David Shatz and the Puzzle of the Right and the True

Given the number of people who have died rather than convert to another religion; and given the number of people who have been killed in the name of God, it's rather surprising that the ethics of religious persuasion isn't a more vibrant field of philosophical research. Having said that, David Shatz has written two path-breaking papers that seek to articulate an authentically Jewish contribution to that field.[1] Indeed, he could be considered a founding father, in the analytic tradition, of the ethics of religious persuasion; a field that deserves much more attention.

In this chapter, I shall seek to develop a problem for Shatz by contrasting his ethics of religious persuasion with his equally important writings in favour of theodicy.[2] In these two areas of religious philosophy, Shatz seems to embody conflicting attitudes towards the value of truth. But I seek, in this chapter, to show that this apparent conflict is easily resolved.

The Ethics of Religious Persuasion

Judaism adopts a notoriously ambivalent attitude towards proselytism. According to the Rabbis, potential converts should be discouraged three times before they're accepted.[3] On the one hand, the Talmud records the opinion that the extent of the dispersion of the Jews, such that we were exiled to the four corners of the earth, was motivated solely to absorb righteous converts from far flung locations.[4] On the other hand, the Talmud records the opinion that converts are like a leprous scab on the skin of the Jewish people.[5] What emerges, in practice, from this ambivalence, is a religion that accepts, and sometimes celebrates, converts from outside, but which refrains from active attempts to proselytize.

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[1] Shatz, D., 2013. "On Undermining the Beliefs of Others: Religion and The Etics of Persuasion." In D. Schwartz and A. Sagi, eds. *Faith: Jewish Perspectives,* (Brighton, Ma.: Academic Studies Press), pp. 137-187; and Shatz, D. "Theology, Morality, and Religious Diversity." In D. Frank and A. Segal, eds., *Jewish Philosophy*: *Past and Present: Contemporary Responses to Classical Sources* (New York: Routledge), pp. 290-299.

[2] Shatz, D., 2019. "Should Theists Eschew Theodicies?" In S. Lebens, D. Rabinowitz, and A. Segal, eds. *Jewish Philosophy in an Analytic Age*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 198–221; and Shatz, D. 2013. "On Constructing a Jewish Theodicy," In J. P. McBrayer and D. Howard-Snyder, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Blackwell), pp. 309-325.

[3] Ruth Rabba 2:16 and Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 42a – all other Talmudic citations in this chapter are from the Babylonian Talmud.

[4] Pesachim 87b

[5] Yevamot 47b

One might offer a political explanation for this policy of acceptance without outreach. After all, there were times in which powerful Jewish kings apparently sought to *force* conversion upon their foes.[6] Even in Talmudic times, when Yusuf Dhū Nuwās – himself (probably) a convert to Judaism – became king of Himyar in Yemen, he supposedly offered conquered Christians the choice between conversion or death.[7] But when Jewish law was being codified, and as Jewish practice came to take the shape that it has today, Jews were most often a minority in exile, with good reason not to raise their heads above the parapet or to risk causing inter-religious consternation.

But this explanation is flawed for a number of reasons. First: Nuwās was an outlier in Jewish history, acting without recorded sanction from the Rabbinic movement, from whose orbit he was likely detached.[8] His example is unlikely to shed light on how Rabbinic Judaism would have acted had it been in positions of power. Moreover, in modern times, when Jews *have* come into military and political power, through the creation of the State of Israel, we *haven't* witnessed an attendant rise in proselytism.

Notwithstanding these reservations, it's fair to think that geo-political considerations had profound effects over the evolution of Judaism, *including* its attitudes to proselytism. But even when they did, a person committed to the truth, or the authority, of the religion will not be satisfied merely with the provision of geo-political explanations. And thus, when David Shatz comes to explore this issue, he isn't merely looking for "an explanation that is historically accurate" as to why the Rabbi's arrived at their policies vis-à-vis proselytism. Rather, he wants to discover a philosophical *justification* of their policy. He wants to find a "compelling reason not to proselytize."[9]

And it's here that things get tricky for somebody who values *truth*. Willard Van Orman Quine said:

> If someone firmly believes that eternal salvation and damnation hinge on embracing his particular religion, he would be callous indeed to sit tolerantly back and watch others go to hell.[10]

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[6] See Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.9.1

[7] For this, and other examples, see Goldenberg, R. 1997. *The Nations That Know Thee Not: Ancient Jewish Attitudes toward Other Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press).

