

# THE ETHICS OF HUMILITY AND ANGER IN THE LEGEND OF MOSES – AND THE “SELF-HATING JEW” AS AN IDEOLOGICAL ATTACK ON THE MODERATE JEW.

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Humility and anger are related in the ancient Israelite myth (or the elaborated historical truth) of Moses. But what does modern ethical philosophy (“*mussar*” in Hebrew) have to say about this intuitively right pairing of contradictory emotions and behaviour? Especially now when Jews, like other minority groups, are at risk from terrorist attacks and a revival of anti-Semitism – including attacks by right-wing Jews on moderate Jews.

Moses has humility when he speaks modestly to a voice of God projected out of his *psyche* and heard by him as an echo and response when he is in a state of *ekstasis* – a standing-out-of –the-world (Heidegger 1962 *passim*). He says that he is “*not an eloquent man... but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue*” (Tora: Exodus 4:10). As well as being *a projection* and of the order of the *ecstatic* (literally and metaphorically as *ek-stasis* – standing out of the world) this voice of God is perhaps a *reaction-formation* against Egyptian polytheistic animal-worship and worship of the solar and star systems which are very African ways of being-in-the-world (Mbiti 1969 p. 50 f.)

*Homo Sapiens*, for 250,000 years, lived in Africa and naturally *deified* the sun, the moon, the planets, beautiful or powerful or predatory animals like the ibis, the great apes, the lion, the jackal, the hawk. With agriculture and selective breeding of animals and the understood, pre-scientific genetics of cereal crops and the consequent production of surpluses, life in the Fertile Crescent became richer and could focus more on pragmatic knowledge which could be projected into a God made in the image of the ingenious humans who if they were mystically and ethically inclined, tried in the middle ages to make themselves into versions of Adam Kadmon, the “original” man, and the of Eve, the “first” woman, Chavva Kadmona, embodying not only fallible psychology, but Jewish ethics (Matt 1995 ed. diagram opposite p. 1 and following on the *sefirot* the “emanations” of the “model” *homo sapiens*.)

It had already been established at the time of the editing of the Torah in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE in Babylon that culturally, socially, and intellectually stratified Judean and Israelite societies and the diasporas of Jews were so *multifarious* that *only an invisible, universalist deity could possibly survive the philosophically sophisticated penetrative internal thought of such a wide-ranging early “globalised” group and fortify them ideologically against their enemies.*

The Hebrew pastoralists originally from Mesopotamia, the *Habiru*, contained within their culture and group, intellectuals, merchants and skilled workers who needed a universalistic God who would transcend the mixed-multitude who joined the purported Exodus – perhaps a folk-memory of many travels and many periods of enslavement suffered by many Canaanites at the hands of Egyptian raiding parties in Eretz Yis'ra'el. (See Paul Johnson *A History of the Jews* pp. 3-69 on this topic).

This philosophically more propitious voice heard in a largely oral non-writing society did not distinguish between internal thoughts and what we would call hallucinations, for example, of the voice that called itself “*Eheyeh Asher Eheyeh*”(I will ever be what I now am.) Walter Ong, a Catholic, a Jesuit and a Japanese American has convincingly explained the totally transforming nature of a changed ontology and epistemology brought about by writing. The Torah as heard and seen and understood as having a divine source records perhaps myths originating in the Bronze Age (the time of the invention of Greek and other civilizational myths) before the second millennium BCE. By the time they were written down as holy and sacrosanct and edited in Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE the myth of God's voice and presence as universal and invisible had become institutionalised in temple, in later synagogue and in *yeshiva* (seminar) writing and study.

In about 1250 BCE to which time Moses is dated, *Israelite philosophy* was religious, performative and poetic in nature – cathartic as in ancient Greek drama. Religion, as far as we know, was coherently challenged by Athenian and widely spread Greek intellectuals through the voices and thought of the pre-Socratic Stoics and then Socrates in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, (and he was executed for “corrupting the youth” with atheism which is the start, for Western civilization, of a pure form of rationality, with all its dangers and limitations). Plato and Socrates believed in the *logos*, the supremacy of reason, which had an *almost* God-like power upholding the *ideal of good* as a transcendental and therefore an immanent Platonic *form*. There was, of course a Hebrew wisdom literature such as Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and, later, the Talmud and rabbinical writings from the Arabic and European renaissances which performed a similar partly demystifying function. Maimonides was both dogmatic and de-constructive and possibly the greatest Jewish thinker of his time and in all Jewish history.

