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PUTTING GOD SECOND:  
HOW TO SAVE RELIGION FROM ITSELF

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GALSTON: Good morning, everybody. My name is Bill Galston; I'm a senior fellow in Governance Studies here at Brookings. Governance Studies has a number of programs and projects. We have a Religion and Public Life program in which E.J. Dionne and I are co-conspirators, and I also run a long-running hit book series called "Governing Ideas". And so we come together under the twin auspices of those two projects. It is a ritual to say that is a pleasure to welcome "X" to Brookings. Sometimes it is, sometimes not so much but you say it anyway. This time I mean it. (Laughter) It's my pleasure and privilege to introduce one of the truly noteworthy thinkers of our time, Rabbi Donniel Hartman, who will present a book for which the adjective "provocative" does not begin to convey the full force of the argument, "Putting God Second: How to Save Religion from Itself". Usually religion is supposed to save us, now we're supposed to save religion? Very interesting. What can he possibly mean?

Rabbi Hartman is the president of the Shalom Hartman Institute which has polls in both Jerusalem and New York. There is a rapidly proliferating Hartman North America which runs hundreds of programs around the country. Rabbi Hartman has been running himself ragged around the country now for five weeks. We are his very last stop before he goes back to Israel. So the fact that he will display the kind of energy that he always has after the end of an exhausting five week tour of North America will be one of the many remarkable features of this morning. He has a Ph.D. in Jewish philosophy from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has an M.A. in political philosophy from NYU, in religion from Temple, and he is of course an ordained rabbi. He appears regularly in the Israeli media as a brave voice of increasingly unpopular truths and he will be presenting some of those unpopular truths to you this morning.

So without further ado, Donniel Hartman. (Applause)

RABBI HARTMAN: Thank you, Bill. Good morning. I got into the religion business -- which is in many ways part of my -- it's a family business -- out of the belief that religion is a value to the extent that it creates a life of value. If it doesn't have a value added then it is something that in this world

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of complex identities in which we choose the identity and the framework in which we live, and we don't inherit our identities or our commitments to the same way that we did so in the past, that it is fundamentally something that we ought to choose to disconnect from. And we have that choice. And I've experienced that choice and I was raised with that choice. And if religion is of value to the extent that it creates a life of value, it requires of us who are part of a religious discourse to instead of define ourselves as successful by definition, that of course we're adding value. One of the classic examples would be in Judaism, we taught ethics to the world. Well, that's nice. I'll build a museum for your great achievements in the past. I want to know what you're doing today. So what's your great achievements in the past does not generate for me, other than I can have fond nostalgic feelings about you, but if you want to be a force, if you want me to commit my life to you, what is it that you add. And increasingly, after a 20th century in which, as you know in the 1966 Time Magazine piece on "Is God Dead", where the reflection was are we really -- is religion coming to an end and has it been replaced by various secularisms of this form or that. Religion has charged back to the center of our discourse. Whether it was ever absent or not is a separate question. It certainly is not absent in our political lives, in our individual lives. You can't understand the world, you can't understand some of the central forces shaping our world, without recognizing that they're motivated by religious commitments. And therefore it is doubly important, because God is not dead, is to ask what role does God play within our lives. Should God be dead? God is not, but should we embrace a religious life and does it add value, or does a religious life serve as a catalyst for diminished value?

And the primary motivation for writing this book is the frustration with religion's moral underachievement. Now when I speak about religious moral underachievement I don't speak or I don't assume that religion is the sole cause of moral failure. There are plenty of other causes for moral failure, but the fact that we are as bad as everybody else is not exactly a commercial for why to be committed to a religious life. (Laughter) We're not worse than them, okay, so therefore -- that's like, therefore join. Could you imagine? You know, imagine McDonalds, you know. I promise you the food is just as bad in Burger King. That's not exactly going to be I should go to McDonalds. Religion is supposed to bring

enlightenment to the world. And as a religious person my agenda is to ask to what extent it does so and more importantly, if it does not, why does it not, so that we can repair it from within.

Is religion achieving the enlightenment that it professes? And I think the answer is no. I think religion is a profound force for good, it's a profound force for greatness. It inspires people to do the good. But at the same time we are evidence -- we see every day that it is in the name of religious commitment, and that very often those who are more religiously committed somehow become more morally insensitive and morally blind.

