

Reflections about Theology and Science

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Introduction

Writing about what I do and think is a pleasant and useful activity, I have been doing this since I was a student, at Warsaw Polytechnic Institute, first in diaries, on which my online book was based:

Ludwik Kowalski, "Diary of a Former Communist"

<http://csam.montclair.edu/~kowalski/life/intro.html>

then in over one hundred scientific and pedagogical publications. (see Wikipedia).

Writing is also an effective way of thinking. The purpose of this short book is to share my numerous theological essays. Hopefully, some people will find them interesting. I do not recall what prompted me to start thinking about God, and to record my reflections, after I retired, in 2004. Some of these items were posted on the Internet; others were sent to editors of various journals and newspapers. The order in which they appear below is coincidental rather than logical, and they may be read in any order. The idea of publishing another book occurred to me when I started placing scattered items into one folder, after the folder became too large. I apologize for some redundancies in the essays.

About this book

This book is a collection of informal reflections on theologically oriented topics. It is based on an article that the author, who is a retired scientist, published in *American Atheist*. In that article he wrote: "... The first step toward mutual respect between theists and atheists should be the recognition that most people on earth are surrounded by material structure and by spiritual superstructure. People investigating these aspects of our environment are scientists and theologians. Methods of validation of claims made by theologians are very different from the methods used by scientists.

God is not a material entity, and attempts to refute God's existence by performing scientific experiments are not appropriate. The same is true for attempts to refute scientific claims, such as the age of the earth, on the basis of disagreements with holy books. Theology is like mathematics, not science. Mathematicians start with axioms (initially accepted truths) and use logical derivation to justify consecutive claims, called theorems. Once proven, a theorem cannot be rejected, unless a logical error is found in the derivation. Science is very different. Here, claims are justified, in the final analysis, by experimental observations, not by pure logic. A scientific claim becomes valid after it is confirmed in reproducible experiments.

Furthermore, scientific validations are always tentative; scientists know that future experiments might result in rejection, or partial rejection, of what has already been accepted. Scientific truth is not claimed to be eternal." What should be done to reduce the intensity of dangerous conflicts between believers and nonbelievers? The author thinks that this can be accomplished by accepting the idea of NOMA (Non Overlapping Magisteria), introduced by a scientist S.J. Gould.

The author also thinks that disagreements about God's existence usually result from the fact that those who argue do not have the same definition of basic terms, such as "God" and "existence." These terms should be defined before debates. How can two people argue if one thinks that biblical descriptions of God are literally correct while another thinks that they are only metaphorically correct. Theological debates would be more productive if all participants accepted Spinoza's definition--"God is Nature."

The fifteen numbered essays, called "items," can be read in any order. Short extracts from the items appear below the Table of Contents. Item 6, significantly longer than other items, is subdivided into eight numbered notes. Each of these notes is a separate essay. Item 14 is not devoted to theology; it is about a very unusual controversy among nuclear scientists.

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Short extracts from 15 items listed above

Extract from 1: Conflicts between theists and atheists are widely known, as illustrated in this Item.

Extract from 2: *The idea that theism and science are two "non-overlapping magisteria" was formulated by Stephen Jay Gould. He wrote, "The net of science covers the empirical universe: what is it made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry (consider, for starters, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty)" (5). Informal cooperation between the two camps will always exist; many scientists are also theologians and many theologians are also scientists. They will certainly know which methodology of validation is appropriate in each of the two environments, material and spiritual.*

Extract from 3: This is a link to my similar 2014 article, published in a Polish online journal, "Philosophical Concepts of Genesis." This article can be considered a better version of the article published in American Atheist. In that article I wrote:

"To understand different aspects of reality humans construct conceptual models, called theories. Predictions of solar eclipses, for example, are possible because we understand the solar system, using Newton's theory of universal gravitation. Theories are abstract logical structures. Both scientists and theologians use logic. Abstract concepts used by scientists and engineers, such as energy and temperature, are not material objects. How do they differ from abstract concepts used by theologians, such as God and soul? One difference is that scientific theories are quantitative while theological theories are qualitative.

The most important difference, however, is in something else. It has to do with ways in which theories are validated. Scientific theories are accepted or rejected on the basis of empirical data; theological theories, on the other hand, are usually accepted or rejected on the basis of intuition, and on the basis of logical consistency with holy

books. The first approach is effective in investigations of material phenomena while the second is effective in investigations of spiritual phenomena. Will the NOMA philosophy help us to avoid real religious wars between theists and atheists? This will depend on the attitude of future generations toward that philosophy.

Extract from 4: *"I am rather disappointed by what we (about 25 people) are doing during Torah study meetings (at our Reform temple, each week). Here is what I wrote about this at the templ 's blog, in September 2014: ..."*

Extract from 5: *"I am reading "Basic Judaism," by Milton Steinberg. Why is this little book, mentioned by our Rabbi last week, very difficult for me to read? ..."*

Extract from 6: *This item consists of nine separate essays. Here is what I wrote in one of them: "Modern Reform Judaism is rooted in the nineteenth-century question-- "Is the Torah history or legend?" The German Rabbi Abraham Geiger asked: "How much longer can we continue this deceit ... presenting stories from the Bible as if they were actual historical happenings?" He was probably referring to the story of creation of the world in six days, the story of Jewish slaves in Egypt, etc. We respect such stories because they represent beliefs, and moral values, of our ancestors."*

Extract from 7: *In this item I wrote: " To illustrate the difference the author describes a defense attorney. "Her morals may tell her that murder is reprehensible and that murderers should be punished. But her ethics as a professional lawyer require her to defend the client to the best of her abilities, even when she knows that the client is guilty." Who decided that in a conflicting situation of that kind a lawyer should follow rules of internal (subjective) morality rather than prevailing rules of ethics? How was this decision justified?"*

Here is one answer, found on a different website: "Legal ethics must override personal morals for the greater good of upholding a justice system in which the accused are given a fair trial and the prosecution must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt." The same greater-good answer is probably given to soldiers, when they are ordered to annihilate enemies, to those who interrogate prisoners, to medical doctors, etc., etc. All rules of conduct are probably flexible."

