Judentum und moderne Weltanschauung

Von

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Introduction

The present paper aims at reconciling religious beliefs with current scientific thought. A synthesis of Jewish and European culture is rejected from both sides. From a Zionistic point of view and for national reasons, the preservation of tradition is required as there is a danger of merging the Jewish way of thinking with foreign elements. Longingly awaited, is the settling of Palestine by Jewish inhabitants so that a unique Jewish culture can be established. If we overlook the many theoretical and practical difficulties of the Zionistic program and we accept nationalism within Judaism, then we are still left with the remaining contradiction between Judaism and scientific teachings of modern times. If these teachings are correct then we are forced to accept their validity and adapt our religious views accordingly, unless we deny man's intellect the ability to make its own decisions in matters of faith. Jewish orthodoxy sacrifices its intellect because of its tradition without any examination and suborders intellectual thought to the authority of faith. Orthodoxy will reject any scientific claims as unjustifiable. A common understanding between orthodox belief and scientific findings is impossible.

Nature and function of religion

A religion does not need to be true in order to prevail, its suggestive force lies in the sentiment that awakens in the souls. The truth of its teachings is only found through criticism; research always starts with a doubt – it transforms convictions into problems and shakes the intensity of the religious belief. If a scientific belief turns out to be correct, it weakens the effect that religion has on a person. Imaginative dreaming of a child is eventually replaced by sober thoughts of an adult, the same way that mythological views of the Bible should be replaced by prudent theories of scientific research. It is therefore of importance to analyze if religion possesses an independent and permanent worth and what it is based on.

In order to understand what value religion has for mankind, clarity must be established on what objective science and culture pursue and what their relation is towards religion. It is rather obvious that religion and science meet – both propose structure and order of the world. First, it needs to be established where the line is

that distinguishes between religion and science. The seemingly easy differentiation which states that religion is the sphere of human belief while science is the realm of solid knowledge is not applicable. If the word “belief” is the acceptance without sufficient proof then all scientific hypothesis and assumptions, which are not proven, would have to be also belong to the sphere of religion. On the contrary, two forms of belief are to be differentiated. If a claim is unsure and there might be the possibility of a mistake, then we say: “I believe”. In that sense there is also “believing” in science. However, the words: “I believe in God” do not mean that it is possible that we are mistaken and God does not exist, they mean: although I cannot prove the existence of God, nevertheless, I am convinced of his presence. Therefore, it does not depend on a subjective or objective certainty in what realm a statement belongs, they are rather distinguished by their objectives.

The purpose that research has is to determine the truth. It identifies what is present in the world and tries to explain it. How do we establish reality? The answer that modern science gives is: through observance, experience and perception. Science has the responsibility to determine the objective content of subjective observance. Since the function of science is the recognition of reality, everything that exists belongs in its realm, without distinction of its objective worth. For research purposes is something small and insignificant as important as something big and beautiful. The central idea of science is therefore the establishment of reality without any regard towards its actual worth.

The observance of culture leads to the opposite findings. If the objects that are being presented through art are real or not or if they originated in the artist’s imagination is unimportant. We only expect them to be beautiful, i.e. to have an aesthetic value. The meaning of art is therefore the establishment of its worth without regard to reality. In between science and culture lies religion. It does not contend itself with a world of a beautiful images but instead wants to give a mirror to reality. The statements of religion, as well as of science, make claims to reality and validity. But whereas for science any matter of fact has the same value and dignity, religion on the other hand chooses from an eternal abundance of appearances and sticks to those which man finds worthwhile. In each religion God is a perfect being. With the establishment of timeless values like beauty and

morality, religion tries to solve questions which science does not even ask: the question of purpose and the meaning of everything real and the theological interpretation of the world.

To give the universe a sense and human life a purpose is the role of every religion. The answer, however, is not always the same one. Depending on how much the moral or aesthetic sense of a person is developed and the further his vision on nature, its majesty and greatness is directed to his endlessly rich inner world, will he find the purpose of reality in beauty and in goodness. This is how the division of religion comes naturally into aesthetics and moral. The religion in which morality has the uppermost value is Judaism. Of substantial interest is the human being who is supposed to strive to lead a moral life.