And I started about two decades ago to try to think about why is that the case. Now there is the safe answer, and it's not really a safe answer, but there's an assumption that it is a safe answer. And the safe answer could be some or different versions of original sin. The doctrine of original sin sees the human being as fundamentally flawed, the human being as incapable of achieving and fulfilling the aspirations that God has for humankind. When God created human beings and God saw that all that God created and said it was very good, human beings don't live up to the very good mark or assessment that God ascribes to us. And so the version of original sin would be that religion is fine, there is no problem, everything is good. If there's a failure it's because you're not understanding the true meaning. If there's a failure it's because you're not doing your job to interpret the scripture the way you were supposed to interpret it. Life is simple, religion is great. That's not religious, that's not Christian, that's not Muslim, that's not Jewish. Religion is fine, it's we human beings who somehow aren't able to hear accurately the moral truth and enlightenment which religion is supposed to provide for us.

Now this is only a partial justification, because if religion is meant to be a system which addresses human beings, its failure to change us doesn't let it off the hook. This is not a system for angels. And there's a very famous Rabbinic tradition where the angels turn to God and say, God, what -- are you giving your Torah to them? Them? Like keep it -- you know who they are, they don't -- they're just -- they're yuck, they're corrupt, you don't want to give something so beautiful to them. And God says to Moses, could you give an answer because -- it's very cute -- God doesn't know an answer, doesn't have -- God says, please tell them. And Moses says, do you work six days a week that you need a

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Sabbath, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. In other words, a religious tradition is built to reach human beings in the midst of our challenges and inadequacies and to elevate us. So the fact that it's not fulfilling or that we are defeating its system is itself a flaw within religious tradition. But it's even deeper than that.

Because as the more we look in the world and the more that we look at people who are committed to religious life, the more we encounter people. And again, I want to remind people because I'm not stating that the only cause of moral failure is faith, but there are major -- but faith is a major impetus for moral failure. And it is not simply that human beings who are of faith commit moral failures, but people of faith precisely because of their faith are inspired to do so. And that means that we have to go beyond the original sin argument. And we have to ask ourselves, and I who cares about my tradition, has to ask myself, what is it that I need to do. Is there something in my religious tradition that is undermining its own goals and the goals which I would like it to have.

Now, as a Jew there's a particular feature of this which makes it even more pressing, because now I am a people of power. I am a people of power as a beloved powerful minority here in America, and I have a people of power as a majority sovereign people in my country. And a powerless people are always a moral people. And so any inner failures within the system don't really -- you know okay. So soon we're going to have the Passover Seder and it's a beautiful event and it's cultural and it's nice and we pass on the story, and there are so many beautiful things. But there is also, towards the end of the Seder, when we marshal all of our diasporic bravado and we pour Elijah's Cup, and then we open the door for a second and we say, God, pour your wrath on the nations which did not know you and then we quickly close the door and we say, oh, we told them. I told them. It was like this was our great moment of nationalist chosen ideology. And so, you know, when you're in the diaspora and it was your literally 30 seconds of machismo and that's the way you expressed. Okay. I said, God pour your wrath on them because you love us best. But now, now that we have power, what's our social responsibility to the world which we now have an ability to shape. What's our social responsibility to people who we live with, what's our social responsibility when we have the fifth most powerful Army in the world? It's a different conversation. Words, which might have one meaning in one context have a completely meaning

in another context. And it's very easy for Jews to judge Christendom. Oh, you've come up short. Well, that's great. What happens when a tradition, Islam and Christianity, have to live with power, with profound power. And now the question is what do our scriptures teach us and where are they guiding us. And what we know is that our religious traditions are not simply able to overcome the human propensity to evil, but very often they are its greatest advocates.

In my book I identify the core challenge of religious life as what I call "religion's autoimmune disease". An autoimmune disease is when there is something within the tradition itself that attacks itself, very often unbeknownst to the tradition. But it's not that human beings aren't hearing, we're actually hearing very, very well. We're hearing all too well. But that hearing activates something within human beings that has a profound influence on us. And I believe that the source of religion's autoimmune disease is none other than God. God does something. This one God, king and creator of the universe, transcendent being. When God enters into the room God can be a force for good. And human history is evidence to how many people are inspired to love neighbor, to be kind to neighbor, to be gentle, to be humble people, to walk humbly with God, and as a result to see people and to feel obligated to care for them. But that same God, who can inspire moral heights, also has a potential to create moral blindness.