Extract from 8: In this item I wrote: *"Most disagreements about God's existence result from the absence of a common definition of God. Suppose that X and Y have different definitions of God; X believes in his own God but not in the God of Y; and vice versa. Then they accuse each other of atheism. A feud about existence or nonexistence of God is impossible unless we agree on God's attributes. Debates between atheists and theists are usually frustrating because one side often refers to literal interpretations of a Biblical God while the other side has in mind metaphorical and allegorical interpretations."*

Extract from 9: Similarities of factors unifying various national groups should not mask undeniable differences. What makes Jews unique, in terms of their national identity? This question was asked by rabbi David B. Ruderman. This professor of Modern Jewish History (at the University of Pennsylvania) is the author of "Jewish Intellectual History: 16th to 20th Century"--a sequence of audio lectures on CD. In the first lecture Ruderman says that "Jewish history, although interwoven with the history of world civilization, is unique in one respect: its landlessness.

Extract from 10: *Several weeks ago I submitted a short note: "Heretical or not heretical." Why did they ignore me? Here is the content: "Browsing the Internet I found an interesting article (1). The author wrote that Spinoza 'denied almost every major tenet of traditional Jewish belief, including that God created and controls the world...'. How would Spinoza have defended himself against such an accusation? He would probably have turned to his own definition of God, as described in (2). The statement "God created the world," he would say, does not have to be rejected if God is identified with Nature (with the entire world). 'Nature is God' does imply, in my opinion, that the world was created by God*

Extract from 11: This item records another rejection of my article submitted to a journal.

Extract from 12: *The primary cause of everything, according to most theologians, is God. But what is the cause of God's existence? The term "everything" refers not only to material reality but also to spiritual reality (God, angels, paradise, etc.) Several weeks ago, a rabbi asked me: "who created material reality?" This question, I responded next day, is as unanswerable as the question: "who created spiritual reality?" The mathematical concept of infinity is very useful in dealing with that kind of scientific and theological questions.*

Extract from 13: *In this item I wrote " Reconstructionist Judaism has its roots in the perceptions and writings of Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan. The foundations of Reconstructionism lie in the Conservative movement, but the driving concern of Reconstructionism is the creation and articulation of a Judaism that could be sustained, that could survive the 20th century, and would continue to grow as 'the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people.' Not merely capturing the spirit of the times, Kaplan recognized the need to reconcile Judaism to modern science, the need to emphasize Jewish peoplehood, and the various ways in which Jewish tradition might be utilized or redirected in order to assure Jewish continuity."*

Extract from 14: ... Why was the CF controversy not "rapidly resolved," one way or another, in the last 25 years? In which way was Huizenga either right or wrong, in describing the "self-correcting" nature of the scientific process of discoveries? What can be learned from the still ongoing CF controversy? How to avoid similar controversies in the future? Such questions will hopefully be answered by sociologists. ... Philosophical and social aspects of that controversy are described in (5).

Extract from 15: *Pray as if everything depended on God. Act as if everything depended on you.*

Prayer invites God's Presence to suffuse our spirits, God's will to prevail in our lives.

Item 1) Collected statements about conflicts

Preoccupied with dangerous conflicts between theists and atheists I visited numerous Internet fora and collected many interesting comments, as one can see at:

http://csam.montclair.edu/~kowalski/theo_sci.html

Item 2) American Atheist

My first formal theological paper was published in a journal called American Atheist, in February 2013, at:

<http://pages.csam.montclair.edu/~kowalski/theo/atheist.html>

The content of the paper is in Section 1 of the above; other comments were added later. Here is what I wrote in that section:

In "Bridging Science and Religion: Why It Must Be Done," Robert John Russell says that the path toward a world without aggressive confrontations is in cooperation between theologians and scientists (2). I tend to disagree. Cooperation may or may not develop in the distant future; what should be done first is conceptual separation.

The first step toward mutual respect between theists and atheists should be the recognition that most people on earth are surrounded by material structure and by spiritual superstructure. People investigating these aspects of our environment are scientists and theologians. Methods of validation of claims made by theologians are very different from those used by scientists. God is not a material entity, and attempts to refute God's existence by performing scientific experiments are not appropriate. The same is true for attempts to refute scientific claims, such as the age of the earth, on the basis of disagreements with holy books. Theology is like mathematics, not science. Mathematicians start with axioms (initially accepted truths) and use logical derivation to justify consecutive claims, called theorems. Once proven, a theorem cannot be rejected, unless a logical error is found in the derivation. Science is very different. Here, claims are justified, in the final analysis, by experimental observations, not by pure logic. A scientific claim becomes valid after it is confirmed in reproducible experiments. Furthermore, scientific validations are always tentative; scientists know that future experiments might result in rejection, or partial rejection, of what has already been accepted. Scientific truth is not claimed to be eternal.

The methods of validation and refutation used by scientists and theologians are sufficiently different to justify separation rather than cooperation. Separation will allow theists and atheists to rethink and reformulate basic ideas and methodologies. Until this happens, scientists should not participate in debates about the spiritual environment, unless they happen to also be theologians. Likewise, theologians should not participate in debates about the material environment, unless they happen to also be scientists. Debates about ways to eliminate existing conflicts might last decades, if not centuries. They are likely to be more productive if conducted separately.

I am a scientist, not a theologian (3). As a university student in Poland from 1949 to 1957, I was an aggressive atheist and subsequently became a member of the communist party. I am now a theist, believing in God and attending a synagogue. Missing an earlier introduction to God, I am very different from other theists, and I describe my ideological evolution in my autobiography, which I've posted online (4). Writing it was a moral obligation, to my parents, and to millions of other victims of Stalinism. The victims are dead but I was definitely with them when I was writing. What can be a better confirmation that many of us live in two different environments, material and spiritual?

The idea that theism and science are two "non-overlapping magisteria" was formulated by Stephen Jay Gould. He wrote, "The net of science covers the empirical universe: what is it made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry (consider, for starters, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty)" (5). Informal cooperation between the two camps will always exist; many scientists are also theologians and many theologians are also scientists. They will certainly know which methodology of validation is appropriate in each of the two environments, material and spiritual.

As I stated earlier, holy books contain pronouncements about the physical world. Such pronouncements are rooted in the incorrect beliefs of our ancestors, who lived when faith and science were not yet separate intellectual disciplines. The story of creation, the world being created in six days, for example, is no longer taken literally, even by many theologians. A formal unambiguous recognition of this, for example, by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in the Vatican, would be a tremendously important step toward the elimination of futile debates. Another commenter online opined that "God means something more sophisticated than the old man in the sky, rewarding the good and punishing the bad like a cosmic Santa Claus. It is not what proselytizers tell us, or what tells terrorists to bomb buildings and trains." Yes, political abuse of religion

is also one of the important issues to be subsequently addressed.

Commenting on relations between science and mathematics, one person wrote that "science would be a shadow of itself if not for the math, and math wouldn't be anywhere as significant if not for the science." Will theology also become a partner of science, as Russell expects? It is too early to speculate about this. One fact is undeniable: many professional theologians and scientists usually respect each other. And they know which methodology of validation is applicable in each field.