As mentioned before, the purpose of religion is to interpret reality which requires achievements of science. Therefore, these are always connected the scientific perceptions. In the first chapter of the Bible, in Genesis, as an example, we can find certain ideas about the position of the earth in the universe and its relation to the other celestial bodies. However, as a result of progressing scientific findings the knowledge that we have about the universe is changing and with it comes the necessity to adjust older scientific views, which were prevalent at the time of the formation of religion. Such a change is possible without causing a loss of value to religious teachings. This change is not only possible but necessary: a belief must to be able to adapt to the changes of time.

Although religion is dependent on science, it follows its own goal. Religion fills a person´s need for sense and purpose. The majority of believers do not occupy themselves with current questions of world view or subtle problems of metaphysics but rather are busy dealing with the problems that life brings. For them, religion is nothing more than a spiritual weapon for the hardships of human destiny and is supposed to give answers to the question of what the meaning of life is and the hidden purposes of all creations. Thus, the combination of science and religion leads to a comprehensive world view which gives answers to the questions of the heart and mind.

Origin of religion

The various forms or faiths which emerged over the millennia show a great diversity but despite all differences, they strive for the same goals. As mentioned earlier, faith satisfies man's longing for a purpose of his life. Its role is to establish the highest values, the beauty and the good. The root of faith can only be a feeling. What do we feel when we look at the night sky? Contemplation and respect. This is the deep and pure source of belief. When man stood for the first time in front of the majesty of nature and bowed down in front of it, this is when religion was created. In first, the Bible talks about the teachings of a holy God, whose will governs the universe. Morality is not the source of belief but an important factor for religious development. There are two different kinds of religions: the religion of nature and the religion of revelation. This means that the religious approach of pagan nations developed by the process of natural thinking, while the teachings of Moses and other prophets are revelations from a divine source. It is important to review the statements that the prophets themselves made as they do not speak in their own name but in the name of God. "God spoke to me", "God's hand touched me", "a voice inside called me", these are statements which introduce their preaching. With our knowledge of nature and its laws it seems as if the revelation was a spiritual, secretive and unexplainable process. From the mysterious depths of the soul suddenly appear thoughts, whose power overwhelm the prophet and he then passes on his teachings of truth.

The existence of God

The roots of religion, as well as art, lie in experience which means that their teachings cannot be provable. The beauty of a poem cannot be explained, one must feel it. The same way can value and validity of religious convictions only be understood by feeling them. However, the dogmas need to be reviewed and analyzed in order from them not contradict scientific thought. The existence of God cannot be proven, as faith cannot be achieved with the mind or a logical conclusion, but only through a feeling. Feelings, however, do not accept criticism as a proof. If the mind cannot force the belief in God, this shows us that the opposite point of view is also not provable, which prevents a conflict.

The possibility of the existence of God is given through the good and the beauty. However, the possibility but not the reality of the existence of God is proven hereby. The more one is dedicated and strong about beauty and goodness in the world, the more one will be convinced of the existence of God. On the other hand, the less a person is interested in the good and beauty of the world, the more unsure he will be about his faith. This depends on the personality of a person. Unfortunately, there are good and evil people, good and evil deeds on earth, besides the fact that evil is not always punished while goodness is not always rewarded. The shattering reality of human misery could be used as an argument against the existence of God. Having said this, there might be a recognition that even the deepest sorrow can be the source of blessing and an outstanding spiritual enrichment – a noble person can become an even better person through suffering; an evil person can become even worse.

Another question is: Is the holy God an impersonal force or a personal being? The first view is called pantheism the second one is the “personal” faith in God. Both forms of perceptions are based on the conviction that God’s spirit is in everything. God being the absolute good means that we perceive him as a holy personality. For the religion of goodness is the perception of God as a personality the only option. However, we need to be aware of the fact that these concepts are based on a human and imperfect idea of God. Based on these thoughts, God is a personality opposite of the world and separate from it and nevertheless, affect each point of the earth and be present everywhere at the same time. He is never ending in a finite world and should be identical with all reality. The realization of these contradictions and the understanding of the anthropomorphic character of these ideas brought about the fight against the personal belief in God. But as mentioned before, man has only a limited and imperfect picture of God and the world and is therefore unable to have an adequate knowledge of reality.

