Rabbinic text process theology

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Preface

If it adopted the *a priori* principles of A.N. Whitehead and of Christian process theology, a Jewish process theology would be a Jewish variety of natural theology. Mordecai Kaplan’s reconstructionism came close to this. It might even be termed a Jewish natural process theology, with a strong sense of the natural role of tradition and, thus, in this case, an openness to the cultural milieu of rabbinic tradition, as well as a commitment to the pragmatisms of William James and John Dewey. Kaplan cited Whitehead favorably; his reconstructionism is at the very least compatible with process theology and thus illustrates one version of what a Jewish process theology would look like in practice.

What would a Jewish process theology look like, however, if it also adopted, rather than borrowed selectively from, the *a priori* principles of rabbinic Judaism – among them, the authority of Torah given on Sinai, an historically particular revelation of divine instruction for a particular people, and the authority of the Oral Torah, an historically evolving hermeneutic, according to which that revelation becomes normative practice for communities of observant Jews? I trust this would not be a naturalism, since it would be a theology that found its grammar or regulative logic in a textual hermeneutic rather than in an account of the orders of perception and imagination. It would not, for the same token, be an anti-naturalism, but rather a theology for which the distinction between natural and super- or non-natural was not definitional. For such a theology, for example, the world out there would belong to the order of creation (*maaseh bereshit*), rather than to “nature.” This would mean that, since God creates through words,
language (at least some sort of language) and world would be intimately connected rather than extrinsic phenomena. It would mean, furthermore, that for language to "know" the world would not be surprising and that something like a form of realism would not be out of the question. While it would presuppose the authority of divine speech and even of some human interpretations of it, this other-than natural theology would not, as naturalists might suppose, present a heteronomous conception of divine law. If the distinction nature/not nature would not be definitive for this theology, neither would those of autonomy/heteronomy, body/spirit, this world/other world. This theology would present its own variety of neutral monism; in this case, however, the undifferentiated plenum would be termed a plenum of undifferentiated signification (or pure semiosis), of which undifferentiated feeling (or pure experience) was an instance; "prehension" would be another term for interpretation.

Max Kadushin was the first and, as far as I know, the only Jewish thinker to articulate a process theology in the service of what he considered the behavioral or halakhic authority of classical rabbinic literature. In this paper, I examine Kadushin's work as the foundation of a rabbinic text process theology. I assume, from the outset, that such a theology may complement a Jewish natural process theology and that a Jewish process theology, in general, would appear as a process of dialogue between textual- and natural-process theologies.

Max Kadushin's organismic study of rabbinic Judaism

From the time of his doctoral studies at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America (New York) in the 1930s, Kadushin sought to identify the rationality of classical rabbinic discourse, or of what he later called "the rabbinic mind." Typical of the class of post- or

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