that a crime punishable by the human court is indicative of an evil deed, it is not true that an act is not evil because it is not punishable by the court. Indeed, there are many crimes that are far more egregious than those for which the Torah prescribes the death penalty and yet they are not subject to penalty by the human court (B. Tal. B. Metzia 59a, Maimonides, Code, 1:3:14, 5:12:7). When and where the human court intervenes is determined by many factors besides the degree of evil of a deed. This principle is known to every Talmudic scholar. One cannot determine the comparative evil of a deed by simply consulting the Torah penal system. The system of human intervention has its own orbit of operation, and one must be a genuine Talmudic scholar to understand its determinants. In short, the Talmud includes many systems of Torah Law. One must know which system to consult for which information. To determine the moral status of a deed one must consult the ethical system of the Talmud. This is something of which Hartung is completely ignorant. He thinks he can determine what the Torah considers more or less evil by simply consulting the penal code and comparing punishments. Torah, which has been the preoccupation of the greatest minds of the Jewish Nation throughout the centuries, is not that simple.

Torah always has the highest regard for human life. It is a custom among Jews on the night of Passover to pour out a bit of wine from the cup that is to be drunk at the Seder in order to demonstrate that although Jews were saved from slavery in Egypt, they cannot totally rejoice, since their oppressors died and human life was lost. (When the Egyptians were drowning, God told his court of angels that they may not sing praise since His handiwork is drowning in the sea (B. Tal. San. 39b). It is for this reason that Jews do not recite the full praise of Hallel from the Book of Psalms during most of the Passover holiday. Human life has always been sacred in the eyes of Torah. Unlike the evolutionists, the Torah does not consider man to be nothing more than a complex primate. He has a divine element. This divine element exists in all of mankind. According to Torah it is an evil of the highest order to take the life of any human being. Torah recognizes, however, that man can choose a life which is unworthy. He can become the lowest of all creatures, evil and corrupt. According to Torah not every life is worth living. In certain instances the human court must intervene in order to prevent harm to innocent people. The worthiness of a human being, however, does not depend on his being a Jew or a non-Jew. According to Torah, a given Jew's life may be worthless while a given non-Jew's life may be as worthy as the most virtuous High Priest.

The Torah, from its very inception, was not an in-group ethic. Many Egyptians went out of Egypt with the Israelites. Jews were enjoined by Moses to treat them as brethren (Exodus 22:20, 23:9).

They had to exert even greater caution when interacting with them than with their own people. It is a greater infraction of the Torah to slight the stranger than the born Jew since the stranger is more sensitive (B. Tal. B. Metzia 59b; according to the Talmud there are some 36 allusions in the Torah to the ethic of kindness to the stranger). This is what Moses taught.

Throughout the ages some of the greatest Torah personalities were not of Jewish origin. The prophet Obadiah, according to the Talmud was an Edomite convert, that is, he was a descendant of Esau. In every printed Torah the most revered position, right alongside the Torah itself, is given to the interpretation of Onkelos, which was written by a Roman proselyte. The teachers of Hillel were converts. The greatest of

Talmudic sages, Rabbi Akiva, was the son of a convert, as was Rabbi Meir.

Torah law has always been color blind. There is no difference whatsoever between black and white. According to Torah law a black person can be the most respected and revered individual on Earth. Our society has a long way to go before it reaches the high level of Torah morality. Let us not project our own shortcomings onto the system of Torah which has served as a model of inspiration throughout history.

I am not an authority on the culture of the Yanomamo, but I understand that an American anthropologist, Kenneth Good, married one of the tribe and was quite well accepted among them. If Hartung's critique of Judaism is any indication of his level of research, I think the Yanomamo might be due an apology as well. - Rabbi Israel Chait, Yeshiva B'Nei Torah, Far Rockaway, NY

Rotten Oranges in the Crate

I was mighty disappointed that Skeptic ran John Hartung's article evidently without much editorial examination. Being Jewish, I recognize a hatchet job on Judaism when I see it, and this is one. Readers should know that Noam Chomsky has been on the outs with the Jewish community for many years for his anti-Israel stance and would be inclined to use his erstwhile familiarity with Judaism to cause the religion the most damage possible. It was under this man's influence that Dr. Hartung claims most of the inspiration of his article. A bad start.