That autoimmune disease I divide into two core features. The first I call God intoxication and the second I call God manipulation. God intoxication is the autoimmune disease which is generated from God's transcendent definition. The moment -- monotheism is not just about the oneness of God, it's about the radical otherness of God. And as Yehezkel Kaufmann argues and posits, that in the Bible idolatry was not the anthropomorphic or the giving of form, et cetera to a god, it was idolatry at its essence. It's the belief that we human beings can control the power of God through magic and through ritual. And therefore, in essence, we were the ones in power and it was religious tradition which in the hands of a priest who knew the magical rights was able to guarantee the human being access to divine power. They had the power but they were in the service of us. The otherness of God, the independence of God, the notion that God has an independent will which we at best could plead to, is one of the core features of monotheistic faith. But the minute this transcendent radically other being -- the first verse of

the Bible, in the beginning when God began to create the heaven and the earth, the first lesson of the Bible is that God is not created. The first lesson is God's radical otherness and separateness from us. The creation happens afterwards. God is not part of this. So when God enters into this world, and you truly take seriously what God means in monotheistic categories, it has the profound possibility at best, if not likelihood that God will skew the perspectives that you have as to what's important and what's not important. That if God is in the room it's at least plausible to argue that God has to be put first. And if God has to be put first, for many that will mean that human beings have to be put second, and that the commandments of a religious tradition which pertain to your relationship with God take precedence over your commandments which define your relationship with human beings. And this is not new. This is not something we discovered the minute somebody is willing to kill, harm, hurt, shame somebody in the name of their faith. 2500 years ago this is what the prophets were kvetching about. 2500 years ago, this is Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, all of them. All of them are saying, what are you doing? Isaiah 58, what are you doing here on Yom Kippur, fasting. This is the fast that I -- you think that the way in which I want you to repent is by going to Shul? Do you think I want you to tell me a few words? Do you think I want you to give me a goat? Like you think this is what I want from you? I want something -- that's what I -- this is -- what I want from you is to do justice. Open your doors to the poor. That's the Yom Kippur that I want. So God is looking at the Jewish people and saying, where did you come from. Isaiah Chapter 1, God says, why are you showing up in my temple on the high holidays? Why are you showing up every new moon? Why are you showing up these three times a year during Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot? What are you doing here? Who asked this of you? Trample my courts no more. This is what God says in Isaiah. But God forgets that who asked this of us. God did. God told us, new moon, show up with a goat. On every holiday, give me a cow. You can't afford a cow, I'll take two birds. Literally. With all the forms of worship half of the 613 commandments of the Bible, half of them pertain to temple worship. So it's not a distortion and it's not an accident. God intoxication is when a person sees if God is in the room then I have to devote myself first and foremost to that God. And God can say the way you devote yourself to me is by doing the ethical, but the human being, the nature of the autoimmune disease is it

doesn't matter what God says, when God enters into the room my whole religious life gets skewed. And religiosity is determined on the basis of ritual excellence, fidelity to a word of God in ritual terms, and not the ethical because the ethical is dealing with the non God.

And therefore embedded within the religious tradition -- and I don't have time to elaborate on it now, but maybe afterwards -- are examples of it, but you don't -- all of you know -- but it's like the model is--imagine if there is a light in the room and that light is supposed to inspire, and that light is supposed to motivate, but that light could also blind. And the transcendent God has the profound capacity to diminish the value of humankind and consequently religion, instead of motivating for the good, creates a religious person who believes that I am more religious the more I choose God over humankind. Monotheism, by definition requires that God be put first. And that's why I write about the need to put God second.

The second autoimmune disease, which is particular not so much to the idea of God but to the idea of one God, which becomes one of the fundamental diseases of every monotheistic tradition, is that if there is one God that one God has to love one best. One God enters into the room, I want to be the beloved. Very often I believe we would have been much better with idolatry, far better because everybody has their God. It's like there's no zero sum game. You have your God, I have my God, there's no reason -- like we could fight over lots of stuff, but we're not fighting over whom God loves best. One of the saddest verses in the whole Bible was when Jacob gets the blessing from Isaac after he tricks Esau and tricks his father, and he gets the blessing. And Esau, whom the Bible is very careful to portray as a righteous, good, decent human being, no flaw is ascribed to Esau in a single verse in the Bible, none. And Esau comes to his father, who he served and took care of -- he was a good, good son, the son that every parent would want. But Jacob got the blessing, and Esau says to his father, do you have any blessing left for me? And Isaac says no. One God could only pick one. And with that starts this zero sum game religious competition over who is God's most beloved. Because the God comes into the room the one thing I can't do is ignore them. I want to be the beloved. God loves me best. If God intoxication, God's transcendence, the light blinds us to the significance of humankind and God manipulation, my