Item 3) My FAG article

My second formal theological article (also in English) was published in October 2014, in a Polish Philosophical Journal, FAG. I have two links to that online article:

< <http://pages.csam.montclair.edu/~kowalski/confrontations.html> > and

< <http://www.nauka-a-religia.uz.zgora.pl/images/FAG/2014.t.11/art.02.pdf> >

The editor of FAG informed me that a rebuttal of my article will appear in the next issue of the journal, probably in December 2014.

Item 4) Torah studies

I am rather disappointed by what we (about 25 people) are doing during Torah study meetings (at our Reform temple, each week). Here is what I wrote about this at the temple 's blog, in September 2014:

"Quoting Abraham Geiger, in 'Judaism's Great Debates,' our Rabbi wrote: '... How much longer can we continue this deceit ... presenting stories from the Bible as if they were actual historical happenings? ... ' I was thinking about this quote during our Torah study, last year. Would Geiger criticize our attempts to interpret these stories by using modern psychological (Freudian) terms? I suspect he would say that scientific terminology should not be used to analyze legendary situations.

This of course is far from obvious. Should Biblical stories be discussed in the same way as real historical events or should they be analyzed in the same way as literary fiction? Debating true social and political situations we usually enrich our knowledge about what really happens in our world; analyzing fiction we usually try to understand why authors invent different characters and different situations. Today was our second Torah study meeting of the year. Suppose Geiger were with us. He would probably

notice that our approach was more 'historical' than 'fictional.' Would he find this consistent with Reform Judaism? "

Unfortunately, no one commented on what I wrote. Why is so much time spent on reading ancient legends and not on discussing contemporary theological topics?

Item 5) Basic Judaism

I am reading "Basic Judaism," by Milton Steinberg. Why is this little book, mentioned by our Rabbi last week, very difficult for me to read? First I thought that this has to do with some archaic phrases, such as "It hath been told thee" or "Seek ye Me, and live." Why wasn't the original Hebrew text translated into modern English? But this is probably only a small part of the answer.

Reading the Preface again I see that the book is intended "for three groups of people ... It is addressed in the first instance to believing Jews in the hope that, finding it a lucid and ordered formulation of their faith, they may be encouraged to live that faith the more consistently and forthrightly. It is directed equally to that large body of heretofore indifferent Jews who, whether in response to pressures from without or voids within, are grouping to establish rapport with the Jewish Tradition, standing at the synagogue's doors 'heart in, head out.' ... The book is designed last of all for those many non-Jews who happen to be curious about Judaism. ..."

Trying to fully satisfy these three kinds of readers is practically impossible, in my opinion. The author is aware of this. He writes: "... To these purposes this book is dedicated. That it shall realize all of them and to their completeness is more than I expect." It is my hope only that it will achieve some of them at least in part." I belong to the second group of his expected readers. Unfortunately, I am not satisfied, even partially. How can this be explained? The Preface ends with another outdated translation: "Not thine to finish the task, but neither art thou free to exempt thyself from it.

Item 6) Notes to keep (all references are below the last note)

Introduction

This item is mostly based on my formal publications (see items 2 and 3 above). What is God? According to our ancestors, who recorded their beliefs in the Bible, God is an all-powerful and all-knowing entity, living somewhere outside of our world, who created the world and controls what happens in it. My definition of God is slightly different; I will elaborate on this later in this essay. The bottom line is simple. I tend to think that God is not an entity outside nature, but nature itself, as postulated by a 17th century Jewish theologian, Baruch Spinoza, in Holland.

I was raised as an atheist; now I am a member of a Reform synagogue. That evolution, from one extreme to another, is described in [1]. One topic that has preoccupied me for the last four years [2] is the endless and dangerous conflicts about God, in human history. Well known examples are organized killing of clergy after the communist revolution in Russia, and slaughter of infidels and atheists by contemporary Muslim extremists. More recent waves of killings in Iraq, and in Sudan, are examples of religion-based conflicts among Muslims. How to prevent such massacres? This question led me to the theological concept of NOMA [Non-Overlapping MAgisteria], formulated by a scientist S. Gould, as illustrated in my article published in American Atheist [3].

My more recent reflections about NOMA will soon appear in a Polish philosophical online journal (4). In that article I quoted Albert Einstein, who wrote [5]: "my views are near those of Spinoza: admiration for the beauty of and belief in the logical simplicity of the order which we can grasp humbly and only imperfectly. ...". In another book [6] Einstein wrote: "I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals, or would directly sit in judgment on creatures of his own creation. ... My religiosity consists in a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little that we, with our weak and transitory understanding, can comprehend of reality. Morality is of the highest importance—but for us, not for God."

What motivates me to write this essay? What motivated me to write two recently published books, one dedicated to my mother [1] and another dedicated to my father [7]? What makes me weep when I think and talk about my parents, and about other

victims of Stalinism? What makes me feel guilty when I do something "wrong," or makes me satisfied when I do something "right"?

According to a traditional theologian all these questions have one answer--God is responsible for everything that happens. An atheist, on the other hand, would say that human motivations and feelings must be explained scientifically, because God does not exist. But how would Spinoza answer these personal questions? The purpose of this essay is to speculate about his answers, and about related theological topics. Keep in mind that I am a scientist--not a theologian. A speculation is a debate with one's self. And, as one rabbi wrote [8], "God loves a good debate." Writing helps me to organize my thinking.

Note 1: God or People

Who is the author of God's commandments? Some answer God; others say that they were written by human beings. Are these two approaches mutually exclusive? Spinoza would probably say the two answers are not exclusive, because God and people are parts of nature. Does it mean that everything people do is actually done by God? This question is often discussed in the context of mass murders, such as those orchestrated by Hitler, Stalin and Mao. The topic of reality of evil has been addressed by many theologians, for example, in the article "How Could God Have Allowed the Holocaust?" written by Rabbi Alan Lurie [9]. Humans are responsible, say theologians (and social scientists), because "Mother Nature" provided them with free will.

Why was the authorship of commandments attributed to God, by humans who wrote them? Because authors of commandments, who can be called ancient social scientists, knew that morality based on the fear of Biblical God would be more effective than morality imposed by human leaders. People do need an authority standing behind the "what-is-good-and-what-is-bad" rules. Are modern societies ready to replace the idea of traditional God, or gods, by the idea of God of Einstein and Spinoza?

