

Article

God, Religion, and War: Language, Concept, and the Problem of Definition from Genesis to *Jihad* to Levinas

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Abstract: Using a discussion of the etymology of *re-lig-io* as a starting point, this essay begins by considering the problem of religion—of understanding God, and of language as an instrument for achieving the ends of religion and that understanding—and the problem for religion of revelation and interpretation. It follows to the consequences of this double complication for understanding “war” in the biblical and early Christian traditions. The essay leads, then, to a tri-valent discussion of “*jihad*”, and from this *jihad* centerpiece toward further versions of these complications as they apply to mysticism, medieval Jewish thought and thence toward and into modernity, from Spinoza to Levinas.

Keywords: *religio*; revelation; interpretation; Qumran; Crusades; *jihad*; mysticism; Gersonides; Spinoza; Levinas

1. The Problematic of Religion and the Israelite-Judean Substratum

One might begin by defining terms, particularly because this essay has as its intention to observe how the first two key terms in the overall title of this volume and their conceptual cognates have been variously used in particular contexts. Part of the range of understanding “war” and “peace”—especially in “religious culture”—reflects the problematic of religion and its understanding in the first place.

The word “religion” is a direct offspring of the Latin term, “*religio*”—which is comprised of three elements. The first, “re-”, is a prefix that means “back” or “again.” The second, “-lig-”, is a root meaning “bind/ing”. The third, the suffix “-io”, simply indicates that the word to which it is attached is, grammatically speaking, a feminine singular noun. The obvious question is: to what does religion bind us back/again? The answer, equally obvious, is: to the source that humans, across time and space, have believed has made us. This leads to a second question: why do we feel the need to be bound back/again to that source? The answer is that humans have also believed, across time and space, that, having created us, that source has the power to destroy us—to help or harm us, to further or hinder us, to bless or curse us. With our sense of an array of related positive/negative possibilities—and our desire to access the positive—humans have, across our history and geography, shaped diverse means, using diverse instruments, of connecting ourselves to our contending understandings of that source. In short, we have contrived religion as a means of survival, be it in the here and now or in whatever we have come to believe, (which may differ from one *religio* to another), is the thereafter.

All of this is inherently problematic. That source is by definition beyond our own human realm, which means that how we understand its configuration (one God or many; lacking any sense-accessible form or assuming human shape—for example) and the most effective way to be connected back/again to it derives from diverse, particular belief systems and are beyond our ability to ascertain using the intellectual and other instruments that we typically use to understand our own reality. It also means that that source connects to us by revealing itself at certain times and places to certain individuals—we might call them prophets, priests, poets, artists—who serve as conduits through which a sense is communicated regarding what that source is, how and why it formed us, and what is necessary in order to continue to flourish in the world that it has shaped.



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This process, *revelation*, is found at the beginning of every religious tradition and is part of the problematic process of understanding God. God—or whatever other term we might use to refer to that source (but all terms are inherently limited by virtue of being human-derived and thus reflecting the human experience and understanding of reality)—*reveals* itself. Or so every religious tradition believes. Revelation presents a dual complication. First, when the prophetic conduit is still among us, does s/he—and thus do and can we—understand what the revelations *mean*, given that that wholly “other” source does not speak our language, so to speak. More importantly, perhaps, in the long run: once that/those sacerdotal individual—or individuals—is/are gone from among us, understanding the revelation is exponentially more difficult: we are consigned to the ongoing act of interpretation. While that in and of itself is not necessarily a problem (perhaps it is intended by divinity to be part of the process of our connecting back to it), it becomes a problem when individuals confuse their interpretations with the revelation itself—especially if such individuals possess the power to impose their particular interpretation on others.

Almost inevitably, then, religion finds itself interwoven with politics and can beget violence as much as gentleness, strife as much as love, war as much as peace. One can certainly see all of this playing out within the Abrahamic traditions. God is understood—*believed*—to be all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing, and ongoingly interested and engaged in human affairs, but can we *know* what these descriptives mean in God’s terms, as opposed to our own? Inherent linguistic issues regarding God and God’s connection to humans are already apparent in the early chapters of Genesis. How and why does the all-powerful, all-knowing God *allow* Adam and Eve to defy a direct order with regard to consuming a certain piece of fruit? Or—a few chapters later, in Gen 6—when God purposes to destroy all of humanity except for Noah and his family, because except for Noah, humanity was evil: *what exactly did they all do?* What is “evil”? Nowhere is that term explicitly defined.

The truth of this problematic has particularly significant applicability in the matter of war, peace, and their concomitants across Abrahamic history. We might, for instance, observe it when we arrive at the era of the early Israelite kingship, when, in II Samuel 15, God instructs King Saul, by way of the priest/prophet, Samuel, to make war against the Amalekites and notes that, with God’s support, he will be victorious—and that he should kill every last man, woman, child, and animal. The reasoning for such a draconian divine order (“... for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt”—v 2) requires and receives considerable rabbinic interpretative discussion. Moreover, when Saul fails to fully fulfill that order—allowing the Amalekite king to survive, along with cattle and sheep to be sacrificed to the Lord—Samuel rails furiously, that “to obey [the Lord] is better than sacrifice” (v 22). This is the final straw, in fact, that leads to Saul’s eventual loss of his throne (to the house of David) and his life (to the Philistines).

The Israelites eventuate, nearly a millennium after the time of Saul, as Judaeans who, late in the Second Temple Period, endure the fragmentation of their mainstream community—and at least one group of Judaeans withdraws from the mainstream to dwell in isolation in the desert, near the Dead Sea, at a site later called Qumran. Among the handful of scrolls (aside from those recording nearly all of the books of the eventual Hebrew Bible) produced by the Qumran community is one popularly called the “Battle Scroll”. It describes a final *war*—between those who are allied with God and led by “the Good Teacher” and those evil forces, led by the “Wicked Priest”, who oppose God’s will. The eventual outcome that is predicted is the wholesale destruction of all of those who are not part of the Qumran community—pagans and Judaeans alike—and the establishment of a new, perfect reality. The Qumran community itself disappeared—either scattered or destroyed—during the time of the first Judean Revolt against Roman power in 65–70 CE that culminated in the destruction of the Judean Temple in Jerusalem.¹

One notes two relevant developmental issues within the few following generations. The first is that the Judaeans evolve into two increasingly separate communities of Jews and Christians. This schism in turn revolves around a handful of primary issues: differences of interpretation regarding the revelation-inspired course of history up to that point in time.