desire to be the most beloved, makes me see only myself and blinds me to others. And consequently, in the name of my pursuit of becoming beloved, I divide the world between those who are beloved and those who are not, those who are chosen and those who are not. And the second autoimmune disease creates the moral blindness not of seeing God, but one of the great paradoxes is that it is precisely a life of faith which enables people to only see themselves and their own interests and their own national priorities, and those who are part of their club as distinct from others. And in many ways a large part of the history of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism is what we do to each other when we have power. And what are the consequences, the real life consequences of God manipulation.

My book is about an analysis of the problem. And as we're soon going to be at Passover, one of the key songs of Passover is a song called Dayenu. It's like a 30 stanza song. Dayenu in Hebrew means in English, it would have been enough. And we say to God, if you just took us out of Egypt and you didn't split the sea, it would have been enough. And the idea is to be thankful at every single stage. And we go through every -- we breakdown each state and we say Dayenu, it would have been enough. There is a Dayenu in my presentation where if we at least recognize the danger and we stop this conversation of original sin -- religion is fine, everything is fine, when we understand the potential for these autoimmune diseases, the mere recognition of it activates the beginning of some sensitivity and responsibility.

But the book is divided into two. The first is an analysis of the problem. And I do so only with -- while this is not a disease that is unique to Judaism, I believe that each religious individual should only speak from within their tradition and it's for others to speak for theirs. So my book is about Judaism as a test case, both of the autoimmune disease and then in the second half of the book about how that autoimmune disease can be overcome.

And I argue in the book for two primary core definitions of religious life. That a life of faith has to, the minute God enters into the room, God is dangerous unless we accept two core principles. The first is the primacy of the ethical and the second is the independence of the autonomy of the ethical. The primacy of the ethical, as distinct from much liberal Jewish life in North America, does not involve the

reduction of religious life to ethics. We do religion a great disservice when we reduce all of Judaism to the ethical so that a Mitzvah means now a good deed instead of a commandment. When religion is reduced to the ethical it becomes in many ways insignificant. I'm not talking about reducing religion to the ethical. I'm talking about creating a clear priority within religious life, so that at any case the key in which everything is always judged is to what extent it still abides by the principles of moral excellence. This is the teaching of Hillel and I call it the Hillelian Key. When Hillel says what's hateful unto you, do not do unto others, that's not what's so interesting. What's so interesting is when he says this is the whole Torah and the rest is commentary. That means -- and he knows it's not the whole Torah, but what he's saying is that whenever you engage in a ritual act, whenever you do anything in the name of your faith, if it does not fulfill the concept of the primacy of the ethical there is something flawed. God needs to be put second because when God is not put second terrible things can happen in the name of religion. And we need to develop a language of faith in which it is precisely a life of faith in God that recognizes what is the God I believe in, I believe in a God who is second. Now, I'm not saying God should be put 10th, 15th, 23rd. Second is not bad. (Laughter) Second is not bad. Put God second. Actually I want God second so that God could be important. This is not a book as distinct from new atheists which is trying to move us out of a system of faith. I want a life of faith because I know God could be a profound inspiration in fulfilling the demand that I made at the beginning, that religion is a value to the extent that it creates a life of value. But to do so we have to have our heads screwed on and our priorities clear.

And the last point, very briefly, and then Bill will elaborate on this, is the more difficult notion of the autonomy or the independence of the ethical. When Hillel says what's hateful unto to you, do not do unto others, he had at his disposal a verse in the Bible, in Leviticus 19, love your neighbor as yourself. Now I and every rabbi in North America has given very, very meaningful speeches which moved us deeply on the profound -- the rabbis I mean -- on the profound difference between what's hateful unto you, do not do unto others and love your neighbor as yourself, and why this is so much better because it's not about just loving and it's that you can't really -- I'm telling you I can't tell you how many times I kvelled from speeches, I was so deeply moved by things that I said. (Laughter) But the bottom line is that Hillel

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could have just as easily quoted Leviticus 19 and we could have just been fine. What's hateful unto you -- love your neighbor as yourself, this is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary, go and study it. Would have worked. I'm telling you we would have had to change some Jewish art on synagogue, but other than that a few different posters, we would have got through the day and it would have been just fine. Hillel intentionally doesn't choose to quote scripture when he wants to speak about the primacy of the ethical. He comes up with the universal maxim that he might have gleaned from his past. I'm not saying that necessarily it comes from nowhere, but that its authority is not based on scripture, its authority is based on the moral principles to which he believes a human being must ascribe.

