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Preface

This book, based on my research into the phenomenology of inner religious life, is a study of six categories of interiorization found in Judaism and other religions. The developments that have occurred in these religions, different though they may be in substance, reveal the common motif of religious interiorization.

A phenomenology such as this cannot encompass all facts and properties, of course, but that is the price of innovating tools for research. In recent decades, studies of comparative religion have frequently been attacked for ignoring interreligious distinctions and for focusing instead only on the phenomena they share. However valid this criticism may be, it does more harm than good to deny any value at all to comparative studies. Dismissing comparative studies as reductive cannot obscure the fact that there is a deep structure common to religious phenomena. The six categories I propose in this book are not total or absolute, but they cast a conceptual and theoretical net that facilitates discussion of religious interiorization and inner religious life.

The phenomenology of inner life as it applies to Jewish sources enables us to observe the uncertainties of the place and value of inner life for a religion in which a transcendent and heteronomic obligation to fulfill the commandments is central. The focus on inner religious life in Judaism and other world religions does not spring from a denial of their outer social, institutional, prescriptive, and ritual aspects. The immanence of the psyche engages even those who are not inclined to relate the social, theological, or legal aspects of religion to other important elements in human existence that are addressed in religious sources in general and in Jewish sources in particular.

The book's introduction elucidates the underlying concepts of this phenomenology. It explains the distinction between inner and external religion, between inner religious life and religious interiorization, and between understanding psychology and psychologizing, and it reviews the philosophical background of the concepts of inwardness in the study of religion. The introduction explains a range of Jewish concepts regarding inwardness in Judaism and the role of comparative research in this work. Throughout the book, I examine multiple sources, above all Jewish sources which reflect inner religious life in Judaism. Each chapter culminates in examples from Hasidic writings to validate the claim that a religious development from the Bible to Talmudic literature, medieval philosophy, and Kabbalistic thought reached its peak in them.

To some degree this structure challenges the conventional format of Jewish studies and the study of religion based on an essential distinction between the sources of different historical periods and literary genres. In the field of Jewish Studies, this is particularly evident in the classification of sources into discrete categories: biblical, halakhic, midrashic, philosophical, or Kabbalistic. The chronological arrangement of Jewish sources in my study does not change the fact that they are drawn from different historical periods and intellectual contexts, yet the inner religious aspects they share justify the comparative approach I have taken. Reading these sources in light of diverse forms of interiorization breaks down the tall barriers often constructed by researchers between different types of sources and affords a more integrative view.

The phenomenological methodology I have used here, in the spirit of Gerard van der Leeuw, the phenomenologist of religion, requires a clear differentiation between the depiction of phenomena and a philosophical discussion of their significance. I have left the discussion for the final chapter, elucidated through my own philosophical understandings of many matters in the book which grew out of dialogs with a long list of contemporary thinkers and scholars.

In particular I wish to thank my friends and colleagues and the institutions that assisted me in writing this book: Moshe Idel, who encouraged me in my decision to publish the book in its present format, and whose studies I address here and agree with more often than not; Avi Sagi, who proposed the publication of this book in the Hebrew series, Parshanut ve Tarbut, interpretation and culture, which he edits for Bar Ilan University press, who supported me all the way and whose important works informed the writing of this book, particularly the concluding chapter; my colleagues at Tel Aviv University's religious studies program and the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Talmud. For many contributions to the thoughts that crystallized here, a true cross-fertilization of ideas, I wish to thank my seminar students over the years at Tel Aviv University and the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. Special thanks go to Donniel Hartman, president of the Hartman Institute, where many of these pages were written, for supporting the Hebrew and the English editions of the book.

For our long conversations and shared reflections I gratefully dedicate this book to my late wife Amalia, to our sons Jonathan and Ayal, and to my mother Yael Peled-Margolin.

Heartfelt thanks go to the translator of the Hebrew book into English, Edward Levin, and to Jeremy Fogel, a true friend who helped with the reading of the manuscript. Many thanks as well go to the Yoran Schnitzer Foundation for Research in Jewish History and to the Jewish Studies School of Tel Aviv University. Finally I wish to thank Dov Schwartz, editor of this series and to the directors and staff of Academic Studies Press for their dedicated work in publishing this book.

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Introduction

Inner Religion

Like all human culture, the phenomenon of religion exists on two planes: the outer social expanse and the inner mental realm, which is focused upon the individual's inner life. The study of religion, which significantly developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, usually distinguishes between sociological-anthropological research on religion and psychological-phenomenological inquiry.