[8] Some speculate that he was in touch with Mar Zutra III (a Rabbinic figure), but Nuwās is not referred to in any Rabbinic text Hirschberg, H. Z. 1946. *Yisrael ba'Arav* (Tel Aviv: Mossad Bialik).

[9] Shatz, D., ""Theology, Morality, and Religious Diversity," p. 292.

[10] Quine, W. V. O. 1987. *Quiddities: An Intermittently Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p.208.

Fortunately, Jews tend to believe that righteous Gentiles have a place in heaven.[11] But someone committed to the value of truth will still find it strange that we don't try to share the truth of our religion with others. Just because salvation doesn't hang in the balance doesn't entail that the truths of Judaism are unimportant. In fact, the following principle, which I'll call the Principle of Truth Sharing (PTS for short), should seem eminently plausible to anyone who thinks that truth is valuable:

> **PTS:** For any person *x*, and for any truth *p*, such that *p* would be important for *x* to know, it seems plausible that, upon coming to believe that *p*, and if sharing the truth of *p* with *x* would come at no (or little) cost to yourself, you'd have an *obligation* to try to persuade *x* that *p* is true.

To deny that PTS is true is to deny that you have an obligation to share the truth, at no cost to yourself, with interested third parties. And thus, to deny the truth of PTS seems to be cold-hearted. And yet, the Jewish attitude to proselytism looks like a massive and ongoing violation of PTS. That's the philosophical puzzle that Shatz seeks to address.

A religious postmodernist might feel less pressure from this problem. She might think that there simply are no religious truths. Rather, each religion lives according to its own narrative and form of life. None of these narratives can be assessed from a neutral standpoint. In that case, there is no violation of PTS here. All that proselytism does – and all it has done in the history of world religion – is to dilute human diversity for no reason other than cultural imperialism. She might well congratulate Judaism for its less imperialist stance.

But this isn't the sort of philosophical justification that Shatz is looking for. We're not looking for *any* philosophical justification that might do the trick. We're looking for one that could plausibly be attributed to the Rabbis themselves. Anachronism might be acceptable, in our final answer, but only to the extent that our anachronism makes precise what was likely to have been inchoately in the minds of the Rabbis. An analogy with other research projects in the history of philosophy might be instructive.

When philosophers study historical figures, they're not engaging solely in intellectual history. And thus, we might want to distinguish between history of philosophy (which is what philosophers do) and intellectual history (which is what historians do). Let's then imagine a philosopher engaging with

[11] Sanhedrin, 105a and Avoda Zara 10b.

Descartes, for instance, and wondering why Descartes said that *P* (where *P* stands for some distinctively Cartesian claim).

It would not be out of place for the intellectual historian to give a Freudean analysis of Descartes' life in order to explain how the treatment he received from his parents at a young age was especially likely to lead him to believe that P. That might be a fine explanation, so far as intellectual history would go, just as it would be fine for an historian to offer a geo-political explanation of Rabbinic attitudes to conversion.

But the philosopher is looking for a *philosophical* justification for Descartes' having said that P. And it's not the case that any justification will do. It has to be the sort of justification by which Descartes himself, given his other beliefs, could plausibly have been moved. Can we allow for a little anachronism, using philosophical tools and notions that hadn't yet been developed in the times of Descartes? Yes, but only to the extent that one can plausibly claim that these anachronisms offer a likely precisification of what Descartes was gunning for. So too with our question about the Rabbis. A postmodern answer would be too anachronistic to pass muster.

To make progress with our question, Shatz distinguishes between two forms of proselytism: *general* and *direct*. When Dawkins writes a book proposing atheism, there's a sense in which he's proselytising.[12] He broadcasts his arguments, for anyone interested. Shatz calls this *general* proselytization.[13] But if Dawkins wrote a book specifically dedicated to persuading *me* of his atheism, and if he camped outside of my house, reading it through a megaphone day and night – that would be extremely *direct*.

Shatz is surely right to note that Judaism *doesn't* have a problem with proselytism when it's sufficiently *general*. There's nothing impious about writing a book, arguing that Judaism is true. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi did so with *The Kuzari*[14] and Rabbi Saadya Gaon did so with his *Emunot Ve'Deot*. But Judaism *would* frown upon Rabbis actively seeking out *specific* Gentiles to convert.[15] This is still a violation of PTS, but at least we've limited its scope.