An interesting article about Spinoza appeared in The New York Times, written by a professor of philosophy, Steven Nadler, [10]; it generated many interesting online comments. A reader, RMC, wrote: "I know many Christians and Jews who practice their religious traditions although their own beliefs are secular. They make no secret of

their sentiments. Spinoza was excommunicated during a time of religious orthodoxy and in that respect his experience is much like Galileo's. When the Catholic Church repudiated its treatment of Galileo, it was not merely saying that the earth revolves around the sun. It was saying that punishing the members of its congregation for thinking for themselves, including about church dogma, was parochial and destructive." With regard to independent thinking, several readers emphasized that traditional religious ceremonies, and respect for legends, do help to keep social groups together, even when people know that biblical legends do not represent historical truth.

Note 2) Reform Judaism

The famous aggressive atheist, Richard Dawkins wrote [11] that a "...miracle-free religion would not be recognized by practicing theists. What is the use of God who does no miracles and answers no prayers?" This is a good question. But one can believe in God without believing in miracles, as Spinoza did. The idea of external God was formulated by humans. It evolved, and is still evolving, naturally. Referring to human history Dawkins names three kinds of religions: primitive, polytheistic and monotheistic. Why doesn't he recognize existence of the fourth category a -"miracle-free" religion? Because he probably thinks that an ideology without miracles is not a religion.

Such an attitude is debatable. Attempts to modify traditional Jewish theology are described by Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz [8]. Most of them are still being debated. Spinoza, excommunicated as a heretic by his contemporaries, wrote: "By God's direction I mean the fixed and unchanging order of Nature ... so it is the same thing whether we say that all things happen according to Nature's laws or that they are regulated by God's decree and direction."

Modern Reform Judaism is rooted in the nineteenth-century question-- "Is the Torah history or legend?" The German Rabbi Abraham Geiger asked: "How much longer can we continue this deceit ... presenting stories from the Bible as if they were actual historical happenings?" He was probably referring to the story of creation of the world in six days, the story of Jewish slaves in Egypt, etc. We respect such stories because they represent beliefs, and moral values, of our ancestors.

Addressing Geiger, another German rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, asked, "Would you deny the Torah?" The answer was simple--"I do not deny the Torah. But ... all laws

and all prayers that are unworthy or irrelevant should be eliminated [from our books]." Why do some people think that only a small fraction of contemporary theologians would be willing to follow such advice? Because biblical stories are intertwined with recommended rules of morality. Personal God, according to most clergy, records all our transgressions, and punishes those who disobey; many Christians believe in hell and heaven, and many Jews believe in exclusion and inclusion in the "world to come."

Prayer may not bring water to parched fields, nor mend a broken bridge, nor rebuild a ruined city.

But prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, rebuild a broken will."

Note 3: Jewish religious affiliations

There are four major strains of Jewish affiliation in North America: Orthodox, belief in an almighty God and strict adherence to revealed commandments; Conservative, less strict in adherence; Reform, as described in Note 2 above; and Reconstructionism, less strict and less structured than Reform.

Along with Christianity and Islam, Judaism is generally considered a Mosaic religion. But Reconstructionists define Judaism not as religion, but as an evolving religious civilization [13]. Why is it so? The answer can be found in [14]. According to this reference, Reconstructionists believe that, "in light of advances in philosophy, science and history, it would be impossible for modern Jews to continue to adhere to many of Judaism's traditional theological claims. In agreement with Orthodox theology (articulated by prominent medieval Jewish thinkers including Maimonides), Kaplan affirmed that God is not anthropomorphic [human-like] in any way. ...

Kaplan's theology went beyond this to claim that God is not personal, in that God is not a conscious being nor can God in any way relate to or communicate with humanity. Furthermore, Kaplan's theology defines God as the sum of all natural processes that allow people to become self-fulfilled." That is a strong indication that he was influenced by Spinoza's definition of God. What is the essential difference between Reconstructivist and Reform theologies? My impression is that the first theology clearly

accepts the "God is nature" definition while the second accepts it figuratively.

Note 4: Between Secular and Sacred

Here is an interesting comment, found in the online magazine Tablet: "Moses ben Maimon, who lived in the Islamic world in 12th century C.E., is widely regarded as the most important thinker in Jewish history. Not only was he a master of Jewish law, writing a definitive Jewish legal code; he was also a master of the most up-to-date Aristotelian philosophy and theology. Guide for the Perplexed, written in Arabic, was his attempt to reconcile those two very different ways of thinking—Jewish and Greek, sacred and secular. In particular, Maimonides argued that much of the Bible had to be read metaphorically, not literally. The Guide was so radical that it was banned and burned by some Jewish communities, yet it remains to this day one of the greatest monuments of Jewish thought, and of the medieval mind."

I do have the pdf version of this book. But reading it is not easy. I would prefer to read a simplified version of it. Does such a version--written for high school and college students-- exist? If not then a knowledgeable educator should write it. Mishneh Torah, also written by Maimonides, is not a substitute for such a popular version of his Guide for the Perplexed. The two books are too different.

Note 5: Literally Versus Figuratively

My description of Jewish religious denominations, in Note 4 above, was not complete. I just became aware of this by reading the following Internet fragment: "... a spectrum of Jewish thought ranges from Independent to Humanist, Renewal, Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative, Modern Orthodox, Orthodox, and, ultimately, Chabad." I was not aware that 35% of American Jews, according to the October 1, 2013 Pew Report [15], identified themselves as Reform, making this the largest American denomination. According to the same report, three in ten Americans who identified themselves as Jewish did not affiliate with any denomination.

How do Jews answer the "do you believe in God" question? Their honest answers would not be different from answers given by other people; some would say "yes," others would say "no," and the rest would say "I am an agnostic," or something equivalent. But what is God? Different theists answer this question differently. Those who belong to Reform and Conservative denominations (see Notes 2 and 4 above) often say "figuratively speaking" and "metaphorically speaking." But what do these

phrases mean, in the context of theological debates? Browsing the Internet, I found a good answer, given recently by a Christian physicist, Aron Wall [16]. He wrote: "

"Most of the time, when people talk about taking theological ideas metaphorically, they mean that they don't really believe it. If someone says that they believe 'God is metaphor' ... that means that they don't really believe in God; they're actually atheists cloaking themselves in religious language. On the other hand, if there really is a Creator of infinite power and wisdom who designed the Universe, it makes sense that he would be beyond our capability to grasp. We can say what God is not, but we cannot understand him in any positive way except by making metaphors. Precisely because we Christians believe that God exists, we have to resort to metaphors in order to describe him. ... " This is not different from what Maimonides wrote in 12th century, and from what Title etc.

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I have read in numerous books written by contemporary rabbi.