Firstly, the two sibling traditions differently interpret what *constitutes* the revelation: for Jews the time of revelation ended around 444 BCE; for Christians it not only continued for more than half a millennium thereafter, but surged upward as it were, so that the culmination of that era was embodied in the ultimate conduit between God and ourselves: Jesus of Nazareth.² And therefore the Bible canonized by Judaism around 140 CE was limited to what, when the Christian Bible was canonized around 393–7 CE, was merely the “Old Testament”. Furthermore, Jesus, as a unique intermediary between humanity and divinity came gradually—“officially” by 325 CE—to be understood by mainstream Christians to be both entirely divine and entirely human.³

Both sides of this spiritual equation considered themselves to be the *verus Israel*—“true Israel,” that properly continues and fulfills Hebrew biblical prophetic predictions. This applied in particular to the long-awaited anointed one (*mashiah/khristos*). For evolving Christianity, Jews were stuck in denial that Jesus was the fulfillment; for evolving Judaism, Christians were stuck in their embrace of Jesus, whereas the messiah had not yet arrived.⁴ Of further relevance to our discussion, the final book of the “New Testament”—*Revelation* aka *The Apocalypse of St. John*—resonates from the Battle Scroll written at Qumran during the late Judean period: the end of time as we know it will be marked by a cataclysmic struggle in the culminating war between God’s forces for good and those, led by the Satan, (in lieu of the “Battle Scroll”’s Wicked Priest), for evil. In the end, the latter will be destroyed by being submerged in a lake of fire.

2. From Judean Schism to War and Peace in Evolving Christianity

The second issue of particular relevance for this discussion is that the time leading up to these developments is marked by what the pagan Roman Empire refers to as the *Pax Romana*: Roman Peace. What is important is that this term refers to a condition marked simply by the relative absence of war. Thus, the long history of external and internal violence that was so significant to the ongoing expansion of the Roman Republic and its offspring, the Empire, reached a point when, for long stretches of time, no such violence was necessary: the borders were established and secure and the far-flung populations within them were not overly restless—or at least so it seemed to the Romans in Rome and elsewhere far from the borders and unaware of or at least unaffected by those groups that remained restless.

As we shall note shortly, “absence of war”—a negative—is not the only way to understand “peace”, and the difference between that negative and a more positive sense of peace will reflect religious developments within and beyond the Roman imperial period. The schism within the Israelite-Judean tradition that yielded Judaism and Christianity will be a significant part of thinking of peace beyond its “absence of war” mode—and part of the ongoing matrix of interpreting how the Creator-God intends humans and creation to evolve.

Judaism moves forward through the interpretive agency of an extended rabbinic tradition; Christianity through the patristic-scholastic tradition the early part of which is dominated by St Augustine (354–428 CE). By the time Augustine is the Bishop of Hippo, the pagan Roman world that encompassed most of the Mediterranean and European worlds, as well as much of the Middle East, has begun a significant reshaping toward becoming Christian.⁵ Within a few generations of Augustine’s death, the last of the Western Roman emperors, Romulus Augustulus, has been dethroned (in 476 CE) and the ancient Roman Empire has made significant strides toward becoming Medieval Europe.

Moreover, that same secular military sense of aggressive self—the roots of which, as with so many key aspects of Christianity, may already be found in St Augustine’s late fourth-early fifth century legitimization of “just wars”⁶—had shown itself capable of being directed against and not only on behalf of or in alliance with the Church. The political hegemony of Christianity was troubled by a series of external and internal issues, with the consequence that even the phrase “on behalf of or in alliance with” may not be seen as referencing a simple, uniform condition. The same Council of Nicaea that emphatically declared the fully

divine/human nature of Jesus yielded Arian's minority view that denied the *homoiousia* of Father and Son—a view termed as heresy by the majority. Heresy would continue in variant forms for many centuries. Thus, for instance, a Monophysite view that denied the reality of Jesus' human nature also emerged.⁷ The Jews, increasingly marginalized, remained a spiritual competitor scattered as an archipelago of islands across expanding Christian seas. Various forms of paganism remained active into the fifth and sixth centuries. The relationship between Church and State—arguing over whether kings and emperors or bishops and popes should be the ultimate authority for governing society—reached crisis proportions in the eighth century. By that time, a new claimant to an absolutely correct understanding of God, God's prophetic conduit, and how humans can properly bind themselves back to God—Islam—had appeared on the stage of history.

By the early eighth century, in fact, Islam extended its spiritual arms from the Pyrenees to the Himalayas. What followed for the next few centuries was, among other things, a varied range of Christian–Muslim conflicts most intensely defined by a series of nine Crusades.⁸ That term itself underscores a distinct interphase between war and religion, since it refers to the ambition to carry the cross (Latin: *crux*) into the Middle East and specifically toward Jerusalem, to return to Christian control what had been lost by the Byzantine Christians to the Seljuk Turkic Muslims a generation earlier.⁹ For the purposes of this discussion, four particular Crusade-related issues are notable. The first is that in the capture of Jerusalem in the First Crusade, in 1099, the Crusaders reveled in spilling the blood of both Muslims and Jews—Godfrey of Bouillon's account of that triumph ebulliently references the flowing of Muslim and Jewish blood through the streets, “up to [the crusaders'] knees and bridle reins”.¹⁰ One might connect this kind of comment to the layered issue in the next paragraph to ask the question: what constitutes a just war in the Augustinian sense—with respect both to the act of “fighting the infidels” and to the nature of *how* one fights.

For the second Crusade-related issue pertains to the precise requirement for what Pope Urban II had promised to his hoped-for army—remission of sins, and with it, a more direct path to Paradise—in a public sermon (at the Council of Clermont) before the First Crusade was undertaken. Was it necessary to *die* liberating Jerusalem? To fight with a *pure spiritual* focus? When the Crusaders were defeated for the most part in the Second Crusade, one of that event's strongest advocates, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, concluded and bemoaned the fact that too many Crusaders must have been focused on plunder and not on spiritual matters—and therefore were defeated. Bernard was also distressed at the massacres of Jews in the Rhineland that took place along the way, particularly during this Crusade, largely inspired by the preaching of a Cistercian monk, Rudolph. For—this is the third issue—an ever-broadening sense of *othering* that the Crusades encapsulated meant not only that the Jews were placed in the same infidel category with the Muslims for the purposes of Crusader violence.¹¹ Later, in the Fourth Crusade, the Western Christian armies chose to go no farther than Constantinople, sacking the capital of Byzantium on the grounds that Orthodox Christians were as worthy of being attacked as an “Other” as were Muslims and Jews.¹²

The fourth issue pertains to the broadest of questions being asked in the context of this bloody era. From the time of the First Crusade forward, not only were there those who wondered whether, in order to gain the promised remission of sins, one had to die fighting, or whether it was sufficient to have fought for Jerusalem and lived to tell the tale. More relevant to our own discussion was the question asked by the French King Louis IX (Saint Louis)—or perhaps Jean de Joinville—in the context of the Seventh Crusade that Louis led with some reluctance: *is this really what God wants us to be doing?*¹³ The reasoning behind the question was straightforward: since Louis understood Christianity to be undoubtedly God's preferred mode of human–divine engagement—God's preferred *re-lig-io*—then Christians should always be defeating the infidel Other! Yet, Christians won sometimes, and Muslims won sometimes. Maybe this is *not* what God wants us to be doing—or put otherwise (although Louis did not specifically think in these terms): if one

thinks along the lines of Augustinian just war theory, perhaps these are not all just wars in God's eyes. Ironically enough, having returned home after a war effort that resulted in no clear triumph for either side, Louis was later induced in part by his voracious brother, Charles of Anjou, to undertake another—the Eighth—Crusade, in spite of his doubts, and picked up the dysentery from which he died, in Tunisia, nearly 1500 miles from the Holy Land that was his martial and spiritual goal.