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[12] Strictly speaking, 'proselytization' refers to *religious* persuasion, rather than anti-religious persuasion, but forgive me this example.
[13] Shatz, D., "Undermining the Beliefs of Others", p. 143.
[14] Even though it's about a fictional attempt at *direct* proselytism, the book counts as *general* proselytism.
[15] Even the fictional Rabbi in *The Kuzari* only engaged the king when *invited* to do so.

Perhaps we are looking to protect the prospective convert from adopting more commandments, and thereby incurring a risk of greater punishment.[16] Perhaps that offers some justification for our violating PTS. Perhaps the thought is that the truth of Judaism, to the extent that it might lead righteous gentiles to want to convert, is just too dangerous, because it will open them up to risks that they currently don't face. But that's a very paternalistic attitude to adopt – perhaps offensively so – since it doesn't allow gentiles to make their minds up for themselves, whether to remain Noahides, or whether to convert to Judaism. Secondly, it doesn't seem consistent with our more permissive attitude towards *general* (rather than direct) proselytism.

Perhaps, instead, we're looking to protect *Judaism* from *converts*, on the assumption that we can't trust their sincerity, or for fear of their backsliding into their previous non-Jewish beliefs and customs. This is surely a fear that *has* motivated various Rabbinic authorities, but it falls short of providing a satisfactory philosophical justification. It might explain our general reticence to proselytize, but if anything, it's a consideration that should speak against *general*, rather than direct proselytism. If you're worried that gentiles would generally make bad Jews, don't go publishing books about the truth of Judaism. But if, for example, you happen to know a truly righteous gentile, with exceptional integrity, such that you're sure that she would make an excellent Jew, if only you could convince her that Judaism were true, then why on earth would you not have an obligation to *try*?

In desperation, Shatz appeals to a variation of the golden rule: "Do not proselytize others because you would not want to be proselytized yourself."[17] Many people find missionaries to be annoying. Mormon missionaries, for example, probably don't relish the prospect of opening their front door, after a hard day's proselytizing, only to find a Jehovah's Witness waiting to harangue them on their doorstep. Is this consideration enough to override PTS? Is it enough to justify our Rabbinic rejection of direct proselytism?

Shatz is rightly unconvinced. First of all, who's to say that a missionary *won't* be willing to open their door to proselytisers from other faiths? At the very least, they may see it as an opportunity to hone their skills in apologetics. Moreover, just as the missionary has an obligation to share the truth with third parties who (perhaps unbeknownst to them) have an interest in it, their interlocutors have an epistemic obligation to be open to hearing the truth – however inconvenient. In the famous words of

[16] See Yevamot 47a, where we're instructed to warn the prospective convert of these risks. But note that we're also told not to lay it on too thick, so to speak.
[17] Shatz, D., ""Theology, Morality, and Religious Diversity," p. 292.

Maimonides, we should be willing to accept the truth from whoever tells it to us. It's not the missionary's fault if their audience is annoyed by the inconvenience of a conversation.

Having distinguished between direct and general proselytism, Shatz helps us to focus even more sharply upon the contours of our puzzle. He compares religious and scientific discourse. He accepts that a person's affiliation to a religion, like their acceptance of a scientific thesis, might be based (at least in part) upon evidence. I believe that my religion is true, and I have some arguments that can back this up, as well as the evidence that I might glean from my wholly subjective, but potentially vivid, religious experience.

I assume that you too, if you have a religion, believe your religion to be true, and have some arguments, and streams of evidence to back you up. But even so, your commitment to a religion is likely to be tied up with much more than merely epistemic reasons. Your religious commitments, like mine, are likely tied up with your family history, your communal belonging, your culture, and your sense of identity. Shatz notes that this seems to be "different in the sciences and politics, even though it may [sometimes] be granted in those domains, too."[18]

Here's the basic thought. Change a person's favoured interpretation of quantum mechanics, and you're unlikely to devastate their social standing, communal belonging, and sense of self – unless of course, the person in question had organized their entire life around being an advocate of Bohmian mechanics. The same can rarely be said when you change a person's religion.