And this is one of the most difficult things -- and with here I conclude. If religion obligates us to act, obligates us to do the good, and also defines what that good is, then religion is a closed system in which there is no possibility of improvement and of criticism. There is no checks and balances. Religion told me to kill you. God says thou shalt not murder, but that doesn't apply to someone who violates the Sabbath, doesn't apply to a homosexual, it doesn't apply to an infidel. Thou shalt not murder is thou shalt not kill unjustly. But I'll tell you what is just killing. And every religious tradition gives me very clear details of what is just killing. So in religion when there is nothing within the system in which you could -- I want to say what did you just say when you create a system that's completely insulated, when the essence of your moral responsibility could be gleaned only from within the system itself, you could have the mistaken notion that there is no place for a corrective, there's no place for a moral conscience, there's no place for an autonomous sense of what's good and not good.

Now, the big problem is that we love religion because it saves us from moral uncertainty. That is the true salvation of religion. The true salvation is not in the world to come, it's here. So that as I walk through life I know what's good, I know what's evil, I am given direction. But it is precisely that yearning for salvation which unleashes one of the most demonic forces on humankind. And that is a completely insulated and isolated moral discourse which is insulated from progress, insulated from correctness, insulated from somebody challenging its self interests, and our ability to speak in the name of God, and to turn God into that which serves us then becomes the foundation in which I could harm,

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maim, hurt others and kill them without any guilty conscience. Because not only do I have a guilty conscience, I am trained that if for some reason I have a guilty conscience I'm religious, be more faithful, get more committed, so that it's a Mitzvah, it's a commandment not merely to do but not even to have that guilt.

We have to fight for the type of religious tradition we want to have. People who speak in the name of religion -- let's call them the fundamentalists. It's one of those strange terms that no one really could define right now, but let's define a fundamentalist as the religion you don't like. (Laughter) It's probably one of more accurate definitions of the category. (Laughter) The religion you don't like. The religious fundamentalist, they have a profound impact on our religious discourse. By the way, including in America. And I'm not speaking about the easy target today, Islam. Always beware when you have an easy target. Part of my religious tradition is I don't speak about others, I only speak about myself. On Yom Kippur you're supposed to say, I have sinned, I have done wrong. And this is what you do. You don't reach your hand out and say you have sinned, you have done wrong, you need to do a lot of repenting. You start with yourself. Fix yourself and then others might fix -- it's your shop in order. Religious fundamentalists have a profound impact on religious discourse. They impact those who see them as religiously authentic and want to become like them. Let's call them religious wannabes, or people who are in the midst of a religious journey who defined a fundamentalist as the authentic one and then are influenced in believing that I have to put God first. And if I don't feel so I have to work and then they in fact become -- religion becomes not a source of value but a source of evil. But in many ways the greatest impact -- and for this I wrote this book primarily -- is on those who define authentic religion as fundamentalist are in no way inspired to become like that, but actually become inspired to leave religious discourse. The power of religious fundamentalism in shaping religious discourse is immense, both on those who had influences -- those to emulate them and on the masses of individuals who basically choose to leave. They choose to leave and they exit religious conversation.

My book is an attempt to create a liberal Jewish theology. A theology in which we recognize our flaws, and precisely because we recognize our flaws there is a chance that we could put in

place a healing process that could move us in a new direction, so that in fact religion can fulfill its primary test and that is to be something of value that adds value to our lives.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. GALSTON: I wish we had all day, but I know we don't. I know you don't, I know you don't. So I want to plunge straight into it. I am tempted to begin with the philosophical foundation of your argument, not just the primacy but the autonomy or independence of the ethical. As you know very well and say in your book, you are taking sides in one of the longest standing running arguments in philosophy and theology that goes all the way back to Plato's Euthyphro if not more. And in effect you are confronting a religious narrative with a carefully constructed counter narrative. You are taking sides. And rather than making this abstract let me make it concrete, concrete within the Jewish tradition. There are two Abrahams. Abraham one is the one who asks famously when God lets him know what he's about to do to Saddam, you know, Abraham says basically this is wrong. Shall the lord of all the earth not do justly. I mangled the quote, but you know what I'm talking about. And there is the Abraham who finds his own son without question. And you are saying that Abraham one is Abraham and Abraham two is a kind of a defect or an aberration, something to be criticized.