What, on the other hand, might one say of the Muslim view of all of this? Where Islam is concerned there is a very logical place to direct the question—another matter of terminology. The term is the Arabic word, *jihad*, meaning “struggle”—and popularly, in the West but also in some parts of the contemporary Muslim world, understood to mean “Holy War.” *Jihad*, however, operates on three levels. The primary level focuses on one's self, struggling to make one as effective a *muslim*—one who submits to God's will—as possible.¹⁴ The secondary level applies to the larger sphere of the “*Umma*” (the [Muslim] people) and only the tertiary level even pertains to the realm beyond the *dar al 'Islam*, [“the Realm of Submission [to God's Will]”), much less necessarily embracing violence and war as a method for *jihad*.

Within this threefold matrix there is an inherent double issue with double consequences. As always in the history of religion—to repeat—one is necessarily caught between the faith-bound certainty of revelation and the complexity of interpretation, and each of the Abrahamic traditions offers to its constituents the certainty that the text of the Torah (and Hebrew Bible) or the Gospels (and Old and New Testaments) or the Qur'an represents God's definitive word through one or more intermediating prophets or messengers. Once these texts are committed to a canonical written form, we are caught in the complication of interpretation.

3. Islam and the Shaping of *Jihad*

Where *jihad* is concerned, the double consequence is obvious. We might reasonably assume that primary *jihad* is not only purely spiritual *jihad*, but is effected through spiritual means (although the spiritual might be reinforced by physical means: fasts or other denials of the body's needs or performing a particular number of *rakats* in prayer). When, however, one turns to secondary and tertiary *jihad*, an obvious interpretational issue will be: what are the most appropriate instruments of the struggle? Concisely put: *the word or the sword*?

The very fact of interpretation within Islam has led, across history, to the early Sunni–Shi'i schism, and beyond that split, to *Ash'arite* and *Mu'tazilite* understandings of fundamental religious issues (such as God's attributes, the Qur'an as created or uncreated, the reality of human free will, the validity of the use of reason within the understanding of revelation, et al.), to say nothing of diverse schools (*madhabs*) of jurisprudence, from Hanbali, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanafi; to Ja'fari, Zaydi, and Ismaili (to say nothing of minor schools)—and within Sufi (mystical) Islam, to scores of different *tariqas*.¹⁵ Across geography and history within and beyond the borders of the *dar al 'Islam*, *jihad* has meant discussion and debate and it has also meant warfare. Therefore, it is no small matter to say that *jihad* is this and not that: our human penchant for interpretation, complicated by the limits of words when confronted with describing and conveying an understanding of and commandments from the Ineffable has meant that *jihad* has had varied practical applications over the centuries.¹⁶

This complexity is further complicated by how we interpret the need for *jihad*: not only what it means to be a better *muslim*—i.e., (to repeat), someone who *submits* [to God's will]—but what the consequences are if one fails to fulfill that desideratum. Consider: for Christianity (to be concise), the consumption in Eden by Adam and Eve of the fruit forbidden to them by God ends up interpreted as an Original Sin profound in its repercussions. The notion that all of humanity is the heir to that Sin merely by being born as a consequence of sexual congress, combined with a well-evolved concept of Hell in all of its horrors, yields the unhappy fate for all of humankind to end up forever in that Hell unless it embraces the human/divine Jesus as its savior.¹⁷

Jews interpret the act of Adam and Eve as disastrous on a moral and practical plane (they are thrown out of the Garden of Eden, after all; he will have to work hard and she will bear children in pain, etc.), but without the generation-by-generation consequences explicated by Christianity. Nor is there even a real word for “Hell” in Hebrew, much less the sort of visions of it endemic to Christian thought.¹⁸ While Islam offers a concept of Hell and also a distinct concept of Final Judgment that can lead someone to that unhappy place, the road to damnation is not based on the sin of Adam and Eve. On the contrary, the Qur’an is rather explicit that one person’s sins cannot yield consequences for someone else: “No soul will be questioned for what another soul has done” (Q. 17:15). Therefore, the very nature of sin and evil, particularly as understood through the act of Adam and Eve, (and/or referenced through Noah), is necessarily subject to an interpretive process when we are trying to determine how most fully to submit to God’s will—and each tradition, speaking broadly, goes in its own direction.

What we *believe* is inevitably interwoven with what and how we *understand* and how and what we *understand* is interwoven with what we *believe*. The great scholastic, St Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), recognizes this even when he is undertaking the first fully articulated argument for God’s existence—the Ontological Argument, contained in his ca 1085 work, *Proslogium*—when at the end of the first chapter he notes that “I do not seek to understand that I may believe, I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe: that unless I believed, I would not understand”. And indeed, his “proof” is predicated on an already-accepted belief not only in God’s existence but in an understanding of God as perfect—as a Being than which there can be none more perfect—and that to exist is more perfect than not to exist (St Anselm 1966).

I make this last point to underscore the historical tendency of humans to confuse our belief in a given set of revelations with the interpretations to which the revelations have been subject. If we add *love* to the issue of revelation/interpretation/belief/certitude complexity—and the issue of “knowing” what constitutes God’s Will and “knowing” how serious the abrogation of that Will might be, together with particulars of the potentially negative consequences of that abrogation—then *jihad* with regard to others becomes potentially further complicated.

For loving myself and loving God and therefore struggling with myself so that I am a better *muslim* is simple enough as a concept. Loving others, both because God suggests that we love one another and simply because one loves certain others—most obviously, family and friends—is also simple to understand but potentially complicating when that secondary love is placed in the context of secondary *jihad*. If I love you and therefore want the best for you, I naturally want to struggle to help you become a more effective *muslim*, which at least will make you a happier being in this life and perhaps the next and at most keep you from Hell—if the tradition in which I believe understands that there is such a thing.