If you join a faith group to which you didn't always belong, you will often find yourself straining pre-existing bonds of family, friendship, and community. When you pull somebody out of one religion, and place them into another, there's a sort of social fabric that stands to be ripped asunder. This is much less often the case when a person changes their beliefs about a given *scientific* theory. Martin Marty writes:

> The fabric of social relations is gossamer, easily pulled at and torn. Bombarded from all sides by advertisers, public relations experts, strangers, and seducers, people have few psychic defenses that will help them keep to boundaries and uphold traditions. The

[18] Shatz, D., "Undermining the Beliefs of Others," pp. 172-173. I'm less confident, in our times of tribal political affiliations, that Shatz is right to treat politics alongside (as analogous to) science, so I'll leave politics aside in what follows.

> proselytiser violates boundaries and disrupts traditions… Be caught off guard, and, whether or not one succumbs, there is a challenge to personal and social identity.[19]

What can emerge from this insight, and I take it that this is Shatz's point, is a justification of Jewish attitudes to conversion. Yes, we *are* trying to protect the gentile from harm. But this isn't based upon some patronizing attitude according to which we assume that the added responsibilities of becoming a Jew are just too dangerous, or onerous, for them. Rather, we recognize that this person lives a life in a truly valuable network of relationships and cultural affiliations. If eternal salvation were at stake, perhaps it would be appropriate to run roughshod over those associations and rescue the gentile from hellfire. But since we don't believe that salvation is at stake, and since we do recognize the value of the social fabric in which a person is born and raised, we have reason to treat the truth of Judaism as an exception to PTS.

Supporting Shatz

I think a multitude of Jewish sources can be brought to bear in support of Shatz's position, which captures both Rabbinic attitudes to conversion, but also towards truth itself. Regarding conversion:

- We have no obligation to convince non-Jewish ethical monotheists of the truth of Judaism because the harm done in uprooting such a person isn't worth the expected gain.
- We will *accept* people who *volunteer* to convert to Judaism, but we place special emphasis, in such cases, upon ascertaining that they feel a strong affinity, not merely to Jewish *belief*, but to the Jewish *community*.[20] That being the case, we can assume that the candidate in question is already somewhat uprooted from her previous cultural and familial connections. Why else would she be volunteering to convert?

These data points, regarding Rabbinic attitudes to conversion, fit like hand and glove, with Shatz's justification.

Regarding Rabbinic attitudes to *truth*, it's well known that truth-telling in Jewish law isn't a categorical imperative admitting of no exceptions. According to the canons of Jewish law, a person is allowed to deceive (or even sometimes to lie) to preserve a state of peace. But that exception is only operative if

[19] Marty, M. 1999. "Introduction." In J Witte and R. Martin eds. *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytizing* (Ossining: Orbis Books), p. 2.
[20] See Yevamot 47a

the objective cannot be achieved *without* deception/lying, and if the discord prevented or ended by the lie/deception is not assessed to be such that it will reemerge in exacerbated form if and when the lie/deception is exposed.[21] Other exceptions include deception (and sometimes even lying) to protect modesty, humility, and privacy, and to prevent exploitation (and, it should go without saying, to save a life).[22] But our discussion is less interested in when one might lie or deceive. Rather, we want to know when Judaism recognises exceptions, if any exist, to PTS.

In this regard, the Talmud teaches: "Leave the Jews alone. Better that they be unintentional sinners and not [be transformed, through our ill-fated attempts at outreach, into] intentional sinners!"[23] In other words, Simon is about to commit sin X. Thankfully, for Simon, he doesn't know that X is a sin, so his transgression will be less severe than it would have been, had he done it with full knowledge of its sinful status. It would be hard to deny that *X being a sin* is a truth in which Simon has some interest. After all, he's the one who stands to be punished (whether it be in this life, or in the afterlife) for the performance of X. Accordingly, PTS dictates that you should tell him this truth. But the Rabbis demur. They say that his coming to know this truth might *not* stop him from sinning, and then you'll be responsible for having made his sin more severe. Intervene only if you know that your chances of success are high.

Once again, this accords with Shatz's general position: PTS is a good rule of a thumb, but it should be abandoned if and when we think that the knowledge in question might be more harmful to the person than ignorance. In this case, admittedly, the specter of paternalism has reared its head again. It seems we would rather leave Simon in his state of ignorance than give him the autonomy required to make his own decision. But, then again, we're not talking about a life-changing truth like the truth of a religion. We're talking about the legal status of one isolated action. And the principle is limited to cases where we're uncertain if intervention would succeed.