Like Chomsky and others, he lists an impressive bibliography. I suspect a dishonest purpose. By doing such a thing, he might be seeming to invite the reader to see for himself that everything he says is true. But really, who is going to read even a fraction of that bibliography? The longer the bibliography, the more the reader is put off from investigating it. And Hartung knows this. He is safe, because that sliver of a percentage of readers who will actually investigate his references and form a different conclusion, will probably not articulate their disagreement. Like a lot of others, Hartung wants the reader to believe that he has actually read all of those works from cover to cover and discovered that no one word effectually disputes his opinion.

Hartung wants us to believe that he discovered that "neighbor" is meant to include only fellow-Israelites, what he terms as members of the "in-group." His assertion is not new. In a commentary by the late British Chief Rabbi J. H. Hertz, in 1937, he says:

Though the Founder of Christianity quotes "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" as the old Biblical command of recognized central importance, many Christian theologians maintain that the Heb. word for "neighbour" (rea) in this verse refers only to the fellow-Israelite. Its morality therefore is only tribal. But the translation of the Heb. word rea as "fellow-Israelite" is incorrect. One need not be a Hebrew scholar to convince oneself of the fact that rea means neighbour of whatever race or creed. Thus in Exodus XI, 2- "Let them ask every man of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, etc." the Heb. word for neighbour cannot possibly mean "fellow-Israelite," but distinctly refers to the Egyptians. As in all the moral precepts of Scripture, the word neighbour in Lev. XIX, 18, is equivalent to "fellow-man," and it includes in its range every human being by virtue of his humanity.

During the Passover seder Jews are required to spill a little wine from their cup at the mention of each plague inflicted on the Egyptians so as to enjoy the wine that much less. Also, in Rabbinic lore, the story is told that when the Red Sea crashed together to drown the Egyptian army the angels started rejoicing and

God stopped them saying, "My creatures are perishing, and you are ready to sing?"

Or what about where it says in Proverbs "Rejoice not when your enemy falls?" Or where a Jew is commanded to help his enemy's beast of burden rise from the ground? Surely Dr. Hartung is not going to tell us that "enemy" here means "fellow-Israelite."

Dr. Hartung is guilty of sloppy scholarship and at odds with the professed scientific methods of Skeptic by starting out with an opinion and looking for evidence which could show his opinion to be false. This, I am sure, Dr. Hartung did not do. I will leave it to my Christian friends to deal with Hartung's treatment of that religion. As Bertrand Russell once wrote, when one sees some rotten oranges in a crate of oranges, he would be correct in suspecting there are a lot more rotten oranges. -William Winkelman

Throw The Baby Out - Draw New Bathwater: Hartung Responds

Since Rabbi Chait has emphasized the importance of thoroughly reading and studying the sacred scriptures, let me start off by saying that for the past eight years I have spent most mornings between 5 and 7 reading the Bible, the Talmud, and related material. Because I am not a believer, I have been able to understand these works more accurately than most people who have spent much more time with them. Nevertheless, when I make some startling argument, many people's first reaction is "I wonder what real experts think." Of course, I tried to document "Love Thy Neighbor" thoroughly, but the criticisms received, especially Rabbi Chait's, provide a forum to show that, contrary to being "contrived, deceitful and morally reprehensible," the points I have made follow from an informed and fair reading.