Thereby, of course, hangs the double conundrum: if my tradition teaches that there is Hell and that those found morally wanting end up in that place, I believe that loved ones who fall into this last category are in obvious danger. Aside from the question of whether Hell exists (as it does *not* in every tradition), I am bound by the problem of whether or not I am accurate in my assessment as to what it is that my loved ones (and I) need to be doing to please God and what not to do in order not to displease God: a constant *jihad* to understand this and to know how to improve myself and others must never let me rest with the certainty that I *have* it. I must *continue* to struggle. (Think Plato: my life and that of those I love, together with important moral and ethical principles and concepts, may never simply transpire, unexamined, but must progress under constant cross-examination.)

My loved ones may, if, say, I am a Muslim, fall within the ‘*Umma* but it is also conceivable that some of them are beyond the ‘*Umma*, in the *dar al’Harb*. Ought I to struggle with them all to compel them to see the Truth of God as I see it, or as the leaders whom I follow and respect see it? If I have found the right path—the *shari’a* that leads me in the wilderness of existence to the water of eternal life—ought I not enjoin others to join me on

that path, and ought I, if I can, use whatever means are at my disposal to ensure that they do so?¹⁹ Do those means include violence: is *jihad*, then, definable as Holy War?

How capable am I of recognizing the possibility that *my path could be mistaken*—that I and those who agree with me could be wrong about what we believe, based on our misinterpretation of the revelation’s message; that what I believe, even if it is perfectly correct for me, might not be so for others? Given the infinite variety of humans, trees, leaves, and snowflakes created by the one God, is it not at *least* as likely that there are diverse correct paths that can bind (*-lig-*) us back (*re-*) to God than that there is only one? How capable am I of understanding the degree to which my *ego*—my self-focus—may impinge on my understanding of God and the path to God?

Interestingly, this difficulty is assuaged in a particular way by the Abrahamic mystical traditions. The mystic, by definition, believes that there is a hidden innermost depth to God that s/he can access, even as God’s depths are inaccessible—and even as, in the Muslim and Jewish traditions God is understood to be absolutely without form and thus without the spatial aspect that the notion of “innermost depth” implies. But mysticism embraces the paradoxes that define any attempts to grasp, engage, understand, “know” God. The mystic seeks the unseekable, the *mysterion* (“closedness, hiddenness”, in Greek) but also believes that the God who is sought is, at the same time, seeking the mystic—seeking to unify, to *bind back* the mystic’s soul (a tiny “piece” of Godness in all of us) to the source of every soul.²⁰

One way to understand this—without forgetting that words are always limited and limiting instruments of engaging, exploring, and explaining God—is to say that the mystic seeks to be completely filled with God. In order to be filled with God one must be empty of self—*empty of ego and of self-focus*. And ego is precisely the element that might cause an individual to engage in *jihad* with others over matters of faith. Sufism refers to the emptiness process as *fana’*—a dissipation of one’s self into Godness. To be relieved of ego, of self, can lead in at least two directions. One is the direction of danger: if I cannot regain my ego once I have been emptied of it, once I have escaped it (achieving *ek-stasis*, a condition of being outside myself), then I will go mad—or I will die or apostasize.

If my ability to return to this reality—and to communicate the experience well enough to benefit the community around me—is compromised, then I will have fundamentally failed. For my goal must be not to gain enlightenment but to gain it in order to improve the world of others around me—otherwise my goal is too *self-focused* (so I will by definition be doomed to fail in the first place). If my goal is to improve the world around me but I so completely lose myself in Godness that I cannot regain myself, my goal will not have been achieved. The danger of losing myself is layered with possibilities.

The second direction, however, is that, in emptying myself of ego I may come to a clearer sense of how diverse the paths—the *tariqas*—to God’s *innerness* actually are.²¹ Given the endless diversity of humanity and of all of the Creator’s creation, it seems inherently odd that God would expect in only this one area of human enterprise, religion, a single path back, and the mystic has a unique potential to recognize this oddness and to push back against it, articulating a broad *shar’ia*.

This perspective expressed itself historically in the words of a number of Sufis.²² To name two outstanding examples—both of them individuals well versed in conventional legalistic *shar’ia* and both of them engaged in life-long spiritual *jihad*, ever seeking the path to effective *islam*—“submission”—vis-à-vis God. Ibn al-‘Arabi (1165–1240), popularly known as *Muhyi id-Din* (“Reviver of the Faith”), who drew together myriad prior threads within Muslim thought in writing extensively about Islam, also noted that in the Qur’an we are told that “wherever one turns, there is the Face of God” (Q II.115). His understanding of that verse, in part, led him to write, in his *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusus al-Hikam*):

... My heart can take on any form:
A meadow for gazelles,
A cloister for monks,
For the idols, sacred ground,

Ka'ba for the circling pilgrim,
 The tablets of the Torah,
 The pages of the Qur'an.
 My creed is love;
 Wherever its caravan turns along the way,
 That is my belief,
 My faith.

His view is explicitly that aspirants of diverse spiritual traditions can become one with God. The heart to which he refers is both his own heart, assuming an omnimorphous condition—and the heart of God, speaking through him. For his heart is emptied of self and filled with God, but he has managed to regain a self that can communicate his enlightened condition. The God he experiences is a God of love seeking reunion with all those who seek Him—not only those who follow a particular *shar'ia* or *tariqa* or form of faith.

A generation later, Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273), who began his career as a prominent master of jurisprudence, took a sharp turn in his life's *tariqa*, prompted by an unnerving question asked by Shams of Tabriz, who appeared in Rumi's classroom and blurted out: "who is the greater Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad or (the Sufi) Beyazid Bustani, who said 'how great is my glory!'"? The notion that the latter had been filled with God in a particular manner—so that he was in the moment of that outcry a channel through which God Itself spoke (as opposed to Bustani speaking as some egotistic politician might)—could suggest a condition of God-filledness even greater than that experienced by the Seal of the Prophets. But that is not possible, since no human spiritual being can achieve greater intimacy with God than Muhammad!

Suddenly moved to consider that *shar'ia* might not be the be all and end all of binding one's self back to God, Rumi moved further away from teaching and thinking about jurisprudence and deeper and deeper into a dynamic Sufi *tariqa* renowned both for its mind-bending spinning *sema* and for the poetry that poured out of Rumi himself.²³ One of the more famous passages ascribed to him is (in part):

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, nor Hindu,
 Buddhist, Sufi or Zen. Not any religion
 Or cultural system. I am not from the East
 Or the West, nor out of the ocean or up
 From the ground . . .
 And he writes:
 . . . I go into the Muslim mosque
 and the Jewish synagogue
 and the Christian church
 and I see one altar.