But now consider the case of Reuven. He believes in Judaism, but he's convinced (on good grounds) that he was born a Gentile. He decides to remain a Gentile with his belief that Judaism is true, in the knowledge that Judaism doesn't require Gentiles to *convert*. He marries a devout Christian. They love one another deeply. She wishes he would believe in Jesus, but they agree to disagree. Together, they

[21] See *Hafetz Hayim, Hilkot Rekhilut 1:8* and Levine, A., 2012. *Economic Morality and Jewish Law* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 36.
[22] See Tractate *Baba Metzia* 23b-24a
[23] Tractate Beitza 30a.

raise a family of seven children who also become devout Christians. If I were to discover that Reuven was actually a native Jew, would I have an obligation to tell him?

In this instance, I wouldn't be transforming an unintentional sinner into an intentional one. On the contrary, I can be quite confident that he would strive to observe Jewish law as soon as he becomes aware that he's a Jew. And yet, he would have to separate from his wife, since a Jew is not allowed to be married to a non-Jew, according to Jewish law. Untold harm would accrue to his children and their family life. He *would* become an observant Jew, but at what cost? He would likely be torn, bitter, and profoundly psychologically damaged.

If Judaism really values the social fabric into which a person is enwoven, it might be argued that we should leave Reuven in the dark here, about his Jewish identity. Interestingly, it seems that there's *room* to say that Jewish law *would* forbid (or at least discourage) me from telling Reuven about his identity. This is, once again, a source of support for Shatz's position.

Rabbi Moshe Isserlis rules that one shouldn't intercede to prevent unintentional sins if doing so would conflict with an over-riding *ethical* concern for the people involved.[24] This is particularly pertinent in the case of Reuven, since many of his transgressions might be considered "*mitasek*" – which is one level *less* severe than an unintentional sin. An action is considered *mitasek* when (for one reason or another) Jewish law won't attribute the action to the agent at all.

Admittedly, Rabbi Akiva Eiger *wouldn't* categorise Reuven's unintentional transgressions as *mitasek* – since he is, despite his ignorance, in *control* of his actions – but Rabbi Eiger concedes that some authorities, including Rabbi Yaakov Loberbaum, *would* relate to Reuven's actions as *mitasek*.[25] Rabbi Krumbein argues that Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik and his grandson, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, would both also view Reuven's sins as *mitasek*.[26]

An unintentional sinner holds some degree of culpability for his or her ignorance. But somebody who is *mitasek*, like Reuven, isn't *culpable* for his ignorance. It's this total lack of culpability which serves to sever the agent from his actions.[27]

Even if some of Simon's transgressions cannot be considered *mitasek* (for technical reasons, such as the pleasure he receives from unkosher food restoring the link between agent and action), they can

[24] HaMapah, Yoreh Deah §303.
[25] Teshuvot Rabbi Akiva Eger, Responsum §8.
[26] Krumbein, E, 1985-1986. "Begidrei Mitasek". Alon Shvut, Volume 113.
[27] See Ohr Sameach, on the Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shabbat 1:8.

certainly be considered *unintentional* (in that he had no intention to *sin*). Accordingly, Ashkenazi law[28] seems to accept that *ethical* considerations make it *improper* to correct Reuven's behaviour. His sins aren't intentional, many are even *mitasek*, and thus, we're in a situation in which ethical concerns take precedence over truth-telling.[29] David Shatz, and the religious tradition in which he functions, seem to value the right over the true. Or so it seems, until we look at Shatz's work on theodicy.

Theodicy

The problem of evil is generated by the following inconsistent triad:

- God is powerful (and knowledgeable) enough to rid the world of evil
- God is loving enough to rid the world of evil
- The world contains evil

Attempts to defend the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God, in the face of the problem of evil are called theodices. Shatz's most distinctive work on the problem of evil has less to do with offering a true theodicy, and more to do with justifying, against some formidable opponents, the very endeavor of *trying* to offer a theodicy.