Moses is also a real or partly legendary philosopher in the ancient sense of a lover of wisdom:- in the desert to which he has taken flight after a presumably furiously *angry* killing of an Egyptian persecutor of an Israelite. Whilst strong in his execution of justice, he has enough humility to say that he is not articulate. He is chosen or chooses to lead a slave revolt. He chooses or is chosen to use unbelievable magic like rods turning into snakes, and snakes into rods. This is a story, not history or science. These are the *legendary* Moses and Aaron-figures. But the presence of a universalist ethics implicit in some of their actions carries on in Western civilization until the Enlightenment and into existentialism and a modern revival of ethics – Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Buber, Searle.

But to whom or to what are ethicists actually speaking? Existentially *to the sense of being* they felt in “God” and around them, which *sustained Moses’ identity as partly-Egyptian and partly-Hebrew. Being or God was created out of identity conflict, perhaps. Here was an aristocratically educated man, who knew the law-giving of Mesopotamia and Egypt and culturally, was not purely an Israelite.*

Rowan Williams (2018) establishes that without the transcendental there cannot be the idea of a person at all: we constantly change even as we define ourselves from moment to moment. We exist as subject and as the object of others in a matrix of criss-crossing forces, ideas, language and biology. Our identity changes subtly every second we experience, grow or decline.

Moses is a possible murderer, but is seen as an executor of justice, inflicting and carrying out a death sentence on a perpetrator of an assault. This is a *very angry man not humble at all*. Yet according to the Torah he flees to become a humble shepherd working for a Midianite priest Yitro, whose Midianite daughter Zipporah he marries. He is now the repository of *three* cultures, having known the *Israelite* mother who gave birth to him and breast-fed him, *Pharaoh’s daughter* who reared and educated him as a prince, *and the dark-skinned (African?) / Midianite Zipporah who married him and who was so dark (African?) that she incurred the prejudice of Moses’ sister Miriam.*

The myth doesn’t tell us explicitly how he manages to combine the three cultures: yet it is a legend with a *moral or homiletic* purpose: the Israelites need *one invisible, transcendent God to unite them in their various diasporas, each one of which makes different cultural demands on them* to develop what Erikson calls basic trust, autonomy, initiative, identity, the capacity for intimacy with the culturally Other and the culturally Same, and finally integrity of the *psyche* before being enfolded by and accepting death in this world or as a memory in the significant Others who face the Same death sooner or later.

The text goes on to say: “And Moses said to the LORD, O my LORD, I am not an eloquent man...[...] I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue...” He has already found integrity: he knows the truth about himself. On the face of it he is too modest or humble to be a leader of men. But “the anger of the LORD burned against Moses...”

This voice of *Moses-being-in-a-world-of-identity-conflict projected out* is perhaps the cause of Moses’ murderous anger and humility – contradictory but very human emotions reflecting the Israelites moving between various historical and geographical identities.

The great contribution of Freud, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, Carl Gustav Jung and Erik Erikson to understanding *projection as a mechanism of psychological defence*, against anxiety caused by

identity conflict has been researched in much empirical psychology and history (see Erik Erikson 1950).

As the world becomes both more globalised culturally but also more fragmented, so heroes who transcend identity conflict become leaders who have moral stature, but may lack practical skills required to administer a more egalitarian modern state and economy.

Hence Nelson Mandela transcended his conflict over becoming a Thembu tribal chief by not repudiating his birth-inheritance, but at the same time remaining a Methodist Christian, then, expediently, joining the South African Communist Party which drove the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. And yet, despite his integrity, the crushing inheritance of colonialism and apartheid made it impossible for him to build and administer agencies of social control as to deal adequately with crime and corruption, because unable to delegate and manage sufficiently well. This was caused by the existence of a fragmented and relatively under-skilled liberation movement. The ANC, a liberation movement that was not and is not a true parliamentary party with an educated voting public behind it, could not and cannot mobilise a sufficiently large, adequate skilled working class and a professional middle class – many of whom were whites who emigrated as a result of what they saw as the failure of post-apartheid South Africa. Apartheid and white supremacy had failed to propagate a successor: a viable post-apartheid society. This is just one example of the disjunction of ethics and politics and a viable and logical *mussar* – *ethics generated by an educated context*.