Rabbi Chait and Mr. Winkelman argue that the tolerant, pluralistic nature of Judaism is evident in the often repeated commandment to treat strangers kindly. It is important to realize that the several Hebrew words which are translated as "stranger" in the Bible and the Talmud, words which are also variously translated as "sojourner," "proselyte," "alien," "resident alien" (the latter being generally specified in the Talmud, and understood in the Bible), are never translated as "heathen," "idolater," "Gentile," "Arab," or "min" (i.e., Christian, Talmud only). That is because these two groups of people are radically different - the former were to be respected, and the latter were to be discriminated against, persecuted, subjugated, or murdered, depending on their geographical location and the period of history (pre-monarchy, monarchy, or post-exile to Babylon).

In the Bible, the most frequently used word for strangers and sojourners is "ger," which also means "guest." (Genesis 15:13, 23:4, Exodus 2:22, 12:19, 18:3, Leviticus 16:29, 17:8, Numbers 9:14, 15:14, Joshua 8:33, 20:9, etc.) In the Torah (first five books of the Bible), "stranger," "sojourner" and "sojourning stranger" most frequently refer to Israelites who were guests in a territory where they had or should have had full civil rights. In almost all such cases, that territory was the land of an Israelite tribe other than the tribe of an Israelite ger, or it was Egypt, where the Israelites were inordinately prosperous and powerful resident aliens before they were enslaved (Genesis 47:20-28). The admonition to respect Israelites who were strangers in Israel by virtue of being from a different tribe became critically important during the period between the massacre of the Canaanites and the establishment of the monarchy - a period during which the in-group was in danger of self-destructing because the captured wealth which formed the basis of cooperation had been depleted and an authority that could impose the rule of law was yet to be established.

For example, "a certain Levite" made the mistake of traveling through the land of the Benjaminites, another tribe of Israel, after retrieving a concubine who had run away. An old man gave him shelter, but things went badly (Judges 19:20-30):

"Rest easy," said the old man. "Let me take care of all your needs. Do not on any account spend

the night in the square." And he took him into his house. He mixed fodder for the donkeys; then they bathed their feet and ate and drank. While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the town, a depraved lot, had gathered about the house and were pounding on the door. They called to the aged owner of the house, "Bring out the man who has come into your house, so that we can be intimate with [anally rape] him." The owner of the house went out and said to them, "Please, my friends, do not perpetrate this outrage."

Look, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out to you. Have your pleasure of them, do what you like with them; but don't do that outrageous thing to this man." But the men would not listen to him, so the man [the stranger] seized his concubine and pushed her out to them. They raped her and abused her all night long until morning; and they let her go when dawn broke.

Toward morning the woman came back; and as it was growing light, she collapsed at the entrance of the man's house where her husband was. When her husband arose in the morning, he opened the doors of the house and went out to continue his journey; and there was the woman, his concubine, lying at the entrance of the house, with her hands on the threshold. "Get up," he said to her, "let us go." But there was no reply. So the man placed her on the donkey and set out for home. When he came home, he picked up a knife, and took hold of his concubine and cut her up limb by limb into twelve parts. He sent them throughout the territory of Israel.

The *ger* in this story sent his concubine's body parts across Israel to protest an offense that was committed by fellow Israelites. This incited a war against the Benjaminites. By way of revenge, the Levite and his Israelite allies killed all of the Benjaminites and left 600 of the men alive. Then, fearing that Israel would lose one of its tribes altogether, since the Benjaminites had no women with whom to reproduce, the Israelites killed all of the men, women and children of an Israelite town which had failed to help them defeat the Benjaminites, sparing only virgin maidens. That netted 400 virgins, who were given to the Benjaminites along with permission to steal one woman each from among the virgins of another community, at Shiloh (Judges 20-21). As is the case today, animosities and rivalries within the in-group were Israel's greatest threat - thus the emphasis on treating "strangers" kindly.

The Egyptian *gerim* put forth by Rabbi Chait and Mr. Winkelman were proselytes. Exodus 12:48 reads: "And when a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it." Circumcision was the sign of the covenant and served as a sufficient indicator of proselytes' loyalty at the time of the exodus. In contrast, the Talmud tells of a non-Jewish, non-proselyte Syrian who traveled to Jerusalem to partake of Passover meals until local Rabbis "investigated his pedigree, and discovered that he was a Syrian and killed him" (Pesachim 3b).