Now, some people might look at the Jewish tradition, to which you and I both belong, and say no, right. These are two polls of one religious personality and we somehow have to do justice to both of them, not just one. So are you taking sides too one-sidedly?

RABBI HARTMAN: It's a pleasure being with you. (Laughter)

MR. GALSTON: That's what Rabbi Sacks said at first too.

RABBI HARTMAN: No, I travel all across America for these types of questions. So first of all, thank you very, very much. Absolutely I'm taking sides. But I'm not saying that Abraham in Genesis 22 is not Abraham. I'm actually saying he's as Abraham as Genesis 18. I'm not doing the move that many claim in which they determine this is authentic Judaism. The whole book -- and here is where one of the ways that I argue with Rabbi Sacks -- is that I don't think Judaism is all nice. I don't think monotheism is all wonderful. I think a fundamental part of our religious traditions are corrupt. And what

we have, we have to recognize that it's there. We don't do a service when we say no, that's not Abraham. When I'm taking a side I'm not taking a side as to what's more authentically Jewish. I'm taking a side as to what is the Judaism that I want to belong to and what is the Judaism that I want to fight for so that this is the Judaism that will own the public sphere.

Genesis 18 or Genesis 22 gives birth to two completely different political programs. Completely different political programs. Different attitudes in many ways to a peace process, different attitudes to Palestinians, different attitudes to Israeli Arabs, different attitudes to refugees, different attitudes to the world. Genesis 18 and 22 gives birth to different attitudes to the gay and lesbian community, to people of color, people of different race. It gives birth potentially to a completely different universe. And I know that they're both part of religion, they're both Abraham, they're both part of God. I write in this book, the devil quotes scripture. The devil doesn't misquote scripture. Doesn't misquote it, it's there. What I believe we need to have is not to speak in the myth that there is only a good religion if we would only be clever enough to discover it. And somehow to reread Chapter 22 in the light of 18. And we know that the human interpretive -- that we reach the limits of interpretation when we pass them. Like there is no limits, we could do anything to any text that we want. But the reality is that there are people who are reading 22 quite literally. I recognize them as part of my tradition, but this is a book for a call for a cultural war. Not a cultural war as to who is authentically Jewish, but a cultural war as to who will win. That's a very different argument. And on that I have absolutely a position and a side and a cause.

MR. GALSTON: This leads me to an additional question which will give you an opportunity to talk about your distinctive take on sacred scripture. Because as you just said, the devil doesn't misquote, the devil quotes. So what is the standing of what has been handed down to us as sacred, inviolable, and unchangeable?

RABBI HARTMAN: This is one of the more complicated chapters in the book and I believe one of the most important. We have to free ourselves from the notion that regardless of whether you believe God is the source or scripture or its inspiration, it just doesn't matter. Because the minute the will of God gets translated into a word the meaning of that word is determined by who hears. And one of

the great sources of this autoimmune disease is the human desire to have certainty as to what God said and as a result to sanctify a particular revelatory moment for the rest of history. What I argue in this chapter, that even if -- and it doesn't matter to me whether you believe God wrote the Bible or not, the whole argument is that the discussion just doesn't matter, because a perfect God cannot give a perfect Torah to an imperfect people. At any given moment scripture is always connected to a historical context. It is we who in a desire to reach certainty have to deny the historical context within which that word has to be stated and then we are stuck with a 3000 year old message which might have been relevant at one time, but could never be of the same moral significance for times that come afterwards. And for many somehow that notion is less religious.