There are those who argue that since these overtly universalistic passages are not from the canonical *Mesnevi* or from the *Divani Tabrizi Shams* (the two multi-volumed main bodies of Rumi's written work), then they may not be his. Perhaps, but within the *Mesnevi* itself there are also passages such as

Every holy person seems to have a different doctrine
 And practice, but there's really only one work (I: 3087–3088).

And, in a lengthy passage (in *Mesnevi* II, 1750ff), Moses is represented as being instructed by God that

... *Ways of worshipping are not to be ranked as better
or worse than one another.*
Hindus do Hindu things.
The Dravidian Muslims in India do what they do.
It's all praise, and it's all right.
... the love-religion has no code or doctrine.
Only God.

The words in italics are presented as God's, the non-italicized words are the poet's comment on God's words. There are more passages like these in Rumi's poetry. He, like Ibn al-'Arabi, was a very devout Muslim—but he saw no contradiction between that and embracing the full spiritual legitimacy of others whose form of faith was different from his own—including non-Abrahamic faiths.

The point is that both of these mystics, among many others, in simultaneously bursting beyond the bounds of the self and finding the piece of Godness within themselves—so that *ek-stasis* and *en-stasis* are one and the same—understood (in an era fraught with violence and strife—with endless wars—from the Mongol invasions and the *Reconquista* to the Crusades) that the spiritual *jihad* undertaken by the mystic seeking oneness with God opens him/her to true dialogical possibilities with those of different *tariqas*, different *shar'ias*, different Muslim theological and jurisprudential perspectives, as well as with those whose approach to divinity falls outside Islam.

If *jihad* by no means necessarily implies war, except in the spiritual sense—of warring with one's own soul and on behalf of the souls of others to make one's self and them better Muslims—what of the primary word for peace: *salaam*?²⁴ There are two related ways to understand the root Arabic meaning of that word. One is that it shares the root of the word *muslim*, so it implies peace that is a function of embracing God and submitting to God's will. A second aspect of the root connects it to the idea of completeness. In both possible aspects the term is a positive that contrasts significantly with the Latin word, *pax*, that is a negative—a mere absence of war, as we have noted above.²⁵

This is certainly clear in Hebrew, a sibling language to Arabic—these languages are as close, as Semitic tongues, as are, say, Spanish and Portuguese as sibling offspring of Latin—in which the word for peace, *shalom*, is barely an adjustment of the word *shalem*, meaning “complete”. Therefore, the religious traditions that make such central and purposeful use of these languages for both their revealed texts and centuries of interpretational discussions offer an inherent three-dimensionality to their concepts of peace—at least in the ideal.

4. Medieval and Post-Medieval Jewish Thought and God's Wars

This leads to the obvious question: where might we find somewhat equivalent discussions regarding peace and war within medieval Judaism? This question must yield an answer informed by radically different political circumstances compared with Christianity and Islam. Both of the latter came to assume politically dominant positions in the world at large, the first by the end of the fourth century and the second by the mid-eighth century. By contrast, by the time what we may recognize as “Judaism” emerged out of the Israelite-Judaean tradition—certainly by the year 140, with the canonization of the Hebrew Bible—Jews had ceased to govern an independent polity, and over the next 18 centuries instead occupied the position of a minority wherever they dwelt, shaped as a far-flung archipelago within vast Christian, Muslim, and often other (e.g., Hindu) seas.

Until the mid-twentieth century and the coming into existence of the State of Israel, Jews would rarely have been in a position to consider physical violence—much less war—as a viable option for pursuing their political or spiritual ends. This becomes particularly obvious in considering the important fourteenth-century work by the Provençal polymath, Levi Ben Gershon, otherwise known as Gersonides (1288–1334), whose *The Wars of the Lord*—written at length between 1317 and 1329—might seem, based on simply looking at its title, to suggest something other than what I have just asserted for medieval Judaism. However, Gersonides' text has nothing to do with war, as it turns out, but is rather an

extensive polemic intended to show that Aristotle's view of the universe as eternal—over and against the Torah, the perspective of which Gersonides is defending—is wrong, even as mediated by Maimonides. *The Wars of the Lord* discusses creation, the nature of the soul as immortal (because it is, after all, a “piece” of God within us), dreams, prophecy, divine knowledge, and providence—and so on.

Gersonides' long narrative neither comments on physical war, per se, nor therefore either approves or disapproves this or that form of it, and is thus completely different in its discussion from Augustine's discussion or the discussion of *jihad* in its secondary and tertiary meanings; if anything, it comes closest in feel to the discussion of *jihad* in its primary, inwardly directed meaning. Why such a title, then? It is derived from a verse in the Torah (Num 21:14–15): “Therefore it is said in the Book of Wars of the Lord, what He did in the Sea of Reeds, and in the brooks of Arnon . . . ”—in the context of the Israelites' first military contacts with Canaanites, their God-aided success against the latter, their loss of faith, nonetheless, and the peculiar punishment for that failure of faith, of poisonous “fiery” serpents, followed by atonement and cure by way of a “serpent of brass.” The referenced book does not exist—or at least, no longer exists—but the medieval midrash known as the *Book of Yasher*²⁶ asserts that such a scroll was a group effort, written by Moses, Joshua, and the Children of Israel; and the Spanish rabbinic commentator and poet, Moses Ibn Ezra (1060–1138), took it to be a narrative that covered struggles to assert God's primacy that extended from the time of Abraham to the time of Moses. Ibn Ezra and others connected the book to another Torah passage, Ex 17:14, where God commands Moses to inscribe an Israelite military victory (over the Amalekites at Rephidim), “on a scroll as something to be remembered and [to] make sure that Joshua hears it . . . ”.²⁷

So why does Gersonides choose this biblical phrase as the title for his work? He sees his polemic, expounding and defending the truth of the revealed Torah against all-comers—and for him, contemporary Christianity's perspective is as problematic as that of the pagan Aristotle (whose style of argumentation had been picked up and used by the scholastics, most obviously in St Anselm's formulation of his Ontological Argument). Therefore, his words are the spiritual sword in the hands of a victorious God whose wars to establish universal recognition of Its singular supremacy began in the time of Abraham and continued through the time of Moses and Joshua to the time of Samuel and Saul to the long era of the rabbinic/patristic-scholastic schism to Gersonides' own time. The word *milhamot*—“wars”—used for his text is a summary statement of spiritual *jihad*, even as the word and the phrase that comprise the title in which it is embedded evoke the sort of physical wars associated with Canaanites and Amalekites hostile to Israel and the Israelite God and not the philosophico-theological struggles of medieval Judaism against paganism and—from Gersonides' and his intended Jewish audience's perspective—Aristotelian paganism's Christian heir.²⁸

Jewish obliqueness and allegory where “war” is concerned might point our own narrative forward another step by following history a further war-and-peace-within-the-context-of-religion step forward. For the issue of the papacy's supremacy within and/or beyond Christian Europe that helped lead to the Crusades also led, much later, to a series of wars, fought under the umbrella of religion, which emerged in the aftermath of spiritual revolt—the Protestant Reformation—first against certain papal policies and ultimately against papal ecclesiastical authority overall. What began as a series of spiritual protests against those policies (in particular, the selling of indulgences) in the form of 95 theses articulated by Martin Luther and nailed to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517, initially led to a simple response: the excommunication of Luther by the Medici Pope Leo X. The unanticipated support, however, of his fellow bishops beyond the Alps, led to a protracted struggle that by mid-century became an Age of Catholic–Protestant Religious Wars that continued on and off for more than 150 years. The most intense period within that long stretch was the so-called Thirty Years' War, lasting from 1618 to 1648.