The passage of Deuteronomy cited by Rabbi Chait indicating Jewish generosity to "the gentile strangers in their midst" reads (14:21): "You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your towns, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner." And this rule derives from its earlier injunction (Exodus 23:31): "You shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs." Regarding the Rabbi's citation from Leviticus that "gentile" strangers "shall live with you" and be given financial aid, the verse reads (35-36): "And if your brother becomes poor, and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall maintain him; as a stranger and a sojourner he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or increase, but fear your God; that your brother may live beside you." Here "brother" means fellow Israelite of local origin, "stranger" is *ger*, and "sojourner" is *towshab*, which means dweller or

local inhabitant. Gentile is not implied.

Moses' treatment of "Jethro, a non-Jew" as evidence that "the Biblical ethic is completely universal" also needs some fleshing out. Jethro was a Midianite priest, one of Moses' fathers-in-law, the man who sent him up Mount Horeb to meet the god of the Midianites who then became the god of the Jews, and the man who advised him to set up the system of judges which saved Moses' people from annihilating each other. All that aside, when Moses received orders from his god to "vex" the Midianites because their women had "played the harlot" with Israelite men (this was an error on the part of the god of the Bible - the text of which clearly states that it was the Moabite women who consorted with Israelite men), Moses took this opportunity to make the Israelites his god's only chosen people by commanding his troops to murder all Midianite men, boys, and non-virgin women. This netted the soldiers 32,000 virgins who were shared around, except for 32 who were given "to Eleazar the priest" as an "offering for the Lord" - i.e., for human sacrifice (see Numbers 31, RSV). The King James translation specifies that these women were to be a "heave offering" (see Numbers 31:29 & 41) - which means that after dismemberment, various body parts were "heaved up" (thrown in the air) in celebration. (Human sacrifice of Canaanites and other non-Jews was common [see 1st Samuel 15:31-32], but sacrifice of Israelites by Israelites in order to appease or cajole their god was rare subsequent to rescision of the commandment to sacrifice all first born children [cf. Exodus 13:2; 22:29-30 and Leviticus 27:28-29 with Exodus 13:13 and 34:20] - a commandment for which the god of the Israelites eventually apologized [Ezekiel 20:26]. Nevertheless, ritual sacrifice of a virgin Israelite woman was well received and well rewarded [e.g., Judges 11:12 through 12:8]).

Regarding Rabbi Chait's reference to Rabbi Meir's opinion that "a non-Jew who engrosses himself in the study of Torah is as honorable as a high Priest," shows that "every Jew must accord a gentile who studies Torah the same sense of human dignity he would accord the High Priest," Rabbi Meir's statement in the Talmud is put forth as a minority argument (his alone) to suggest a modification of one of a set of majority opinions which include: "A heathen slave owned by a Jew may marry his daughter and his mother [the slave's own daughter and mother], for he has lost the status of a heathen, but has not yet attained that of a Jew," "If a heathen smites a Jew, he is worthy of death ... He who smites an Israelite on the jaw, is as though he had thus assaulted the Divine Presence," "A heathen who keeps a day of rest, deserves death," and "A heathen who studies the Torah deserves death." Rabbi Meir's opinion was offered to ameliorate that last ruling by clarifying that heathens should study the last seven of the 10 commandments (Rabbi Chait omitted the ending clause - "That refers to their own seven laws"), though certainly not the first three nor the remainder of the Torah (as in this footnote: "It is meritorious for them [heathens] to study these [the seven laws]; but not laws which do not pertain to them," see Sanhedrin 58b-59a).