I quote in the book a very famous -- Maimonides guides much of that chapter and he was my teacher. My father was my teacher of Maimonides who was my teacher in reading this. Maimonides Guide for the Perplexed, part 3, chapter 32 argues that why did God command us to give sacrifices when that's clearly a primitive form of worship when the most ideal form of worship is using words, and even better Maimonides posits, thoughts. So like here it is, I'm arguing, and Maimonides argues that everything within Judaism is rational and makes sense. I have to be able to explain it, I have to be able to show why it's of value. And he says that the reason for the sacrifices were that the people whom God was speaking to had spent 400 years in Egypt. They were embedded in idolatry. If you would tell people I want you to have a relationship with God, but use words. I want you to have a relationship with God, but contemplate. They would say, what are you crazy? I need rain. What do you want me to choose, words? I'm not going to get rain if I say give me rain. I'm only going to get rain if I give a goat. Without a goat I don't get rain. And God says I understand, you really need to give a goat. So Maimonides even uses these words, God suffered the above form of worship. Literally. God suffered the above form of worship because that's what people needed.

And so, number one, scripture is always within a historical context. And the second, scripture will always only mean what we interpret it to mean. And that means that we human beings have to get used to living without certainty. And that to live with God is to recognize that the goal of religion is

not to give you the knowledge of God, because that just simply is not for you to have. That's the temptation. And when you have that temptation then you subject yourself to God manipulation. Because you're certain and then you continue and there's no -- you don't have that certainty. At the end of the day what you have is your moral and intellectual and spiritual abilities as you try to live with God, to interpret God's word to the best of your ability find out which Chapters were only relevant 3000 years ago, which chapters have some relevance for contemporary life, making the distinctions between which ones are keepers, which ones are ones that should be shelved in the museum of past religious doctrine, and take responsibility for building the religion that we have. And hopefully whether you're doing it right or wrong, you just never -- you never know. All you could do is be a person who faithfully walks with God, whether you were successful or not, whether you gave into temptation, whether you misinterpreted, whether you did it wrong. That certainty, you never know. And it's the desire for that certainty and then the belief that you have it which unleashes the destructive force that I'm trying to fight.

MR. GALSTON: Let me read a sentence from your book that leaped out and grabbed me by the throat. And then when I could breathe again I started thinking. And I quote -- it's not a long sentence or a complicated one -- "Moral excellence is sufficient to qualify one as a good Jew."

RABBI HARTMAN: Yes.

MR. GALSTON: Now, at that point I said to myself what does the teacher whom we both revere, you more knowledgeable than I, namely the Moses whose life was not seen from Moses to Moses, namely Maimonides, what would he say about that sentence? And then I asked my sentence, was I hallucinating. So I went back to his introduction to Sanhedrin just to make sure I wasn't. And there I found, just as I remembered, 13 fairly specific articles of faith. Now, as I understand it Maimonides is saying well, in addition to all these ethical precepts that I've summarized previously, this is what you have to believe to be a good Jew.

RABBI HARTMAN: Correct.

MR. GALSTON: So that's not your position?

RABBI HARTMAN: Yes and no. (Laughter) Because four paragraphs in his introduction



to chapter phallic, which is his commentary on the tenth chapter of Sanhendrin, of the mission in Sanhendrin, he in fact declares and puts forth these 13 principles of faith. But about three paragraphs earlier on, he says what does it mean to love God. What does it mean to love God. And in that same introduction he gives the following definition of who is a lover of God. A lover of God is someone who believes that the commandments enjoin you to do the good and that the prohibitions enjoin you to refrain from evil. And he uses the following term -- I'll say it first in Hebrew. And it is worthy of you as a human being to do the good and to refrain from evil. This is what he defines as what it means to love God. And then he says, and do not be like a donkey for whom that which guides them are the bit and bridle. Is that the way --

MR. GALSTON: Blinders.

RABBI HARTMAN: Blinders. Don't be like the donkey, but what must guide you is your human form. This happens right before that section.

Now, that said, so Maimonides is one of the features of Maimonides. We joke about it a lot. This is my Maimonides, this is my -- everybody has their Maimonides (laughter), it's like -- and one of the features of Maimonides is that part of his methodology is to attack complex questions by positing opposites and therefore I believe that there's a whole genre of Jewish scholarship which tries to show coherency in Maimonides' thinking and I think they are misreading him at his core, because his methodology is not to be coherent, his methodology is to put forth opposites and leave them there so that you could somehow recognize that there is a complexity involved. And I think this is one of those cases.