This was the war-and-violence-ridden world into which Amsterdam-born philosopher, Baruch/Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677)—a Sephardic Jew whose family had emigrated from

Portugal—grew up. Spinoza’s role in our own discussion is this: that he saw vicious wars being repeatedly fought on religious grounds as derived from a sense of possessiveness regarding God coupled with the egotistical clinging to particularized interpretations of that source and how to access it. He proposed to change this ego-bound equation for *re-lig-io* by reconsidering the accepted revealed text exploring and explaining that source and its access, and by altering the terminology *referencing* the source.

Therefore, Spinoza begins by introducing a modernist approach to analyzing and understanding the Bible. The *Theologico-Political Treatise* is the first work that exhaustively and in detail considers the text of the Bible in a manner that may be considered both rational and very little affected by particularist prejudices. Indeed, consistent with his non-particularist viewpoint, although Spinoza’s primary focus is the Hebrew Bible, he makes no distinction between it and the New Testament as “Bible.” Trained as a Jewish biblical scholar, he espoused a viewpoint that is nonetheless both Christian and Jewish—or rather, neither of these, *per se*.²⁹ He follows this innovative discussion with a second innovation, in which he equates God with Nature: “Nature herself is the power of God under another name, and our ignorance of God is co-extensive with our ignorance of Nature (25).”³⁰ It is Spinoza’s unequivocal non-sectarian viewpoint that God is not drawn more to one group than to another—although his introduction of new terminology for “God” has been too often misconstrued as atheistic, first by his own contemporaries and then by subsequent commentators.

The *Theologico-Political Treatise* was published in 1670—anonymously, and in Latin, rather than in the vernacular—and raised a storm of controversy. Surely what distressed some of its readers, at least, was not what it said regarding Scripture or God—it does not really question the validity of either—but the fact that it does undercut the supercessionist sensibilities of Christians and the superior sensibilities of Jews vis-à-vis each other (and vis-à-vis all others). Blinded by the offense taken at Spinoza’s universalism, his critics railed against him as a heretic or worse.³¹

He equates God and Nature—in a literal sense, for he refers to *Deus sive Natura* (“God or Nature”) specifically in *Ethics*, Part I, Proposition IV, *Proof*; and in Part IV, *Preface*, where he also equates both with “eternal and infinite Being.” The typical treatment of “God” as a kind of personal name—encouraging a sense, within diverse religious traditions, of God as a particularized possession—is replaced by a term and concept that people rarely claim in that same way, for they recognize that nature belongs to everyone. Therefore, God as “*Natura*” is other than God as that term is traditionally used by Christians and Jews and we might suppose that such a God is an entity that created the world but, having done so, retains no particular interest in its progress through time.

But everything that Spinoza says about God, whether he writes *Deus* or *Natura*, militates against that understanding. For in suggesting that *Natura* exists both as *naturans* (“naturing”) and *naturata* (“natured”), he underscores the idea that the Creator is found throughout Creation: God and the world are both separate and profoundly linked. God is embedded within us, within the natural world—within *everything*. Of course, one could still suppose that the Mind of God becomes disconnected from Creation once that Mind has finished creating: a father can deposit part of himself (sperm) into what eventuates as his offspring and, having done so, disappear without ever having a relationship with that offspring.

Those who saw or see Spinoza as disconnecting a personified God from Creation because of his choice of terms no doubt imagine(d) his intention as something of this sort. Those who do this would be missing both another aspect of understanding the *Deus sive Natura* equation and Spinoza’s own discussion of God that peppers the *Ethics*. This way is by means of the rabbinic notion of God’s Name as ineffable. Spinoza recognizes this in alluding to the conversation between Moses and God in Exodus 3:14—in which the latter responds to Moses’ query as to who God is with the words “I am/will be that am/will be”—in writing of Moses’ understanding of God as “a Being Who has always existed, does exist, and will always exist, and for this cause he calls Him by the name J-H-V-H” (*Treatise*,

chapter II, p. 36). If God's very name is ineffable, and cannot be used in the ordinary way of offering some intelligible sense of God's essence—because God's essence is being itself, which humans cannot understand—then how much less can we truly understand what the being that we wish to name really is?

The point of this brief discussion of Spinoza is twofold. It carries us back to the beginning of this narrative, and the problematic of understanding the source—even its name—to which our various traditions wish to bind us back. It also underscores that, where Spinoza is concerned, the issue of *war and peace within religious culture* offers two significances. One is the context in which he is wrestling with the questions of God that he addresses—a war-soaked context shaped by Western religious culture, in which he is both an insider (he is part of the world and its large philosophico-theological concerns) and an outsider: exiled by his Sephardic Jewish community he never became part of the Christian community, either. The other is his attempt to facilitate an end to this religious war-based way of the world by introducing a new vocabulary to articulate the way in which humans are bound to the source of all of humanity and all of nature.³²

5. War, Peace, and Religious Culture in the Modern Era

We can twist the screw of this discussion a further turn by moving deeper into the age of modernity toward our own time, and turning, in a world ever more torn by wars, to the French Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995)—specifically, his essay, “God and Philosophy.” His discussion also furthers our return to the starting point of our discussion in addressing (among other things) the problematic of religion as that problematic is shaped by language and by the tension between revelation and interpretation—and thus, implicitly, the problem of God and understanding whether and when God wants us to wage war or peace.