Chullin 94a is also a weak argument. The story upon which Rabbi Chait's assertions are based is that one of the Sages, Samuel, "was once crossing on a ferry-boat and he said to his attendant, 'Reward the ferryman,'" which the attendant did by giving him a trefah (impure, not edible by a Jew) chicken (the ferryman was a gentile). Samuel became angry, but the reason for Samuel's anger is recorded as a matter of dispute between two Rabbis - one saying that Samuel's anger was over the attendant's representation that the chicken was ritually slaughtered and so a more genuine gift, and another arguing that Samuel was angry at his attendant for having brought a forbidden thing among his baggage. Even if the former interpretation is accepted, this does not warrant the edifice of apologia which has been built upon it.

Each of the above critics has accused me of using selective, as distinct from selected, quotations. That is, quotes which misrepresent rather than represent. But the best example of a selective quote appears in Rabbi Chait's penultimate paragraph. In addition to Maimonides' major effort of interpreting the Talmud and the Torah for the purpose of explaining what the law should be when Israel was re-established, he suggested his own codes of behavior for diaspora Jews. The quotation in question is such a ruling "in the interests of peace." Unfortunately, the only way for readers to judge whether a quote is selected or selective is to read

enough of the original to have a sense of its overall message. In that regard, I recommend reading at least the first six books of the Bible and relevant portions of the Talmud (the Tractate Sanhedrin is representative, being long enough to provide a substantive impression). Even just that much background reading enables the realization that Maimonides, in addition to making up rules for diaspora Jews, made a consistent effort to take the hard edge off of the Torah and the Talmud.

Mr. Winkelman's citation of Exodus 11:2 as evidence that the word neighbor included everyone "of whatever race or creed" requires context and a fuller understanding of the word *rea*. The context is Exodus 12:35-36: "The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians." That is, the Jews stole their "neighbors" silver and gold under the pretense that it was being borrowed. This is the only case in which *rea* translated as *neighbor* is used in reference to persons from whom the god of the Jews approved stealing. *Rea* derives from the verb *ra'ah* which means to tend a flock or to rule. In this case *rea* might be better translated as *other* or *another*, as is frequently done, as in rule over another or steal from *another* person. (Genesis 11:3 & 7, 15:10, 31:49, 43:33, Exodus 18:16, 21:18, 21:35, Judges 6:29, 10:18, Ruth 3:14, Esther 9:19, etc.)

Further clarification can be gleaned from the Talmud in this regard: "With respect to robbery - if one stole or robbed or seized a beautiful woman, or committed similar offenses, if these were perpetrated by one goy against another, the theft must not be kept, and likewise the theft of an Israelite by a goy, but that of a goy by an 'Israelite may be retained" (Sanhedrin 57a, see also Baba Kamma 37b-338a). This is put more succinctly in Sifre on Deuteronomy: "The Holy One, blessed be He, did not dispense love to the nations of the world as He did to Israel. You learn that this is so from the Sages' saying, 'that which was stolen from a non-Jew is permitted, while that which was stolen from a Jew is forbidden.'" Or, going to Maimonides' neighbor: "One may not procure the death of a heathen against whom we are not at war, or of similar people. It is, however, forbidden to save them from dying - for example, if any of them falls into the sea, one may not rescue him - for Scripture says, Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor (Lev. 19:16), and none of these is thy neighbor" (Torts. 5:11, italics not added).

Both Rabbi Chait and Mr. Winkelman have peppered their criticisms with ad hominem accusations. It is interesting to note that Rabbi Chait simultaneously believes that his religion prohibits "any sort of verbal abuse which includes any form of unkind speech to the stranger." It seems reasonable to conclude, under the circumstance, that even Rabbi Chait interprets "stranger" to mean sojourning Jew or resident alien (excluding a heathen like myself). That, or the Rabbi has engaged in hypocrisy or impiety, or, I think, all three. This aside, his most objectionable assertion is that the Talmud cannot be understood "without a personal teacher." When I began to study the Talmud it did take a few hours of reading before I began to cut through the disorganization, understand the nonsense that so often passes for argument, and grasp what its authors thought. Nevertheless, the most rewarding aspect of the Talmud is the degree to which it confirms a straightforward reading of the Torah, and one does not need a personal teacher to gain that confirmation.