Why is the term "metaphorical" not used in scientific or mathematical explanations, when topics are beyond students' capacity to grasp? According to one online reference, the words "metaphorical" and "figurative," are synonyms, while "figurative" is the opposite of "literal," which means "actual," or "real." No wonder that some atheists say that "metaphorical" translates into "not real." According to Reform Judaism, many stories found in Torah do not describe actual historical events, as mentioned in Section 2 above. Can one say that these stories are only "metaphorically correct"? The common advice is "do not take them literally."

The Torah was composed by people, thousands of years ago. It contains many legends, not only the story of the world's creation. Eventually another Holy Text, called the Talmud, was compiled. According to a short booklet I am reading [17], it "is a vast collection of studies and interpretations of Scripture, traditions and innovations, discussions and debates ... transmitted orally [starting in 450 C.E] from father to son, master to disciple, teacher to pupil. ... The Talmud is the veritable laboratory of Jewish law, lore and thought " This unique document now exists as a sequence of two books, called The Mishnah and the Gemara.

Spinoza's philosophical approach--God is nature--is called pantheism, as I learned from [18]. The author writes: "... Their differences aside, pantheists take a broad view of the universe, and attempt to synthesize logic and reason with awe and wonder. Their cathedral is not a building, but the universe itself. The universe, they say "creates us, preserves us, destroys us. It is deep and old beyond our ability to reach with our

senses. It is beautiful beyond our ability to describe in words. It is complex beyond our ability to fully grasp in science. ..." Yes, indeed; the universe (Spinoza's God) is infinitively complex, while human abilities are limited.

Note 6: Judaism, Christianity and Marxism

A chapter in the book I am reading [19], describes Judaism, Christianity, and Marxism. I was attracted to this topic because I am superficially familiar with each of these three utopian ideologies. One kind of humanism, according to the authors, "is based on the assumption that we do not need God or religion to make an ethical world." The section ends with the following question: "Which is more likely to create ethical individuals, secular humanism or religious humanism ...?" The author's opinion is clear; they wrote: "In no area of life is the total opposition of Marxism to Judaism so apparent as in morality. Marxism morally sanctions any act so long as that act was committed 'in the interests of the class struggle.' Consequently, the morality of any act is determined by whichever Marxist is in power. ... Judaism, on the other hand, gave the world ethical monotheism, the objective moral values without which tyranny is inevitable."

But many atheists are not Marxists. That is why quotations from Marx, Lenin and Solzhenitsyn, found in this chapter, do not help to answer its concluding question. Where can one find empirical data to support the conclusion that secular humanism is less effective than religious humanism? What percentage of atheists is moral? What percentage of religious people is moral? Suppose court data are examined. Would they show that a majority of condemned criminals were theists or would they show they were atheists?

Another chapter of the book addresses the topic of alienation from Judaism, affecting many young Jews. At first, the authors blame parents, who most often prefer their children to become lawyers, doctors or engineers, rather than scholars of Judaism. "The irony is that later in life, many of these parents are saddened by the product which they so diligently molded." Are such saddened parents really typical?

Then the authors write: "Most young Jews are given a Jewish equivalent to between a third and eight-grade level, and then are expected to compare Judaism favorably with high-school-level and later university-level secular humanism, Marxism, or other

philosophical systems". The authors claim that "a few hours per week for a few years," is not a sufficient amount of Jewish education. ... It is the responsibility of parents to teach their children Judaism with reason as well as with passion. We are living in a free society, in a huge marketplace of ideas." Which of these ideas should be debated first, both at home and in formal Jewish education classes? In my opinion it should be Spinoza's idea "God is nature." Why do I think so? Because I am not aware of any other idea that will help to destroy the barrier between theism and atheism. The idea of a personal God, keeping track of all human actions, is probably not as useful as it was in the past. Yes, I know that there is nothing specifically Jewish in the "God is nature" idea; all religious people should support efforts to eliminate dangerous ideological confrontations.

Note 7: Deed Over Creed

The first section of [19] is loaded with topics of great importance. Why am I not enjoying reading it? Is it because of my limitations or is it because the material is not properly organized for effective learning? It begins with a simple question: "Does God exist?" The authors state that this question should be "confined to theologians and philosophers." I tend to disagree. Responding to this question they write that obeying God's commandments is more important than believing in God, because "Judaism emphasizes deed over creed." Why does "emphasizing deed" make the "does-God-exist" question less important? Am I wrong in thinking that those who believe in heaven and paradise are more likely to obey God's commandments than other people?

In the next paragraph the authors write: "Atheists will discover that anthropomorphic [human-like] conceptions of God are utterly foreign to Judaism. When Moses confronted God, he asked Him His name. 'I am what I am,' God replied. The Jew cannot know what God is, only that God is and what God wants." This seems to contain a contradiction. Those who believe that God spoke to Moses accept (not utterly reject) the idea of human-like God, who replies, speaks and wants.

And here is another case in which grammatically arranged words failed to give me the satisfaction of understanding. Why should doubts about God's existence be an obstacle to being a good Jew? The answer is: "If we knew God existed and would punish us for evil acts, then good acts would be much less freely chosen. An element of unknowability about God is necessary so as to allow us to choose good. In order to choose good, we must feel free to do bad, and we would not feel this way if we had

definite knowledge that God was present and recording our every action." Once again I disagree; I think that a person believing in a personal God is more likely to follow his commandments than a nonbeliever.

At the end of the section I see the following statement: "Atheism, then, is rationally no more (and apparently a good deal less) convincing an answer to the mysteries of human existence and the universe than belief in God." I think that the authors did not properly validate this claim. Scientists, both theists and atheists, have successfully studied many mysteries of the universe, and of human existence. Why is the role of science not even mentioned in the context of rational analysis of such mysteries?

Note 8: Evolving Reform Judaism

A brief history of Reform Judaism is presented in [20]. Spinoza is not mentioned. But the following observation is relevant to what I wrote in Note 3 above. "We hold that Judaism presents the highest concept of the God-idea as taught in our holy Scriptures." It was reaffirmed in 1937 in the Columbus Platform: "The heart of Judaism and its chief contribution to religion is the doctrine of the One, living God, who rules the world through law and love." One can say that "Mother Nature" is the source of God's "Law" while "Father Nature" is the source of God's "Love." Spinoza's idea that Nature = "One God" is preserved when Law and Love are seen as two aspects of reality, material and spiritual.