The problem that Levinas raises is twofold. First, he makes reasoning a circular proposition: “Rationality has to be understood as the incessant emergence of thought from the energy of ‘being’s move’ or its manifestation, and reason has to be understood out of this rationality.”⁽²⁾³³ Second, in turning to the issue of God—by way of the claim of theology to independence from philosophy—he asserts that philosophy should be able to include the discussion of God within its discourse (by which he means “God” as the Bible represents God) “if this God does have a meaning.”⁽³⁾³⁴ My added emphasis is intended to underscore—again—the God problem for Levinas: can we even speak of God as having *meaning*, whatever that term signifies for us? Is God, as a *signified*, another aspect of “thought”—in other words, something that is within *my* head that I express when I say “God” and when I discuss God, or is it some transcendent Other?

We cannot really list the attributes of God, even though every religious tradition tries to do so, because God is wholly other than what and where we are (as we have previously noted); God has no *meaning* in the common parlance sense of that word, outside of the meaning that we impose on the word “God.” We cannot talk about God—although we not only *do* so but make *war* based on what we assert about God—because the transcendent God is beyond any kind of language that we possess, derived as language is from our immanent realm. It is not, then, ultimately, God's *Name* concerning which we cannot state definitively that it does or does not effectively convey “Godness”, but God Itself that is beyond any discussion of God.

The problem is that in its absolute transcendence, God cannot fit into our *ontology*. Everything we say of God, every attribute we ascribe to God, attempting to reify God, tries to bring God into our realm—but that defies what we have defined God to *be*—*Wholly Other*³⁵—and every effort we make to bring God into our realm, to give God *meaning* for us so that we can enter God into our philosophical discourse about what *is* (ontology), must fail. Even as we speak of “pure Being” (by way of Ex 3:14 or otherwise), the notion conveyed by those terms (“pure” and “being”) is derived from the limits of our reality and our understanding: what we understand “pure” to mean and what we understand “being” to mean.

And whatever we do to discuss it leaves us trapped in the limits of language. Nothing we say about God can escape the limits of our world, but God is by definition *beyond* our world. God remains meaningless as far as we understand meaning. God remains outside the limits of philosophy, and thus theology, in Levinas' excursus, is liberated from philosophy to the extent that its focus transcends those limits. "If the intellectual understanding of the biblical God, theology, does not reach to the level of philosophical thought, this is not because it thinks of God as *a being* without first explicating the 'being of this being,' but because in thematizing God it brings God into the course of being." (3).

If this is so, then any assertion regarding what God wants—including making war—cannot be embraced uncritically. To the extent that "religious culture" connects to theology, that culture has the power to extend us toward everything around and beyond us, yielding a rewarding internal *jihad* toward understanding what is beyond understanding and an external relationship with those around us that is peaceful in a full and complete and not merely devoid-of-war sense. The fact that too often over time and space the opposite has been true underscores the reality of human limitation—that we misunderstand God and then misconstrue the imperatives of that misunderstanding.

Religious culture has a long history of shaping both war and peace. As humans we are, according to all three Abrahamic traditions, endowed by God—the source to which our diverse forms of *re-lig-io* seek to bind us back—with free will and therefore with the ability to choose our actions (not, incidentally, because our revelatory texts explicitly say this, but because we have *interpreted* the God-breathed soul within us to encompass free will). This means that we can choose—and have chosen, over time and space—how to understand God and God's relationship with and intentions for us, including the imperative to make war in God's name.

The complex history of peace and war is the historical fruit suspended from the tree of choice—and that fruit still hangs before us into our own era. In plucking and consuming it we realize the heavenly and hellish possibilities of the present world, regardless of what the Abrahamic traditions variously assert may or may not await us in the next. As a species we continue, still today, to make war and peace, inspired or not by religion. The ultimate war is the *jihad* with ourselves and with our understanding: of the world; of the source to which we want our world and ourselves to be bound back; of the question of whether there is a prescribed manner of accomplishing this—and if so, whether we can ever really *know* or properly articulate it beyond our unprovable beliefs.

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Notes

- ¹ There is a plethora of works, particularly in the past two decades, on Qumran and the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls. For easy accessibility to the general reader, however, I recommend two early paperback classics: *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Allegro 1965); and *The Dead Sea Scriptures in English Translation* (Gaster 1957).
- ² Jewish tradition maintains that, after the priestly Scribe, Ezra, redacted the Torah—for which the traditional date is 444 BCE—God ceased to reveal Himself through prophets. Obviously, Christianity does not embrace this idea.
- ³ This transpired at the extensive Council of Bishops at Nicaea that year, when the full divinity of Jesus, championed by Athanasius, prevailed over the argument by Arius that the Father is superior to and thus separate from the Son (and Holy Spirit). Athanasius contended that the three aspects of the Trinity were of the same substance: *homoiousia*.
- ⁴ One of the further distinctions, as a consequence, is that, whereas traditional Christians were (are) awaiting the return of a specific figure, traditional Jews were (are) awaiting an entirely ambiguous figure—and therefore any number of "false messiahs" littered the landscape over time, the most famous of these being Shabbetai Tzvi (1626–1676).
- ⁵ Thus, the Emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity with his Edict of Milan, in 313, and the Emperor Theodosius makes Christianity the official religion of the Empire not long after his accession to the throne in 379.
- ⁶ Augustine noted in his *City of God* and argued more specifically in his treatise, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (St Augustine n.d., book 22, sections 69–76) that, while individuals should not resort immediately to violence, God has given the sword to

governments for good reasons—based on Romans 13:4. Thus he asserted that Christians, as part of a government, ought not to be ashamed of protecting peace and punishing wickedness when pushed to do so by a government. He further argued that this was a personal, philosophical stance, centered on thought, not action: “What is here required is not a bodily action, but an inward disposition. The sacred seat of virtue is the heart.” He further observed that to remain peaceful in the face of a grave wrong that could only be prevented or stopped by violence would be a sin. The obvious question that this just war theory yielded was/is how and when war-making may be construed as legitimately as opposed to falsely based on these principles. The issue is—again—interpretation.

The Armenian Church stands out for having embraced a Monophysite view.

Nine, more or less; the number is debatable because sometimes it is difficult to say whether one Crusade continued with a brief break or ended and a different Crusade began shortly thereafter. Moreover, there was a slew of crusades at the same time *within* Christendom. Ultimately, the number becomes not only debatable but irrelevant: my point is to suggest that there were many such wars fought in the name of God. Moreover, one can argue that Crusades—or attempted Crusades—against the Muslim world continued after the Crusades were over, as for example that of Pope Pius II against the Ottoman Turks, in 1464, that never got off the ground: virtually nobody showed up at Ancona, where the Pope was waiting.

I am referring specifically to the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 and its consequences for the region.

See Krey (2012, pp. 256–62), and much more recently, *The First Crusade* (Rubenstein 2014) and more particularly, *Armies of Heaven* (Rubenstein 2011). These words are ascribed to Raymond d’Aguiliers. A second, anonymous witness suggested “up to their ankles.” Either way, the level of slaughter was presumably substantial and enjoyed by Geoffrey. The description may have been colored by references to Apocalyptic literature.