There are all sorts of reasons why religious philosophers, both Jewish and gentile, have thought it impious or otherwise ill-advised to formulate a theodicy. Shatz has done careful work to document these various reservations. In this chapter, I want to focus on just one aspect of this project, in which Shatz responds to an anti-theodic consideration developed by Rabbi Nachum Rabinowitz, and his student, Rabbi Lord Jonthan Sacks.

Developing a thought of his teacher, Rabbi Sacks offers a homiletical explanation as to why Moses was afraid at the sight of the burning bush. On this reading, Moses hid his face:

> Because if he were fully to understand God he would have no choice but to be reconciled to the slavery and oppression of the world. From the vantage point of eternity, he would see that the bad is a necessary stage on the journey to the good. He would understand God but he would cease to be Moses, the fighter against injustice who intervened

[28] I stipulate "Ashkenazi" because I'm relying on the Rav Moshe Isserlis rather than upon the Shulchan Aruch.
[29] I am grateful to Aaron Segal for helping me to think through the halakhic complications of Reuven's case. I should note that my teacher, Rabbi Chanoch Waxman, though he doesn't fault the halakhic logic itself that I've applied to Reuven's case, is doubtful that the halakha would *really* approve of keeping Reuven in the dark about a proposition of such great existential import.

> whenever he saw wrong being done. "He was afraid" that seeing heaven would desensitize him to earth, that coming close to infinity would mean losing his humanity.[30]

Shatz raises various concerns with this line of thought, which we could summarise as follows:[31]

1. It is all very well for people who *believe* in God to sit back in good faith, without second-guessing His motivation. There is surely something humble and pious in that. However, if we are at an earlier stage in our religious journey that Moses was, and we're sincerely searching through the evidence for and against theism, can it really be impious to wonder why a good God would allow such pain and suffering, and to search through suggestions, on the off-chance that something convincing can be said for theism in the face of evil?
2. There is a deep philosophical problem in the contention that God wants us to fight injustice even though, from His perspective, there *is* no injustice. Moses hiding his face, if that's what it really meant, seems like an abdication of his intellectual responsibility to render his own views about the world coherent and consistent. Maybe that's why, later on in the narrative, Moses is no longer afraid and *desires* to see God's face. It would be intellectually dishonest to rest satisfied with the conclusion that apparent evils are really goods, and to think, at the same time, that God wants us to fight those evils. More needs to be said. The intellect requires a theodicy.
3. We have plenty of evidence of people who have theodicies that convinced them, but who didn't then abandon the fight against injustice. Martin Luther King, for example, was convinced that pain and suffering play an important role in human salvation. But it would be absurd to suggest that his religious faith, and his belief in a theodicy, rendered him callous or passive in the face of injustice. On the contrary, he was a warrior against multiple forms of evil. We shouldn't think that the project of theodicy is automatically apt to render people morally inert.
4. When searching for a theodicy, we can be particularly alert to the possibilities of arrogance, of belittling people's pain, of contradicting the basic moral imperative that calls upon us to fight in the face of evil. If we are aware of those pitfalls, then we can better assess which theodicies should be rejected out of hand, and which theodicies can still play a role in

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[30] Sacks, J., 2005. *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (London and New York: Continuum), pp. 22-23.

[31] I'm drawing here from Shatz, "Should Theists Eschew Theodicies?" and to a lesser extent from "Constructing a Jewish Theodicy."

maintaining the evidential force of theism in the face of pain and suffering. But we needn't give up theodicy altogether!

All of these considerations are important, but to make Shatz's rejection of the Rabinowitz-Sacksean homily as stark as possible, we could frame it in terms of the following series of dilemmas:

1. Either there is a true theodicy or there isn't.
2. If there isn't, then it would seem to follow that God doesn't exist, or that He isn't sufficiently good/powerful to be worthy of our worship.
3. If there is, then the theodicy either explains why apparent evils are actually good, and thereby entail that we should act in this world to avert apparent evils, or it explains *how* – even though God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, His world still contains things against we are obligated to struggle.

In championing this series of dilemmas, Shatz seems to be promoting intellectual honesty above many other virtues. If the evidence suggests that atheism is true, we should be honest enough to bite that bullet. Alternatively, if there is a true theodicy, the truth of which entails that we should stop seeking to remedy apparent evils, then we should be honest enough to bite that bullet instead. We shouldn't hide our face from it, if it's true. If we do believe in God, and we do believe that we should nevertheless seek to remedy apparent evils, then we better hope that there exists a true theodicy that makes room for human obligation to fight against apparent evils, and we should seek to formulate it.