The first approach is concerned with religion as a social and objective phenomenon, independent of the private, subjective thoughts and conceptions of individuals. For example, the social anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard lists three aspects of religion that, from the sociological perspective developed by Emil Durkheim, give it its objective nature:

Firstly, it is transmitted from one generation to another, so if in one sense it is in the individual, in another it is outside him, in that it was there before he was born and will be there after he is dead. He acquires it as he acquires his language, by being born into a particular society. Secondly, it is, at any rate in a closed society, general. Everyone has the same sort of religious beliefs and practices, and their generality, or collectivity, gives them an objectivity which places them over and above the psychological experience of any individual, or indeed of all individuals. Thirdly, it is obligatory. Apart from positive and negative sanctions, the mere fact that religion is general means, again in a closed society, that it is obligatory, for even if there is no coercion, a man has no option but to accept what everybody gives assent to, because he has no choice, any more than of what language he speaks. Even were he to be a skeptic, he could express his doubts only in terms of the beliefs held by

all around him. And had he been born into a different society, he would have had a different set of beliefs, just as he would have had a different language.1

The second approach focuses on the mental, and therefore more subjective, facets of religious life, that is, the conscious and direct contents of the individual's subjective life, which religion influences either as part of social norms, or due to a personal choice that is independent of social religious conditioning. According to Durkheim, "[a] religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things which are set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."² In this sociological conception, the significance of religious beliefs and practices does not lie in their contents, but in the fact that they create social cohesion. Unlike this notion, the study of inner religious life is attentive to the manner in which the contents of religious beliefs and practices impart meaning to the life of the individual, apart from their contribution to social cohesion. The literary-historical research of religious texts, accompanied by the anthropological testimonies that assumed increasing importance in the first half of the twentieth century, provide the data for discussions of both the social and psychological aspects of religion.

The distinction between exterior and interior religion does not imply a substantive division between these two planes. As a general rule, the two levels are intertwined and mutually supportive. In his discussion of the religious experience, which he based on Max Scheler's work, van der Leeuw noted that there can be no inner without the outer. No emotion exists without its accompanying speech and posture, and every thought is associated with form and action. Consequently, he argues, we cannot speak of "institutionalized religion" as the antithesis of inner religious experience.³ Van der Leeuw developed the conception of "inward action" to show that every experience is both outer and inner. Moreover, each experience can be examined from two different perspectives: that of expression, which is the outer point of view, and that of impression, which is the inner aspect.⁴

Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 54-55.

² Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Experience (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), 47.

Gerardus van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology, trans. J. E. Turner (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), 459-60.

Ibid., 460.

Although I agree with the fundamental understanding that every outer aspect has an adjoining inner aspect, and vice versa, in the reality of religious life, the idyllic inner plane, which reflects an exalted inwardness, is often detached from the plane of outer life, which reflects reality as it is. In many instances, there is a disparity between the outer aspect of religious behaviors and the inner facet ascribed to those behaviors that emerges from a study of the religious texts discussing those aspects. In some instances, each plane is almost totally detached from the other and exists independently. A certain activity, such as the offering of a sacrifice or public prayer, which is meant to give expression to religious sentiments of thanks and praise, could easily become an exclusively social act. In such a situation this action would express—in terms of the inner world of the sacrificer or public worshiper—social solidarity or aesthetic pleasure and remain indifferent to any religious gratitude. That is to say, outer activities are always accompanied by inner contents, but these contents are not necessarily identical with the inner meaning that the religious literature prescribes for these activities. Some people are defined as religious on the basis of their outer social behaviors—even when their religious conduct is detached from the inner meanings given by the religious texts themselves. Other people, in contrast, express no religious practices and affiliation in their outer lives but ascribe a central place to religious contents in their inner lives. Externally, these people do not seem to belong to any religious culture. Such extreme dissonances in the life and worldview of many people, with, perhaps, a growing prominence in recent generations, in itself justifies the distinction between exterior and interior religious life. Obviously, even if we assume that van der Leeuw correctly objects to the bifurcation between the outer and inner facets of religious life, this artificial division for the purposes of study should still contribute to a better understanding of religious life as a whole. But if, as I have argued, the frequent partial or almost total detachment between exterior and interior religious life does in fact occurs, then the distinction between exterior and interior religious life is valid and essential for a deeper understanding of the subjective and mental aspect of religious life.