Crusade-inspired anti-Jewish violence in Europe was already visible during the First Crusade, but the Second brings both a more egregious level (and exilic consequences for many Jewish Rhineland communities) and the kind of distressed response exemplified by St. Bernard.

Thus, whereas Arians and Monophysites (and others later on) would be termed *heretics*, the conflict between the Bishop of Rome as Pope and the Patriarchs of the seven Eastern Sees regarding comparative levels of ecclesiastical authority led to a great *schism* in 1054 between the Western Church and multiple Eastern Churches. The Western Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade chose to view their Eastern Christian schismatic counterparts as infidels. Certainly the immense wealth of Byzantium available for plunder had something to do with that interpretation of the situation.

The question of who thought this is less relevant than the fact that the thought was being expressed. For more on Louis IX, however, see the magisterial new look at *The Tunis Crusade of 1270* (Lower 2018); and the superb *The Making of Saint Louis* (Gaposchkin 2010).

Note the convenience of contemporary English-language orthography that permits a distinction between “Muslim”—one who follows the specific spiritual lead of Muhammad—and “*muslim*”: anyone, in particular pre-Muhammad figures such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, who submit to God’s will.

There is considerable discussion as to which, beyond the four Sunni *madhabs*, and the first two of the noted Shi’i *madhabs*, constitute “major” *madhabs*. *The Four Imams and Their Schools* (Haddad 2007) offers a dense yet concise discussion of the Sunni schools and there is a plethora of works on each of these and on the various non-Sunni *madhabs*.

One of the ways in which Islam underscores the ineffability of God is with reference to the complication of God’s Name: that there are 99 “Names” to reference God—and certain types of individuals, such as mystics and, above all, the Prophet Muhammad, know/knew many more than 99 such Names.

This does not disoblige Christians from good as opposed to evil deeds as essential religious values: an evil-doer who is baptized does not automatically get into heaven thanks to that sacrament. My point (in the following paragraph) is that neither Islam nor Judaism carry within them the idea of Original Sin and its consequences.

Two Hebrew words are eventually pressed into service by Jews for “hell”. One is *she’ol*, which originally, however, really only meant “grave”—or at any rate a dark and still place where those who are dead go (Rainwater 1990), among other discussions. The other, *gehenna*, is a corruption of the phrase *gei ben Hinnom*—the “Valley of Hinnom”, just south by southwest of Jerusalem, with an at worst horrifying and at best ugly history: this is the “Valley of the Shadow of Death” through which the psalmist walks, “fear[ing] no evil, for Thou art with me.”

The Arabic root, *shar*, of the word, *shar’ia*, (typically translated as “religious law” or “jurisprudence”) refers to the sort of path that leads one to water in the midst of the wilderness—and is therefore essential to survival.

There are many discussions of what mysticism is, from that in Henry James and Evelyn Underhill to a plethora of recent volumes. A concise and accessible definition is found in Soltes (2008, pp. 1–10).

Tariq(a) is another Arabic word meaning path or trajectory; it is specifically used in Sufism to refer to the specific Sufi orders (each of which is its own uniquely and specifically contoured path or trajectory).

There are Christian and Jewish mystics, such as St Francis of Assisi and Abraham Abulafia who manifest this sensibility, as well. See Soltes (2008, pp. 1–10, 124–30, 135–39).

- ²³ *Sema* is a word, together with *dhikr*, typically used to refer to the initiation of the mystical process. Where most Sufi *tariqas* use a word or phrase as a starting point, Rumi came to use the physical act of spinning about. The *tariqa* that evolved included, among other things, whirling round one's own axis while whirling, as a group, around an empty center, with the eyes closed and the head tilted at a 28-degree angle, and with one hand pointing slightly upward, toward heaven and the other downward, toward the earth.
- ²⁴ See note #14 regarding “*muslim*” vs. “Muslim.”
- ²⁵ Salaam must also be contrasted with other Arabic terms that are more limited in fullness of peaceful intention, such as *sulh*.
- ²⁶ This book is named for but should not be confused with the biblical so-called *Book of Yasher* (“Upright [Man]”), mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Sam 1:18 (and possibly, though a potential scribal error obscures it, in 1 Kings 8:53).
- ²⁷ The Amalekites, as we have observed toward the outset of this narrative, would be referenced later on in I Sam 15.
- ²⁸ Gersonides’ intended audience was clearly Jewish, since he wrote in Hebrew. In a manner analogous to the Spanish Judah Halevi’s intentions in writing his *Kuzari* (1140), Gersonides—aside from intense personal intellectual philosophico-theological interests—intended for his fellow Jews, a downtrodden, often persecuted minority, not to lose faith in the absolute legitimacy of their relationship with God (their *re-lig-io*, based on their interpretative understanding of God’s primary revelation). Thus the model of the Israelites—positive (in war, defeating the Amalekites and the Canaanites, with divine back-up) and negative (losing faith and being afflicted by fiery serpents as a consequence) undergirds the extensive and sophisticated dialogue in which he engages with the thinking of Aristotle and its offspring. See Gersonides (1984–1999).
- ²⁹ See Soltes (2019).
- ³⁰ Quotes come from Benedict Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, and from *Ethics*. The editions are reprints of the Bohn Library Edition containing the R. H. M. Elwes translations of the Latin originals published by George Bell & Sons in 1883 (Elwes 1951 and 1955); the page number cited here refers to the Bohn edition.
- ³¹ The initial hostility of the Sephardic rabbinical leadership in Amsterdam toward him that led to accusations of heresy first emerged much earlier (in 1656)—before he had actually written anything, so the criticisms were based on hearsay—largely because, in an inheritance conflict with his half-sister, Spinoza went outside the community to the secular/Christian authorities. The rabbis were both affronted, ego-wise, and paranoid that airing dirty laundry in public could have a detrimental effect on the community of which he was part. This was an uneven legal war: he hardly fought the charges that led to his excommunication—if at all.
- ³² Important discussions of Spinoza with regard to both his Jewishness and his importance for modern thought range from *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* (Strauss [1930] 1982); to *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (Smith 1997); to—especially—*Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (Goldstein 2006).
- ³³ Levinas numbers his paragraphs, so the numbers in parentheses refer to his paragraph numbers. See Levinas (1996).
- ³⁴ In the underlying issue of theology versus philosophy, one might say that he is transforming the Jewish-Christian-Muslim religious “war” regarding supersession and superiority with insights into a kind of academic “war” between these two disciplines regarding superiority.
- ³⁵ Every language has its term for “other”, but the weight of it may be most accessible to English-speakers by way of the Latin term, *alienum*.

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