Somebody who prioritises certain ethical goods over the possession of true beliefs might resist. They might say that even if atheism is true, it would be better – at least for some people – to remain as theists. They might say that even if apparent evils are justified, from God's perspective, knowledge of this could be so damaging to us, given the sorts of creatures that we are, as to make it a truth not worth our knowing. In his ethics of religious persuasion, Shatz seems to prioritize these sorts of goods over the truth. And yet, in his work on theodicy, he seems to prioritize intellectual honesty, and the value of truth, above those sorts of goods. This is a puzzle generated by Shatz's work, regarding relative priority of the right and the true.

Solving the Puzzle

In my own work on the ethics of proselytism, which is greatly indebted to Shatz, I have developed a response to the charge of closed-mindedness.[32] First, I'll explain the charge, and then I'll explain my solution.

Based upon a Shatzean ethic of proselytism, I have suggested that one can re-work Pascal's wager. Pascal presents his audience with a choice between Christianity or atheism. If you committed your life to Christianity, and it turns out to be true, then you'll have won yourself the infinitely valuable prize of eternal life. If you committed to Christianity and it turned out to be *false*, then what did you really lose? You still had a nice life, committed to noble ideals. You may have wasted some time praying, but don't forget the emotional benefits that those prayers gave you. There were some pleasures avoided that could have been enjoyed, but perhaps avoiding them played a role in shaping your moral character. It's hard to say that you'll have lost all that much. You'll probably have gained something from your life immersed in a religious community, even if it amounts to nothing like eternal bliss.

The obvious problem (and one of which I think Pascal was likely aware) has been called the many gods problem. What if Islam is true? And what if it's true under the interpretation that says that non-*Muslims* are damned to eternal hellfire? What if some form of Hinduism is true, and if I don't engage in certain Hindu rituals, I risk reincarnation into some horrible state of affairs? With these different options on the table, each promising a very different, but very extreme set of rewards and punishments, it's far from clear which religion I should adopt. The decision that faces us isn't a simple coin flip between Christianity or nothing. The decision is more like a many-sided die roll between a dizzying array of religious options.

One way to respond is to recognise that not every religion is a "live option" for every person. Indeed, I think Pascal offered the choice that he did because he was writing to an audience for whom Christianity and atheism were the only *live* options. If, for you, Christianity or nothing were the only *thinkable choices*, then the wager should be a very powerful consideration in favour of Christianity. But likewise, if for you, the only thinkable choices are Hinduism or nothing, then a very similar wager would be an equally powerful consideration, not in favour of Christianity, but in favour of *Hindusim*.

[32] Here I draw from Lebens, S., 2021 "Proselytism as Epistemic Violence: A Jewish approach to the ethics of religious persuasion," *The Monist* 104/3:376-392 and Lebens, S. 2022. *A Guide for the Jewish Undecided: A Philosopher makes the case for Orthodox Judaism* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books and Yeshiva University Press).

Every religion – including Judaism – will have a wager that will be powerful to anyone for whom that religion is the only live, or thinkable, religious option.

What do I mean by an option being *thinkable*? I call a thought 'unthinkable' if you cannot bring yourself to factor it into your practical reasoning. Sometimes it seems appropriate, and not at all worthy of criticism for you to find a thought unthinkable. For example, you might be waiting for a heart transplant for your loved one. You know that one way to save the day would be to find a healthy match, and drug them, in just the right way so as to cause a brain-stem death whilst giving the doctors time to salvage the heart. This strategy would work, but it's unthinkable for you. Rightly so. You do not factor it into your practical deliberations.

To be ethical makes some things unthinkable. To love somebody, or to be a committed member of a community will likewise make some things unthinkable to you. Indeed, that's the insight that emerges from Shatz's own thinking about proselytism. People find themselves woven into a specific place in a valuable social fabric. The way in which you're woven in will render some things unthinkable to you. This isn't irrational, so long as it's rational for you to be moral, a friend, and/or a member of the community in question. It's not irrational if you think that the social fabric itself is *valuable*.