And here is another important quote, from the same reference: "The 'Oral Law' is not seen as divinely given at Sinai, but rather as a reflection of Judaism's historic development and encounter with God in each succeeding generation. In this, Reform... [views] God working through human agents. Reform believes that each generation has produced capable and religiously inspired teachers (this means that Reform rejects the often expressed view that assigns greater holiness to those who lived in the past). Some individuals of our generation may equal or exceed those of the past. ..." Current attempts to modify this theological doctrine are described in [21]. Here is a quote from this reference:

"The classical approach of Reform Judaism towards halakha [Jewish Law] was based on the views of Rabbi Samuel Holdheim (1806–1860), leader of Reform Judaism in

Germany, and other reformers. Holdheim believed that Reform Judaism should be based solely upon monotheism and morality. Almost everything connected with Jewish ritual law and custom was of the ancient past, and thus no longer appropriate for Jews to follow in the modern era. This approach was the dominant form of Reform Judaism from its creation until the 1940s. Since the 1940s, the American Reform movement has continued to change, sometimes evolving in what appears to be a traditional direction. Many Reform congregations use more Hebrew in their religious services and are incorporating aspects of laws and customs, in a selective fashion, into their lives. This is a departure from the classical Reform position in favor of more traditional Judaism.

...

Currently, some Reform rabbis promote following elements of halakha, and have developed the concept of Progressive Halakhah. For instance, the American Rabbi Walter Jacob, the Israeli Rabbi Moshe Zemer and the British Liberal Rabbi John D. Rayner believe in many parts of traditional Jewish theology, but take present developments and valuations of ethics and law into consideration. Others actively discourage the adoption of more traditional practices or beliefs, because they believe that this is not in the ethos of the Reform movement. Both encouraging or discouraging practices stipulated by halakha are considered acceptable positions within Reform."

The Progressive Halakhah has recently been criticized in [22]. According to this article, it "has an impact on how we behave in religious communities. The sociologist Rodney Stark has popularized the thesis that religious groups need a strict theology in order to make serious demands on their adherents and that these demands, in turn, make a religion more compelling. Since a liberal theology leads to an emphasis on the autonomy of the individual, personal choice is inevitably promoted at the expense of the authority of God. In the absence of a strong theological basis for making religious demands, the members lose interest and wander off. This is what has happened in American Reform Judaism and in other non-Orthodox movements as well. ... Many Reform synagogues have large numbers on the books but few active participants." This is not a unique Jewish phenomenon, as far as I know. One way to increase participation in collective activities in places of worship is to make these activities intellectually challenging, for example, by organizing theological debates, based on the content of slowly-and-clearly-read prayers.

* * * *

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* * *

Item 7) Morality versus ethics

According to the author of a note

http://www.diffen.com/difference/Ethics_vs_Morals ,

there are two kinds of rules related to "right" and "wrong" conduct. They are called Ethics and Morals. The first "is provided to an individual by an external source, e.g. their profession or religion." The second set of rules, by contrast, is internal, rather than external. "Morals refer to an individual's own principles regarding right and wrong." I was not aware of this linguistic distinction.

To illustrate the difference the author describes a defense attorney. "Her morals may tell her that murder is reprehensible and that murderers should be punished. But her ethics as a professional lawyer require her to defend the client to the best of her abilities, even when she knows that the client is guilty." Who decided that in a conflicting situation of that kind a lawyer should follow rules of internal (subjective) morality rather than prevailing rules of ethics? How was this decision justified?

Here is one answer, found on a different website: "Legal ethics must override personal morals for the greater good of upholding a justice system in which the accused are given a fair trial and the prosecution must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt." The same greater-good answer is probably given to soldiers, when they are ordered to annihilate enemies, to those who interrogate prisoners, to medical doctors, etc., etc. All rules of conduct are probably flexible.

P.S. Browsing the Internet I found many arbitrary descriptions of differences between the words morality and ethics. This is disappointing. For the time being I will accept the first description--morals are internal, ethics are external. It is useful in the context the above mentioned situations.

Item 8) Atheists or not atheists

About two months ago I discovered an interesting blog, called "Judaism and Science:"

<http://www.judaismandscience.com>

Here is my contribution on that blog: *"A short description of Spinoza's God-is-Nature theology was placed on an atheistic forum in Russia, several days ago. Responding to that description, one person wrote (in Russian): 'Your position—God is a spiritual entity invented by humans—is atheistic. ...'*

And here is my reply: 'Thank you for an interesting comment. I suspect that Judaism is not the only theology in which there are several interpretations of God, ranging from traditional to modern. Some orthodox Jews probably also think that Reform and Conservative Jews are atheists. They believe that Bible was written by God, rather than by ancient sages. ...'

Most disagreements about God's existence result from the absence of a common definition of God. Suppose that X and Y have different definitions of God; X believes in his own God but not in the God of Y; and vice versa. Then they accuse each other of atheism. A feud about existence or nonexistence of God is impossible unless we agree on God's attributes. Debates between atheists and theists are usually frustrating because one side often refers to literal interpretations of Biblical God while another side has in mind metaphorical and allegorical interpretations.

Item 9) What does it mean to be an American Jew?

Google helped me to find a 2001 book, with the very attractive title: "Contemporary Debates in American Reform Judaism: Conflicting Visions." It is a collection of articles edited by Dana Evan Kaplan, Professor of Judaic and Religious Studies in the Department of History and the director of a program in Jewish Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Contrary to my expectations, this book is mostly about sociology, not about theology. But the question--what does it mean to be a Jew--is worth addressing.

A similar question can be asked about Japanese-Americans, Greek-Americans, and other national groups. Members of these groups are held together by countries of origin of their ancestors, language, religions, songs, etc. They are all American

citizens, or are in the process of becoming such citizens. Some of them have relatives in Japan, Greece, Italy, Poland, Russia, France, Israel, etc.

But situations are not simple. Some people have lost their national identity and are simply American, without a specific identifier. They may belong to social groups united by other factors, such as love of music, political affiliations, science, sexual orientations, etc. Some Korean-Americans are Christians, others may be Buddhists or atheists. Furthermore, what were once unifying factors may no longer apply today.

Similarities of factors unifying various national groups should not mask undeniable differences. What makes Jews unique, in terms of their national identity? This question was asked by Rabbi David B. Ruderman. This professor of Modern Jewish History (at the University of Pennsylvania) is the author of "Jewish Intellectual History: 16th to 20th Century"--a sequence of audio lectures on CD. In the first lecture Ruderman says that "Jewish history, although interwoven with the history of world civilization, is unique in one respect: its landlessness.