As for Mr. Centner's objections, when fathers and uncles make disparaging jokes about women, do boys' minds get polluted with attitudes that cause them to behave unfairly? And when children grow up in a racist society, do they become adults who congratulate themselves for magnanimity when they extend common courtesy to individuals of another race, or worse? I suspect so, because I have seen such behavior in myself, and I like to think that I am not exceptional in this regard.

If informal influences can have such powerful effects, how strong is the effect of formal efforts to teach children that there is a god who extends special consideration to people who are members of His preferred faiths? I remember standing in front of a butcher shop in Philadelphia's Italian Market when news of the

1967 Middle East War came crackling over transistor radios. A surge of adrenaline and testosterone accompanied my knee-jerk presumption that this was the good guys against the bad, and I wanted to be an Israeli. I had not read the Bible, but I had read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and seen *Ben Hur*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

Meanwhile, of course, the Israelis were bombing and strafing the USS Liberty, killing and wounding American sailors, because they feared that the well-equipped spy ship might find out the truth about troop movements and so discern Israel's plan for expansion (see Paul Findley's *Deliberate Deceptions*, 1993, Lawrence Hill Books). Lyndon Johnson made a frantic cover-up, perhaps more so than necessary because the vast majority of Americans' knees had already jerked along with mine. The right of return was not to be "universally applied," as Centner would have it, and lebensraum was needed for one of god's chosen people. And we all get points for helping a god get his way.

Is there a connection between Centner's "mainstream Christians and Jews" who "believe the moral rules are to be universally applied," and belief in a god who gave his first followers permission to steal "great and goodly cities, which you did not build, and houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, and cisterns hewn out, which you did not hew, and vineyards and olive trees, which you did not plant" (Deuteronomy 6:10-11)? According to former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, George Ball, there is. America has footed Israel's bill to the tune of \$250 billion dollars - or a bit more than \$50,000 for every Jewish man, woman and child living in Israel today (*The Passionate Attachment*, 1992, Norton). Centner is right that "Religions ... evolve in parallel with a society's social, political and economic outlook." And, unfortunately, a society's social, political, and economic outlook is profoundly influenced by its religion.

But Centner's analogy between the Constitution of the United States and the Bible is wrong. When the Constitution is amended, the amendment becomes the law of the land, "valid, to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution" (Article 5, The U.S. Constitution). But when people hold beliefs which differ from those promoted in the Bible, the Bible is not thereby amended. The original text remains available to anyone who wishes to follow it and claim authority on those grounds - whether that be Moses, Joshua, Lyndon Johnson, Yitzhak Rabin, Yigal Amir, or Bill Clinton.

Centner is also wrong about the United States being a "Christian state." The first words of the first article of The Bill of Rights (which was an Amendment to the Constitution passed on December 15, 1791) are: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine, and Ben Franklin have been turning over in their graves ever since "An American Zionist brought him (Harry Truman) two million dollars in cash, in a suitcase, aboard his whistle-stop campaign train"... thus precipitating "the hasty invention of Israel"... which, in Gore Vidal's opinion, "has poisoned the political and intellectual life of the USA." I would add that creating an expressly religious state is expressly anti-American and has contributed to the corrosion of America's moral fibre.

As to Centner's delusion that all good things come from "the Christian West," as distinct from "Islamic nations, and nations with Confucian foundations," while bad things come from "officially atheist states," his word "balderdash" comes to mind. But back to the hypocrisy of revering the Bible while professing to be a humanitarian. Centner argues that "It doesn't matter one whit" what the Bible actually says as long as most of the people who claim it to be the documentary foundation of their religion think that it implores them to behave themselves.

Again, balderdash!