Conversely, totalitarian leaders who are too utterly sure of their *nationalistic* identity may rule through inducing terror in their subjects and in real or imaginary enemies – like Hitler and Stalin who may at first begin to win battles and defensive wars but degenerate into mass-murderers – hence the concentration camps and the slave-labourers of the Gulag Archipelago – which produce humiliation and anger in the victims. There is cruelty and rage in the supposed master-race, and in ruling party of the dictatorship not of a proletariat but of tyrannical party bosses. There is no *mussar* at all.

This Biblical text in *Shmot* (Exodus) about the choice of Moses as the leader of a slave revolt and migration was probably canonised in Babylon during the exile and after the destruction of the temple (587 BCE). The original temple is attributed to King Solomon who is said to have reigned after his father David during the first commonwealth (about 1000-950 BCE).

The author of this Mosaic text was probably the so-called Jahvist since the LORD (YHVH) is given as the name of God, that is Adonai, not Elohim the nomenclature for God used by the Elohist (see the Documentary Hypothesis in the Oxford Companion to the Bible.) This LORD is *Ish haMilchamah* a man of war and therefore the embodiment of military anger required for flight or fight, for battle against the Egyptians and the Canaanite tribes already living side by side sometimes peaceably with Israelites in Eretz Yisrael or Canaan.

We know from archaeology that Canaanites including Israelites (or people whom others would call, and they would call Hebrews in the presence of others) lived in places like Jericho not only in patriarchal times (perhaps 1900 BCE) but since the beginning of the Iron Age as long ago as 6,000 years BCE according to Kathleen Kenyon's carbon-dating (Johnson p. 43). Surely Elohim and even Jehovah and El Shaddai and El Elyon in the most distant times were different gods, only later unified into one God with different human attributes like anger and humility in the face of an extraordinarily diverse *class structure* – *urbanites, intellectuals, merchants, peasants, skilled workers, herders and shepherds*.

*Devarim* (Deuteronomy) chapter 34 tells of the death of Moses. He struck a water-bearing rock instead of speaking to it: the height of arrogant anger in God's eyes, whereas if he was perfect he would have shown humility at all times and done exactly what the legendary God commanded. But then he would hardly be human.

Jesus is mythologically humanised by being allowed to be angry due to a misunderstanding by the Christian gospel writers: the money-changers in or near the Second Temple of Herod enabled worshippers to change their coinage so as to buy sacrificial animals such as birds or lambs which would have been slaughtered as part of the ritual of atonement for sin. Why should this have been any more polluting or taboo than worshipping at the foot of the cross at the feet of a crucified man said to be, literally, the Son of God? The idea of worshipping a tortured man is unique in religious history. Jesus' humility and taking-on-of-the-sins-of-mankind is as "primitive" a form of what Freud would have called displacement, symbolisation and projection as well as introjection, of the Christ-Messiah into the guilt-ridden Christian and as such, a ritual, a mythological performance re-enacted by the Christian worshipper, just as Yom Kippur and fasting is a Mosaic form of submitting to divine and fantastically tortuous labour - implicitly deep devotion, and humility: being on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights copying down the Torah, the Talmud, the Midrashim, the *rabbinal responsa*, the works of Maimonides and the Kabbalah plus all other holy records in Judaism which had not yet happened is another example of the Mosaic miracle.

These then are the mythologies of Judaism positing a divine mind, just as Plato did with his theory of divine forms, or what we would call archetypes of the divine described by Jung as in the *anima* and the *animus* and which we ascribe to the *nefesh*, the *ruach*, and the *neshama* and which Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles and the other great ancient philosophers and dramatists called the *psyche* which metamorphizes in one lifetime.

Without humility and anger we could not face what Lacan calls the Real, and its interaction with the Imaginary and the Symbolic (Bowie 1991, see references in the index of Bowie's commentary to the three orders of the *psyche*). Art, philosophy, religion and creativity are at source not only divine in the Greek and Jewish sense but also because they are sublimations enabling us "to take up arms against the sea of troubles and by opposing end them....[...] The heartache and the thousand natural

shocks that flesh is heir to.." (*Hamlet* III.1 p. 66). Without Freud and Marx Mussar-ethics are surely inexplicable.