This uncommon aspect begins in 586 B.C.E. with the Babylonian exile. In 70 C.E., it becomes more uncommon with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome. ... Without a common government, language, or land, how do Jews have history? Is there really a communality between the United Monarchy of Israel in its biblical setting and the contemporary United Jewish Communities of the United States of America?"

Religion is certainly the most important unifier, for those who believe in the personal God of our ancestors. But is it also a unifier for those who define God metaphorically, and for those whose God is Nature?

This question has already been asked in a slightly different context. Can people behave morally without believing in God's punishments and rewards? I think they can. Addressing open-minded scientists and theologians, Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth in the United Kingdom, wrote: "Science fulfils three functions that I see as central to the Abrahamic faith. It diminishes human ignorance. It increases human power. And it exemplifies the fact that we are in God's image. God wants us to know and understand. He wants us to exercise responsible freedom. And he wants us to use the intellectual gifts he gave us. These are not reasons why scientists should become religious. They are reasons why religious people should respect scientists."

Item 10) A note I submitted to a journal--it was not accepted.

Dear Editor, In a recent issue of Reform Judaism (1), Barry L. Schwartz wrote about Spinoza. Please consider publishing my 320 word article (see the attached file and references within) in response. My main point is that Spinoza's definition of God, as described in (2), is not in conflict with traditional Jewish belief that the "world was created by God." This is my personal approach. But I am a scientist, not a theologian; I want to know what other people think about Spinoza's definition of God. This topic, like other topics mentioned in (4), is worth debating. At the beginning Rabbi Schwartz referred to a large number of Jews without Judaism. I was one of them, as described in (3). This reference was added to illustrate that evolution from one extreme to another is possible. Spinoza's definition of God seems to be consistent with such an evolution.

And here is the content of my note, from the attached file:

Several weeks ago I submitted a short note: "Heretical or not heretical." Why did they ignore me? Here is the content: "Browsing the Internet I found an interesting article (1). The author wrote that Spinoza "denied almost every major tenet of traditional Jewish belief, including that God created and controls the world..." How would Spinoza have defended himself against such an accusation? He would probably have turned to his own definition of God, as described in (2). The statement "God created the world," he would say, does not have to be rejected if God is identified with Nature (with the entire world). "Nature is God" does imply, in my opinion, that the world was created by God.

But I am a scientist, not a theologian. Our world--its material and spiritual components-- evolved progressively over an infinitely long time. It was not created by an external entity (traditional God), during a well-defined period, such as six days, or six billion years. Laws of Nature, which Spinoza identified with God, control evolution of the world. Do you agree with me that such a scientific position should be acceptable to a significant portion of today's scientists and theologians? If not, then why not?

At the beginning of (1) Rabbi Schwartz referred to a large number of Jews without Judaism. I was one of them; I was an aggressively atheistic student in Communist Poland, as described in (3). And now I am a "Jew with Judaism." Such an evolution, from one extreme to another, is conceptually easier if God is identified with Nature. This topic, like other topics mentioned in (4), is worth debating. Debates are essential components of Judaism.

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Item 11) Another rejection.

A more recent note, on the same general topic, was sent to the editor four weeks ago, via traditional mail, rather than by email. But it was not published. Why didn't they reply to me?

Item 12) What does it mean to explain an event?

*The link below will display my short essay on cause-and-effect relations:
<http://pages.csam.montclair.edu/~kowalski/causality/causes.html>*

The primary cause of everything, according to most theologians, is God. But what is the cause of God's existence? The term "everything" refers not only to material reality but also to spiritual reality (God, angels, paradise, etc.) Several weeks ago, a rabbi asked me: "who created material reality?" This question, I responded next day, is as unanswerable as the question: "who created spiritual reality?" The mathematical concept of infinity is very useful in dealing with that kind of scientific and theological questions.

Item 13) Reconstructionist Judaism

Below is a interesting description of Reconstructionist Judaism, found at:

<http://www.keddem.org/foot/99-04.html>

"We are often challenged to explain our movement, to respond to the preconceived notions of those fellow Jews who are curious: what are we up to? What does it mean to be Reconstructionist, and how is it different from other approaches to Judaism?"

Reconstructionist Judaism has its roots in the perceptions and writings of Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan. The foundations of Reconstructionism lie in the Conservative movement, but the driving concern of Reconstructionism is the creation and articulation of a Judaism that could be sustained, that could survive the 20th century, and would continue to grow as 'the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people.' Not merely capturing the spirit of the times, Kaplan recognized the need to reconcile Judaism to

modern science, the need to emphasize Jewish peoplehood, and the various ways in which Jewish tradition might be utilized or redirected in order to assure Jewish continuity.

As Reconstructionists, we at Keddem seek to study our tradition and incorporate the best of the past while not slavishly clinging to concepts and practices which make no sense to who we are and what we need to create a meaningful existence. 'The Jewish religion exists to serve the Jewish people, and not the Jewish people to serve the Jewish religion.'

We also acknowledge that Judaism has always changed with the people as they lived. Never a monolith, it is clear from the study of our history that many forms of Judaic practice existed concurrently, although geography and communications were limited. In our own time, the virtually limitless communications capability we enjoy should enable a renaissance of study and exchange of ideas.

What are some Reconstructionist ideas? Most radical, to some, is the Reconstructionist concept of God. Unlike many religions, Judaism has never demanded a rigid or proscribed faith in the Deity as a condition for belonging. Like most liberal Jews, Reconstructionists differ from the traditionalists who maintain that the Torah is the literal word of God, given to Moses on Sinai, rather believing it to be a document written by human beings. Beyond that, Reconstructionism acknowledges that as individuals we all differ somewhat in our concepts of God and our feelings about the relationship of God and the world. Neither agnostics nor atheists are excluded from our community. While many of our prayers praise attributes of God, it has long been acknowledged that we are reflecting our own idealized attributes in these prayers, since it is impossible to understand God.

Reconstructionist thought also varies from that of other liberal movements around concepts of the 'Chosen People' and the personal relationship of God and the Jews. Much of the traditional liturgy appears to appeal to a personal God capable of 'granting petitions to the Chosen People.' For one who believes that all people are capable of 'emulating God' through ethical behavior, this concept is both chutzpah and non-inclusive. While we maintain our own uniqueness, we reject the idea that the validity of others' pathways to God and ethical behavior should be denied. Such denial leads to a form of elitism that is divisive and ultimately detracts from our humanity. The Reconstructionist liturgy reflects that rejection through appropriate alterations.

Reconstructionism is also sensitive to the idea that men and women are equal before

God, and rejects patriarchal characterizations of God and prayer language that excludes both half the human population and God's own 'female' aspects.