A Jew who embraces Jesus does so at the cost of their communal bond to the mainstream Jewish community. It follows that, to the extent that a person is committed to their Jewish identity – the extent to which their woven into a Jewish life and culture – the thought that Jesus is the Messiah will be *unthinkable*. But then the close-mindedness objection emerges. Isn't it closed-minded to think of something that millions of people believe in as unthinkable? Isn't it closed-minded to think that some intellectual options are live and that some are not, merely based on your own contingent sociological conditions?

In response to this objection, I appeal to the distinction between ordinary living, and our time spent in the so-called philosophy seminar room. In the philosophy seminar room, all intellectual options should be on the table. And, in the philosophy seminar room, we're all capable of entertaining a wide range of intellectual options, even those that seem horrific to us outside of it. It is a good thing for all human beings to spend time in that room. It sharpens our minds and exposes us to new ways of thinking. But not everything that we examine in the philosophy seminar room needs to come with us back into our lives outside of it.

Solipsism is a good example. It's the belief that you're the only person that exists. In the philosophy seminar room, it should be seriously entertained. In fact, it's not at all easy to construct compelling

philosophical arguments against solipsism. But outside of the philosophy seminar room, as I reason practically about how to act, I don't so much as consider the possibility that I'm the only real person affected by my actions. Does this mean that I learnt nothing in the philosophy seminar room? Does it make me closed-minded?

I don't think so. The philosophy seminar room helped me to improve my critical faculties. Moreover, if—in the philosophy seminar room—I come across *overwhelming* reason to adopt a theory (including solipsism) that I wouldn't hitherto have considered outside of the seminar room, then reason dictates that I take that theory back with me into the world at large. In these ways, philosophy can change us, despite our rootedness. We are open to argument. We are open to being moved. Our time in the seminar room can, if we're confronted by overwhelming evidence, transform the unthinkable into the thinkable.

The Jew in the philosophy seminar room, just like anybody else, should be willing to entertain all evidence and arguments for other religions. She should listen with a patient and open-minded ear. But if the evidence isn't *overwhelming*, then she's licenced to leave those arguments at the door, and to ignore them in her practical reasoning, just as we all do with solipsism.

This is, I think, the way to solve our puzzle regarding Shatz and the right and the good. When Shatz is critically engaging with Rabbis Rabinowitz and Sacks, he's doing so in the philosophy seminar room. In that room, the gloves are off, and truth is the only value in town. It's important that we all spend time in the philosophy seminar room, and when we do so, we must play by the rules of philosophy which places the value of truth, and the epistemic ought, above all other values. But when we leave the philosophy seminar room and find ourselves embroiled in the various complexities of life, we find that practical rationality often has to trump epistemic rationality. We're often operating in situations that, from an epistemological point of view, are far from ideal, and yet we have to make decisions, and we have to make the most of the life that we're living.

Moreover, in the messy realia of day-to-day life, practical rationality can come into direct conflict with epistemic rationality. Admittedly, for an example of every-day life, the following thought experiment is wholly far-fetched, but it's still a useful exercise for thinking about the conflict I have in mind. Suppose that somebody puts a gun to your head and tells you to form the belief that 2+2=5. He tells you that he has a mind reading device and will know if you're lying. In this situation, practical rationality demands that you find some way of coming to believe that 2+2=5, even though epistemic

rationality can never sanction such a belief. Life is messy, and truth cannot always be our over-riding concern. Only in the sanctuary of the philosophy seminar room does truth reign supreme.

In the philosophy seminar room, one might imagine David Shatz urging all and sundry to accept the truth of Judaism, providing them with the best arguments that he can formulate. But knowing that those arguments don't amount to overwhelming proof, he wouldn't expect his non-Jewish colleagues to leave the seminar room with Jewish beliefs, or even with Judaism having been rendered a live option for them. Shatz's ethics of religious persuasion is an ethic for life lived out in the real world, rather than in the philosophy seminar room. And that's why he's entitled to privilege the value of a precious social fabric over the value of certain truths. Perhaps, outside of the seminar room, he'd be more amenable to anti-theodic arguments too. Out in the real world, people of faith might have to come to terms with the sort of uncertainty that theodicy seeks to irradicate; the sort of uncertainty that Rabbi Sacks sought to dignify. But *inside* the seminar room, when the gloves come off, Shatz is well within his rights to pit his intellectual honesty against any such accommodation to uncertainty, and against any values that would seek to usurp the value of truth.

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