To the same conclusion comes the critical analyzation of pantheism. If everything real is God, then also man is part of God and is no independent being. However, religion is based on the distinction of man and God. An unresolvable difficulty is the existence of multiplicity. If everything real is one single being then the great diversity of individuals, who all feel independent, remains an eternal

riddle. Pantheism is an imperfect form of conception of an infinite divinity that remains for us humans – because of its infinity – an eternal secret. We can experience it with deep awe, but we will never be able to fully understand its true being. A feeling of intuition can emerge in us when looking at the beauty of the world and the transcendence of goodness. These creations can then serve as an indication of the creator himself.

Creation

The creation theory in Judaism suggests that the existence of the world has a temporal beginning. Its contrast is the claim of eternity of the universe. The question of how long the world exists, if its presence has a temporary or an eternal duration, is a sheer theoretical and historical one; religion has no interest to decide between one or the other. The longer or shorter existence of the world does not change anything about its worth. Religion, which claims the absolute validity and duration of its values, will always answer this question with the statement that the universe is a creation of divine will. The first chapter of the Bible states that the world was created, and God was its creator. This does not exclude that it was created an eternity ago. In what time period the universe was created and in what chronological order all beings were fashioned and if these beings went through changes – these questions can be left for science to resolve. Because the Bible explains the beginning of the world through God's words, every other approach towards the creation of the world and everything it contains was thought to be unreligious. This applies also to other theoretical teachings. Obviously, this opinion is an error. However, what is important is the conviction that everything came into being through God's action. If the good should reign absolutely and without limitation, then the forces of nature cannot have an existence independent from God but must emerge from within him.

The creation of the world has another problem: Through what natural forces and according to what laws did everything real came into existence? The religious questions would be the following: Did beauty and morality came into existence through the mechanical forces of the universe or is the world the work of a force, whose essence is beauty and moral perfection? Science and religion do not

contradict but even complement each other. This thought can be supported by the fact that nature is not a sovereign force but obeys the will of God; its laws are an expression of a constant divine being.

Free will

The term freedom has several meanings. It can mean the lack of coercion. Does the law causality apply to man? Are man's actions an expression of his disposition? Is a person, who committed a sin doomed to fall into darkness, or can he escape its domination? This is the religious problem of free will. The legitimacy of emotional and mental processes is a fundamental problem for psychology. It is questionable if it will ever be possible to fully understand and map out the various mechanics of psychological phenomenon that happen to man. Assuming that we have mastered these difficulties and the laws of emotions are known to us in all details, what relationship would there be between psychology and religion? Jewish faith claims the reign of good. However, can we speak of good when man acts out of necessity or is for the existence of morality the lack of a causal coercion, i.e. the free will a requirement? Morality is a certain quality of the will. Consequently, it seems that we are only able to act morally if the law of causality does not affect our soul. Otherwise, we would only do what we must do and not what we would like to.

At last instance do our actions depend on our will. If this intention resulted because of our being, i.e. if we wanted to do the action or if the action was random, is unimportant. Just as our will does not decide based on mood or randomness but on the necessity of our being then they are certain example of our disposition. We have to face the consequences of our actions and we will be punished for our wrongdoings. With what right does this happen if our actions are not random but necessary? Reward and punishment do not immediately restore law and order but are rather for educational purposes. This can only be the case if man is subject to the law of causality. If our will is absolutely sovereign, then it can escape manipulation. When there is an unmoral action because of coercing surrounding circumstances then the moral of a normal person does not need to be a bad one. However, we are only responsible for our own actions. Reward and punishment are an educational tool whose explanation is that with a good deed we will be rewarded

while an evil deed will be punished. Consequently, it seems that our will is removed from the coercion of the law of causality. However, a deeper look into the matter proves that our actions are always a connection of two factors: our will and the external circumstances which set it in motion. Whether there is a causal connection between the two or not, our will is necessary for the realization of an action.

The belief in our freedom from the rule of law of causality lies in the consciousness of our individual worth. Compared with the ideal of God´s personality, even the greatest human personality will appear to be imperfect. This feeling of our inadequacy is the requirement for moral development. This is why, religion demands the humble acceptance of human weakness. Religion, therefore, has no interest in man having a feeling of absolute independence from the world. On the contrary, a religious man is supposed to be aware of the fact that he needs God's help, that he is a tool of God's will and that all of his earnings (moral or material) are thanks to God. However, the blame for his offences is his own as he is imperfect and did not appreciate God's greatness. The religious approach of freedom is that man has the ability to form his character and conquer his evil inclinations. The true nature of his soul is good, and man can always return to his pure essence.