Now, as always, it is well to reflect on one's own freedom to choose a spiritual way and to preserve the rights of others to so choose. Reconstructionists acknowledge diversity of thought, belief, and action. Some may struggle with different ethical dilemmas and others with the minutiae of the details of keeping kosher. But while we may differ in our individual practice of Judaism, we are always respectful of the paths of others. We do not condemn people for being more or less observant, and we discuss our ideas in an open forum."

How does Reconstructivist Judaism differ from Reform Judaism, with which I am affiliated? Here is a link to another description of Reconstructionism:

<http://judaism.about.com/od/reconstructionistjudaism/a/reconstruct.htm>

Item 14) An ongoing controversy among scientists

Many people think that controversies about beliefs exist only among theologians, and among uneducated people. Controversies between highly qualified scientists, they think, are rapidly resolved by using scientific methodology of validations of claims. Here is a typical statement about scientific controversies, made by a well known nuclear scientist, John Huizenga:

"... Scientists are real people and errors and mistakes do occur in science. These are usually detected either in early discussions of one's research with colleagues or in the peer review process. If mistakes escape notice prior to publication, the published work will come under close scrutiny by other scientists, especially if it disagrees with an established body of data. The greater the implication of a result, the sooner it will be reexamined. Scientific results, if valid, must be reproducible. When errors are discovered, acknowledged and corrected, the scientific process moves quickly back on track, usually without either notice or comment in the public press. The scientific process is self-corrective. This unique attribute sets science apart from most other activities. The scientific process may on some occasions move slowly, sometimes even along a circuitous path. The significant characteristic of the scientific method, however, is that in the end it can be relied upon to sort out the valid experimental results from background noise and error. ..."

This was written (1) four years after the beginning of the so-called "Cold Fusion" (CF) controversy, in 1989. In that year a spectacular claim was made by two highly qualified electrochemists, Martin Fleischmann and Stanley Pons. They publicly announced the discovery of something that was widely believed to be impossible, a chemical process triggering a nuclear process. Short biographies of these two scientists can be found in (2).

I am a nuclear physicist and I followed this controversy with great interest, as illustrated at my website (3). At first I was very excited by potential benefits of CF. Then I became a skeptic, like so many of my contemporaries. But two decades later I met nuclear scientists whose published experimental data seemed to confirm the initial claim. I even collaborated with some of them. I am not aware of any evidence of dishonesty or fraud, among these internationally recognized experts. Unfortunately, I was not able to confirm the reality of CF processes that we investigated. But I still think that something new and important has been discovered, but not yet understood.

Why was the CF controversy not "rapidly resolved," one way or another, in the last 25 years? In which way was Huizenga either right or wrong, in describing the "self-correcting" nature of the scientific process of discoveries? What can be learned from the still ongoing CF feud? How to avoid similar unpleasant controversies in the future? Such questions will hopefully be answered by sociologists. Some interesting comments about the CF feud were made in (4). Philosophical and social aspects of that controversy are described in (5). This was my oral presentation at a conference in Canada. After the conference the article was submitted to a journal. I do not know why the editor did not accept it. Rejections of CF-related submissions are quite common; this kind of censorship interferes with the self-correctiveness of the scientific process.

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Item 15) "Bless you," she said

Hearing a sneeze recently, a four-year old responded, "bless you." Where did this come from? Her mother said she never told the her about God. This prompted me to do some Google searching. One link I found [12] displayed some very interesting suggestions. But they refer to situations in which parents believe in a traditional God, and in which they want to transfer that belief to their children. But suppose parents believe that God is the entire universe, as Spinoza did. In that case they are in a more difficult situation. Can they say, "God loves you" to a child? Yes, they can. But that would contradict their belief that God is not a human-like creature, with heart, brain, etc.

Reflections of this kind are useful; they make us aware of difficulties encountered when the definition of God changes suddenly, from traditional to Spinoza-like. Traditional ways of introducing children to God did not appear at once, they evolved slowly, together with languages, from one millennium to another. Most people belong to one of three categories, as far as their attitudes toward God are concerned; they are theists (believers), atheists (non-believers) or agnostics (undecided). And what about people like Spinoza and Einstein, who believe that Nature is God? These people are not numerous; I think that they belong to the first category. Dawkins, on the other hand, would probably disagree, saying that nature is not God, because nature does not perform miracles.

Many theological contradictions would disappear if Spinoza's definition of God were universally accepted. But those who accept his definition will encounter many new difficulties. Slow transitions from one definition of God to another would not be easy; traditional almighty and all-knowing God, in whose image we are said to be created, is intuitively more acceptable than Spinoza's God. This became obvious to me recently, when I was reading the following prayer: "We acknowledge with thanks that you are Adonai, our God and the God of our ancestors forever. You are the Rock of our lives, and the Shield of our salvation in every generation. Let us thank You and praise You--for our lives which are in Your hand, for our souls which are in Your care, for your miracles that we experience every day and for your wondrous deeds and favors at every time of day, morning and noon. O Good One, whose mercies never end, O Compassionate One whose kindness never fails, we forever put our hope in You."

We recite such prayers collectively, during weekly services in our reform synagogue. It

is clear that we are not addressing Spinoza's God; we are addressing the personal almighty God of our ancestors. It would be very difficult to modify this prayer, for those who believe in Spinoza's God. Can this be accomplished via some kind of metaphorical terminology? Most of us know that words "Shield" and "Rock", in this context," are used as metaphors. But terms: "Your hand," "our souls," "miracles," "mercy," "Compassionate One," and "kindness" suggest literal interpretations. How to avoid this kind of inconsistency?

Suppose God is defined as two aspects of one entity. The first would be named "Mother Nature," the second would be named "Father Nature." In fact, the term "Mother Nature" is often used as a symbol of material reality (studied by scientists). The term "Father Nature," on the other hand," would be defined as a symbol of spiritual reality (studied by theologians). The term "symbol" would be emphasized; it would help us to avoid debatable adjectives, such as omnipotent and omniscient. All prayers would be directed to "Our Father our King," without adding debatable adjectives."

I suspect that Spinoza would object to the idea of two kinds of reality; his God-is-Nature definition probably referred to both material and spiritual aspects of human existence. My emphasis on two realities is justified in (4)--methods of validation of claims, used by scientists (laboratory investigations) are very different from those used by theologian (intuition and authority of sacred books). The idea of two realities can also be recognized in the following prayer, also from our reform prayer book:

*"Pray as if everything depended on God. Act as if everything depended on you.
Prayer invites God's Presence to suffuse our spirits, God's will to prevail in our lives."*

Item 16) Thank you for reading. Send me your comments:

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