Inner Religion and the Concept of the Subject

The Western investigation of inner religion with philosophical, phenomenological, and/or psychological tools is directly related to the enhanced standing of the self and of subjectivity in Western culture. Charles Taylor argues in his book *The Sources of the Self* that the contrast between the inner and the outer dimensions shapes the languages in which we express our self-understanding:

We think of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being "within" us, while the objects in the world which these mental states bear on are "without". Or else we think of our capacities or potentialities as "inner", awaiting the development which will manifest them or realize them in the public world. The unconscious is for us within, and we think of the depths of the unsaid, the unsayable, the powerful inchoate feelings and affinities and fears which dispute with us the control of our lives, as inner. We are creatures with inner depths; with partly unexplored and dark interiors. . . . But strong as this partitioning of the world appears to us, as solid as this isolation may seem, and anchored in the very nature of the human agent, it is in large part a feature of our world, the world of modern, Western people.⁵

Kantian philosophy, the second Copernican revolution in European thought, sought to rescue the objective status of science in Western culture. However, in reality it contributed to the ascent of subjectivity as establishing consciousness. In the twentieth century, subjectivity became not only the focus of many philosophical teachings, but also the base for the meteoric rise of psychology in general, especially psychoanalysis. The personality theory developed by Freud on the basis of Plato's discussions of the soul in *Phaedrus* emphasized the dark sides of the inner self that had been repressed by "reason" especially because of enlightened thought. These aspects were depicted in ancient and medieval thought as passions, or as independent entities that presumably invade the individual's inner world in order to dominate it. Freud included these facets in his comprehensive theory of personality.

[M]en are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them

Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 111. Taylor's book is devoted in its entirety to a clarification of this issue. For an additional discussion, see Jerrold Seigel, The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on them, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him. *Homo homini lupus.* Who, in the face of all his experience of life and history, will have the courage to dispute this assertion?⁶

Freud revealed the id, the repressed instinctual element in man, and included it in man's self-perception: it demanded close examination. This expanded understanding of the inner self contributed, inter alia, to the rise of new trends in Western culture that to a considerable degree discarded the fundamental tenets of enlightened thought. Despite his declared secularism, Freud contributed greatly to the increased interest in the approach of various religions to the instinctual dark forces within man.

Despite Taylor's claim that the distinction between the inner and outer elements of the self is characteristic of modern Western thought, some Western scholars question this division. For instance, the concept of intentionality developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), based on the thought of his teacher Franz Brentano, who went beyond formal logic and psychologization, undermines the classical distinction between object and subject. In a new definition of subjectivity, Husserl argues that all consciousness is intentional, that is, directed to what is outside the subject rather than the supposed depths within.7 This line of thought influenced a series of twentieth-century German and French philosophers. Husserl does not negate the subject, or the understanding of the inner-outer dichotomy, but rather corrects the Western understanding of its nature.

The postmodernist philosopher Michel Foucault completely denies the existence of the subject, and with it the division of outer and inner, subjective and objective reality. In practice, postmodernists attempted to undermine the psychoanalytical conception of subjectivity. They denied the very possibility of speaking about an independent inner human essence.

Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 58.

On intentionality in Brentano's teachings, see Jan Pavlik, "Brentano's Theory of Intentionality," Brentano Studien 3 (1991): 63-70. On intentionality in Husserl's thought, see McIntyre and Woodruff, "Theory of Intentionality," in Husserl's Phenomenology: A Textbook, ed. J. N. Mohanty and William R. McKenna (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1989), 147-79; and in greater detail idem, Husserl and Intentionality: A Study of Mind, Meaning, and Language (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1982).

First and foremost, their argument was an attack on the great project of the Enlightenment, which championed the concept of the "subject" in its original meaning—"what is located under"—as the heroic founding focus of human experience and action. Foucault's writings posit the subject as a fiction, the product of social and cultural forces. It has no inner essence or universal validity; it is changing, fluid, and has many faces.

[The subject] is not a substance; it is a form and this form is not above all or always identical to itself. You do not have towards yourself the same kind of relationship when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes and votes or speaks up in a meeting, and when you try to fulfill your desires in a sexual relationship. . . . In each case, we play, we establish with one's self some different form of relationship.8

According to the postmodernists, our identity is a construction of the culture in which we live, of the social order into which we are born. This culture gives us the linguistic tools and the symbolic codes with which we think about ourselves and about the world. Does the acknowledgement of these conditioning brings into question the existence of the hidden inner essence of man?