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Freud had a kind of negative transference to Moses as a Hebrew. Why? Perhaps Moses *was* an Egyptian: why else, besides the trivial mistake of striking the water-bearing rock instead of speaking to it, should he not be allowed into the Promised Land? Exactly because he was not fully or at all an Israelite.

So here are the roots of Zionist ethnic nationalism. Just as the worshippers of the Golden Calf were poisoned and then killed by the Levites on Moses' orders, so Moses, "a totalitarian of the spirit" drawn magically out of the water of the Nile by an Egyptian princess, has to be magically buried by God himself on or near mount Nebo in Moab.

Freud's theory goes further: Moses was murdered by the Israelites. Why? Yitzchak Rabin was murdered by a fundamentalist fanatic for not being sufficiently Zionist, virtually for shaking hands with Yasser Arafat. One might see this as a reaction-formation to Freud's own position as an assimilated secular, "godless" Jew. He tried to make psychoanalysis respectable by attempting and failing to transmit his legacy to Carl Gustav Jung, a Catholic and a "world-wide" authority by comparison with the persecuted Jews of Europe in the pre-Second World War period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Three of Freud's sisters were murdered in Nazi concentration camps just as Freud says Moses was murdered perhaps for being only partially Israelite. Freud himself, a modernist prophet, would himself have been murdered as a contemporary godless Jew who was saved by the intervention of William Bullit, an ex-patient and a U.S. diplomat, by a telegram from President Roosevelt to the Nazi regime, and due to the influence of Princess Marie Bonaparte, also an ex-patient who arranged for Freud, his wife Martha, and his daughter Anna to be allowed to immigrate to London. (See the biography of Freud by Peter Gay's *Freud: A Life for our Time*.)

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How does this tie into Mussar or rather "*mussar*", that is Hebrew ethics?

Alan Morinis (2007) founder of the Mussar Institute in his book *Everyday Holiness* takes up a tradition that originated in Lithuania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century amongst Orthodox Jews, in part as a reaction to populist, Kabbalistic mystical Hasidism. "*Mussar*" is the study of Jewish ethics which includes ways of changing behaviour pragmatically so as reach ethical ends including humility, control of

anger and channelling psychic energy into what is regarded as proper self-esteem, that is human dignity in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others.

One can give examples of how humility, self-esteem and anger are related from one's own experience. My examples come from the experience of latent or implicit anti-Semitism fused from related incidents into one set of fictionalised incidents. It is, I believe, totally impossible to deduce from this truthful fiction any reference to actual people and places other than the well-known public personalities mentioned. What follows is a sociology or facts for a social theory or the social psychology of prejudice. No slander or libel of any real community or people or person is intended, and none has been committed. What is aimed at is what Freud called "condensation", which can be truthfully de-coded from fiction or dreaming which *does bear on reality but does not entail real people other than the well-known figures conjured up in ideology and counter-ideology who exist as projections, displacements and symbolisations.*

Nevertheless this happened in a part of Britain where there had been no evident anti-Semitism since anti-Jewish riots occurred at the hands of unemployed and economically depressed factory workers who smashed Jewish shops in neighbouring towns before the First World War. This constituency was and is not notably racist although UKIP, the United Kingdom Independence Party was at the time nationalistic, anti-immigrant and locally strong and the church has had racist graffiti painted on its walls.

One does not expect anti-*Jewish* racism in a church in an otherwise tolerant British town but this is what happened two days after the May 2015 general election which was lost by the Labour Party by over 20 seats in the House of Commons at a time when a friend of mine was doing research for his Ph.D. on the sociology of religion in this British town's Protestant churches. It concerns what looked like an attack on an ethnically Jewish leader of the British Labour Party.

Both David and Edward Miliband were the post-war sons of European Jews whose father Ralph was a Marxist intellectual who arrived in Britain in 1939 as part of a family of refugees from the Holocaust. Ralph Miliband was a serious Marxist and a university teacher in London, one of the main theoretical inspirations behind the student protests of 1968 who supported the *eventments* of Paris in May 1968, which forged an alliance between workers and intellectuals. This movement nearly toppled the French government. It opposed the Vietnam war, sought to prevent an escalation of the Cold War, and led to breakthrough in feminist thought and action.