Immortality

Jewish view states that the soul is immortal. The conviction that the psyche survives the death of the body is common in various forms of immortality belief. Body and soul are opposites according to their nature and value; the body is worldly and transient, the soul is spiritual and energy. Immortality teaches us that the most valuable part of a man will not be destroyed with his death. Between science and the religious belief of immortality is no contradiction. Modern science has shown that spiritual life is bound to bodily processes and that the psyche is a world on its own. The reason for the development of the belief in immortality is man's insatiable and unbeatable desire for endless life. Trust in the world is identical with goodness and divinely rule. The belief of the immortality of the soul is a religious one. It is also a selfish wish to believe in immortality because we are interested in preserving the souls of our loved ones and with this belief love triumphs over death.

Man's position in the universe

Holy Scripture shares the view of antiquity that earth is the center of the universe around which all the other celestial bodies circle. The central position of the earth results its ideational meaning. The celestial bodies were created for the earth, the sun to light during the day, the moon at night. Man is the ruler of the world and that is why man is the ideational center of the world. Several thousands of years this perception was the standard theory until it was replaced with the teachings of Copernicus. This huge revolution which dethroned man as the center of the universe happened without a big fight within Judaism as the religious approach does not change. With Copernicus' teachings man became smaller, while his God became greater and more powerful. Man is a representative of morality, but moral emotions are only a part of his soul. Science perceives the human being to be the highest developed animal and even claims his animalistic origin but for religion he is an image of God. This seems to be a difference in thought and emotion, nevertheless, this conflict is solvable. From the Bible's perspective, man has a moral nature. It would make no sense to call the behavior of an animal good or bad; therefore, we have the right to claim that man is more than just an animal. Science overlooks the aspect of morality and human honor.

The origin of morality

Life of man is regulated by laws, morals and common decency. Laws and customs are national, every state has its own economic and political laws and customs. The demand for morality, however, is a human one with eternal laws and requires its unconditional acceptance. Morality calls for an ethical approach. Why do we perceive certain actions to be valuable and necessary? What is the origin of morality? Clearly, we often act subconsciously and purposefully. The laws of morality are obligatory and not just suggestions of wisdom. We have the feeling of being bound by it, which is more than the natural inclination to follow the rules of morality. Certain actions are egoistic or altruistic, but these actions are animalistic since also animals act selflessly. We would not, however, believe that animals have the consciousness to fulfill moral obligations to do something good. Based on these observations it can be stated that morality is something specific to humans. Man's

actions are moral when deeds are done for its own sake, only then we perceive them as good. Moral rules vary in different times and places and are dependent on living conditions. It is like an organ that regulates blind and passionate instincts and adapts to different situations. The morality of Judaism is the preservation and elevation of human life and the harmonic development of spiritual strength.

The development of morality

Already primitive cultures had moral codes that limit human arbitrariness. Even in prehistory, man has had some sort of conscious which limited actions that were purely governed by animalistic desires. It is possible to trace back moral insight to a primitive way of life. The Jewish nation has had a deep influence on the development of morality. The classical system of moral teachings is owed to Jewish prophets. Holy Scripture provides fundamentals of moral laws and justice. This closed system of moral teachings does not only apply to the people of Israel but has human and universal importance. As an example: the Babylonian law punished murder, but it did not protect slaves or foreigners. Even the most genius people of ancient times, the Greek, were not any greater with regard to morality. They did not know of a holy God who represented morality, primarily they adored violence and beauty of nature; their gods and cults had only little moral traits. Christianity, on the other hand, had a very different approach to God and morality. According to its teachings they did not view man's responsibility to conquer nature and rule over its forces but to save the soul from the threatening danger of sin. The individual does not have a right to follow his own interests; his worth lies in being a serving member of the entirety and his interests need to be sacrificed for his fellow man. The teachings of the church have a pessimistic basic tone, the feeling of human guilt and sinfulness tried to conquer man's egoism and animalistic instincts. The individual's responsibility is an absolute dedication towards the fellow man and the common interest. Messianic hopes announce that the good within man will conquer evil. In this future vision man is the ideal citizen of human society and the individual will be a unique and powerful personality.