Emil Durkheim, the founder of the French sociological tradition, first conceived the self as and entity fashioned by society. His thought formed the base of French structuralism and influenced both the anthropological school of Claude Levi-Strauss and the linguistic movement following de Saussure. Despite Foucault's insistence on the difference between his conception and the structuralism of Levi-Strauss and de Saussure,9 his objections to the essentiality of the subject attest to his affinity with structuralist

Raul Fornet-Betancourt et al., "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984," Philosophy & Social Criticism 12 (1987): 121. My thanks to Asaf Sagiv for drawing my attention to this source.

[&]quot;If I suspended all reference to the speaking object, it was not to discover laws of construction or forms that could be applied in the same way by all speaking objects, nor was it to give voice to the great universal discourse that is common to all men at a particular period. On the contrary, my aim was to show what the differences consisted of, how it was possible for men, within the same discursive practice, to speak of different objects, to have contrary opinions, and to make contradictory choices; my aim was also to show in what way discursive practices were distinguished from one another; in short, I wanted not to exclude the problem of the subject, but to define the positions and functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse" (Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith [New York: Pantheon, 1972], 200).

thought. Apparently, Durkheim's sociology exerted greater influence on this way of thinking than Foucault himself was willing to admit.

The waves spread especially by the postmodernist critique of the subject intensify the ongoing discussion about its existence and nature. To quote Jacques Derrida: "This question of the subject and the living 'who' is at the heart of the most pressing concerns of modern societies." ¹⁰ Indeed, debates about which of the two factors, environment or heredity ("nature or nurture"), is more central in constructing the personality rest on two worldviews with different consequences in terms of values, determinism, and indeterminism and free will. Similarly, the disagreement between sociology and psychology is predicated upon fundamental axiological differences between the two disciplines, and is not simply a matter of scientific dispute. However, since both of these perspectives are firmly focused on reality, this philosophical and ethical divergence is concealed behind the appearance of their objectivity. Sociological and postmodernist views, which see the self as a product of social conditioning, are more deterministic. They grudgingly accept the anarchistic or nihilistic conclusions that follow from the idea that the individual is motivated by a social and cultural conditioning over which he or she has no control. Philosophical and psychological views that stress the substantiality of inner man assume the existence of free will and rationality. In short, these intellectual positions forestall the idea that the subject is a field of opposing forces in favor of a model of the subject as an essential entity despite everything.

Strengthening the awareness of the subject to himself is central to preventing this disintegration of the subject for such philosophies. According to Durkheim and his followers, the future of culture is conditional upon its ability to create secular mechanisms that will substitute the unifying force of traditional religious rites and preserve social cohesion in new ways. For Freud and his disciples, the future of culture is dependent upon the ability of individuals to correctly manage their inner world through the conscious illumination of the dark elements at work within them.

At the end of the twentieth century, the subject was declared dead by postmodernists. This statement could be compared with Nietzsche's

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in Who Comes after the Subject?, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), 115. See also Nick Mansfield, Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

proclamation of the death of God in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Aaron David Gordon said of Nietzsche's declaration: "All that died was the obsolete and fossilized concept concerning God, but not God, not the unknown that you encounter whenever you think and feel, but which cannot be perceived or attained, that you run into whenever you live yourself, whenever you feel, think, speak, without knowing what it is and from where it comes."11 Similar sentiments could be voiced about the death of the subject: the concept that became obsolete and fossilized might have died at the end of the twentieth century, but not the subject that you encounter within yourself whenever you think and feel.

On the History of Interest in Inner Religion

Beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Western culture showed increased interest in the connection between religion and the inner psychological life of the individual.¹² This interest was sparked by the search for new forms of religious life, as sociologists by extensive

Aaron David Gordon, Man and Nature [Heb] Edited by Yuval Jobani and Ron Margolin (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2020), 94. Gordon (1856-1922) was both a Torah scholar and an autodidact maskil (member of the Jewish Enlightenment) born in the Ukraine. In 1904, at the age of forty-eight, he joined a group of young pioneers from Eastern Europe who, including David Ben-Gurion and other later founders of the State of Israel, immigrated to the Land of Israel, in order to work as an agricultural laborer. He was an important thinker who lived among these young people and joined the group that founded the first kibbutz, Deganyah, near the Sea of Galilee. His outstanding personality and thought influenced the founding generation of the State of Israel. His original existentialist philosophy was marked by spiritual-religious searching. Gordon took an interest in Buddhism and was erudite in modern philosophy and Russian