After their education in state comprehensives schools, and after taking degrees at Oxford both Miliband sons rose in power and influence in the Labour Party, winning seats in the Commons and being appointed to Cabinet posts in Tony Blair's governments of the 1990s and early 2000s.

David Miliband became Foreign Secretary and Ed Miliband Energy Secretary. However, after the financial crash of 2008 and the moral and physical devastation of the Iraq War which was promoted by Labour Prime Minister Blair and President George W. Bush Jnr., Labour lost power and although Ed. Miliband was eventually elected leader of the party, he failed to lead it to victory in the election of May 2015.

Having obtained the agreement of the church council to do this, on a Sunday morning two days after the election my friend was in a Protestant church in the downtown area of this British city observing the proceedings as part of his Ph.D. research there, when after the service a woman warden of the church confronted him as he stood in his pew chatting to a friend. The warden passed my friend (who is Jewish and known to be Jewish) going up the aisle and asked my Jewish friend: "Is Ed. Miliband not a self-hating Jew? If he is how can the Labour Party be fair to *Israel* and the Palestinians? Do *you* want him in 10 Downing Street! Is he not too pro-Palestinian? Can a Marxist Jew really be a good Prime Minister of Britain?"

They were referring to the fact that both the Miliband brothers as Foreign Secretary and Energy Secretary and as leading members of the Labour Party would have to have dealings with the Palestinians, which to a fundamentalist Christian might be seen as treason against the Jewish and even the Christian religions and the ideology of Zionism - treason against fundamentalist Christianity which believed in the second coming of Christ to a Jerusalem which should be free of the world-wide influence of international British and other internationalist socialists, certainly free of Marxists and even ex-Marxists. My friend, not wishing to alienate his research subjects, smiled, shook his head and said nothing. After the service that Sunday there was an AGM of the congregation and rival congregants engaged in a dispute about a visiting preacher who had refused to visit the church again after he was questioned about his quite modest expenses which were paid by the church council. After the formal proceedings my friend was asked by the same warden who questioned him earlier, if *he* believed in God, and by the way, did he think the Jews were sometimes *too tribal* and did they not sometimes *keep their charity to themselves*? My friend said he was in the church with the agreement of the church council merely to do anonymous research (not identifying the subjects or the place) and said he thanked the church wardens and congregation for allowing him to do this. In return he had taken part in fund raising for the church's charity programme, sponsoring holidays by the sea for city children. He would show his Ph.D. dissertation to the church council in case they wanted to comment on his conclusions which would include his findings about the relevance of religion in reinforcing the spiritual morale and identity of the community which was sometimes itself stressed and angered by racism.

In terms of the principles of *anavah* – humility – and of Morinis' account of Mussar, my friend was truthful and not arrogant and showed good self-esteem in maintaining his integrity and the integrity of his research. He showed kindness and gratitude to the church for allowing his research to go on.

However, there may have been racist and anti-racist anger, *ka'as* at work. Why were Jews singled out as mean with charity? Perhaps my friend was unwittingly arrogant or exploitative? But why should the Jewish "race" be thought to be negatively "tribal"? Is this not implicitly anti-Semitic? Why did the attacker behave to the attacked like an anti-Semite, that is, by attacking an apparently innocent Jewish third party who treated the Palestinians as human beings with rights?

Conclusion: we do not all live in a civilized society in the best, not-racist sense. Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, atheists, agnostics in different places and different times can and do hate or distrust the Other and do not even understand their own Same as a source for irrational projections, displacements and symbolisations of their own partly animalistic worlds. *Homo sapiens* is a naked ape walking upright with opposable thumbs and a huge number of neuronal connections in the neo-cortex. We forget that this highly developed fore-brain can be switched off and a reptilian hind-brain survives within the context of instincts, animal drives, and can and is all the time being switched on and off. Hence crime, war, genocide, addictions and functional mental illnesses which devastate the victims and negate the *sapiens* in the *homo*. We can only forward our "*mussar*", our ethics by bringing a multi-disciplinary approach to our world and our being-in-the-world. *Mussar* without social context and psychoanalytic insight is banal or at least simplistic. Of course we can train ourselves to have faith, humility, contain anger, show alacrity. But only with insight into the sociology and psychology of the unconscious.

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