¹² The rise of individualism and subjectivity characteristic of Western society in recent decades is expressed, inter alia, in the Western citizens' inclination to limit their commitment to external authorities and to compliance with the laws of the country in which they live. This limitation usually entails denying the right of other external authorities, such as religious establishments, to fashion the individual's life in areas not essential to the existence of the state, such as sexual and marital matters, or the realm of opinions and beliefs. The elevation of subjectivity and the modern concept of the self to fashioners of the individual's reality has greatly weakened the force of the allegedly objective revelation standing at the basis of the historical revealed religions, and especially the monotheistic religions. Since these religions justify the moral and religious demands of their faith communities by force of such claims, it is not surprising that the enhanced standing of subjectivity corresponds to the decline in the coercive power of the religious authority, which argues for a transcendental and objective source of its power. Personal experience and subjective considerations have

secularization paradigms predicted a bleak future for institutional religion in the modern world. 13 By revealing the subjective psychological contents of the religious individual, thinkers such as William James and Rudolf Otto showed that modern man could come into personal contact with religious life, while disregarding its institutionalized and social aspects. These elements of religion were increasingly perceived as external only, devoid of inner psychological meaning, and irrelevant for the modern social outer life that replace organized religion.

This interest began in the early nineteenth century, with those European philosophers who were profoundly affected by the Romanticism of thinkers such as Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), Christian Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829), and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). The works of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the father of religious existentialism, who was influenced by these writers, are among the cornerstones of the conception of inner religion. In the second half of that century, this trend was continued by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra presented the prophet of a new religion who showed an alternative way to affirm life. Nietzsche's call was like the little boy's claim that the king is naked in Hans Christian Andersen's story "The Emperor's New Clothes." For Nietzsche, Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century had become a petrified system of social practices, devoid of any inner meaning and no longer joyful. Accordingly, Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, in order to make room for something new. This declaration, along with the rise of existentialist philosophy, gave significant momentum to the study of psychology at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

On the one hand, twentieth-century psychoanalysis fueled the psychologization of religion. This development questioned the transcendental axioms at the basis of the monotheistic religions. Freud, who regarded religion as produced by obsessive neuroses and the Oedipus complex, argued for its substitution by psychoanalytical thought, which would be more successful in healing man's ills. Jung, who identified the divine with an archetype within the collective unconscious, ascribed great importance

become the decisive factor in the individuals' decisions, especially as regards their private life.

¹³ For a current formulation of the secularization paradigm, see Olivier Tschannen, "The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 36 (1997): 109-22.

to religious content that he found in dreams and myths. However, he also used this content reductively, in order to improve his therapeutic method.14 Jung stated that his approach to religion was based on an empirical objective point of view: "Psychological existence is subjective in so far as an idea occurs in only one individual. But it is objective in so far as that idea is shared by a society—by a consensus gentium."15 According to Jung, a religious symbol is not a signifier that attests to the nature of an outer god; rather, it is a collective human expression of a religious content that occurs empirically in the individual psyche.

Other researchers, influenced by philosophy and psychology, different than that of Freud, were more positive in their understanding of the nature of religion and its place in modern life. The Varieties of Religious Experience by William James is one of the foundational books on the psychological aspects of the religious phenomenon. James's fundamental assumption was that the external and institutionalized aspects of different religions could be separated from the inner, psychological processes occurring in people who report religious experiences. His position was that although inner life is inextricably bound to its outer expression, differentiating between the two components is possible by way of the study of religion. James stated that mental occurrences are existential and irrefutable facts, and that their existence could not be questioned by philosophy. Therefore, subjective religious experience could provide the base for the examination of the reality of inner religious life.16

At the beginning of the twentieth century Georg Simmel, in his book Sociology of Religion, analyzed the difference between institutionalized religion and natural religiosity.¹⁷ His student Martin Buber developed this distinction and defined religiosity as natural religious sentiment and religion

See Carl G. Jung, Psychology and Religion, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969). On the debate between Buber and Jung, see Judith Buber Agassi, Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 34-71, 201-24; Martin Buber, "Religion and Modern Thinking," in Buber, Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1988), 63–92.

Jung, Psychology and Religion, 6. 15

¹⁶ William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1928). See especially lecture 2, 26-52.

Georg Simmel, Sociology of Religion, trans. Curt Rosenthal (New York: Philosophical 17 Library, 1959), 23-24. See also Simmel, Essays on Religion, ed. and trans. Horst Jurgen Helle with Ludwig Nieder (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 20-25, 121-33.

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