And the end of the Guide for the Perplexed, 354, and Guide for the Perplexed is completely about faith and its requirements, ends with that at the end of the day the ultimate human excellence is determined by whether you do the good or do not do the good. So there is a very big difference between 351 of Guide for the Perplexed and 354. And please check them and read them because it's like completely different religious lines-- but even so I would posit that Maimonides would hate what I said. For Maimonides to be a human being is to live with the knowledge of God. And if God is not part of what you intellectually know you are a diminished human being and therefore by definition I

would argue a diminished Jew.

So it is true, Maimonides would probably disagree with me. But I have a chapter in the book entitled, "Do You Have to Believe in God in order to be a Good Jew". And I break it down. Number one, do you have to believe in God in order to be a Jew? And the answer is no. Judaism is a modality of being, not a modality of doing or believing. Judaism is not the religion around which the Jewish people were formed. The Jewish people were formed and Judaism was given to this people. And so Jewish people who had an identity precedes Judaism. So you don't have to believe in God in order to be a Jew.

If I believe that there is an autonomous good you don't have to believe in God in order to be good. The Abraham who says, will the judge of the whole earth not deal justly, or the Hillel who says what's hateful unto you, do not do unto others, as assumes that there is an access to the good outside of faith. And therefore you don't have to believe in God in order to be good. Now if Hillel is correct, and here there is a convert who comes to Hillel and says, convert me on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot, his answer is what's hateful unto you, do not do unto others. That's the whole Torah. Now I take that literally. What he's basically arguing is that the essence of our tradition is the ethical and consequently you can clearly be a good Jew if you just follow this doctrine of what's hateful unto you, do not do unto others. In other words, it flows, there is a logic. If it didn't his answer wouldn't work. And Rashi, the 10th century commentator on all of the Bible and all of the Talmud, he is the classic commentator. It's the lens through which Jews read all of our classic works. Rashi reads Hillel and almost he gets -- what is it, you got choked -- he had an aneurism. He said this is crazy, I think you forgot somebody. And so he takes Hillel and he reinterprets him. He says what's hateful unto you, do not do unto others. Others aren't human beings, others is God. And just like you don't like it when people don't listen to you, God doesn't like it when you don't listen to God. And therefore what's hateful unto you -- in other words, you like to be listened to -- is also hateful -- do not do unto God, therefore listen to everything that God commands at you. And he takes this ethical and puts God into the story. But that's not Hillel. So it's at least plausible, and I make the case through multiple sources, that there is a case to be made, and I think a very, very serious case, that you could be a good Jew -- and

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here Judaism is quite distinct at least from Islam -- and I don't want to speak in the name of Christianity -- you can be a good Jew without believing in God.

But then I write the next section, and that is From Good to Great. While you could be a good Jew without believing in God could you be a great Jew without believing in God. And while it's possible that you can be a great Jew without believing in God, it is precisely a life of faith than can move you from good to great. And how God and God's impact on your life can become -- when God is put second, God could be the catalyst for the type of humility, for the type -- what it is humility? Humility is about not seeing yourself all the time. It's about not seeing yourself as the center of the universe. And it is precisely when you contract yourself that you begin to see that there are others who have rights and who obligate you, because you don't walk through the world and look into the horizon and see your own belly button. The greatest humilifier of humankind potentially could be God, but when God is put second. God could be one of the greatest -- this is the fundamental lesson of monotheism and one of its great paradoxes, is the inability or difficulty of religious people to hear it, that's the autoimmune disease, is that you're not God. One of the most important roles that God has in my life is to remind me it's not about you, stupid.

Now, if I take it too far then human beings become insignificant and then I have God intoxication. But there's something about a life with God which ought to, and when it does, it becomes the greatest catalyst for decency and kindness and sensitivity. And that's the type of faith that I want to unleash. So I don't believe that you need to believe in God in order to be a good Jew, but I do believe that God could be an important part of you becoming a great Jew.

MR. GALSTON: Well, I have a list of about another 20 questions, but in the name of walking justly and doing rightly by the audience I just want to end in what I think is an appropriate fashion, with a joke. My favorite Jewish joke which I think builds on this theme of humility and its excesses that we just heard about. It's Yom Kippur, and the rabbi throws himself on the floor and says, oh, Lord, I am nothing. Then the president of the congregation throws himself on the floor and says, oh, Lord, I am nothing. And then a member of the congregation, inspired by this vision of religious fervor, throws himself

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on the floor and says, oh, Lord, I am nothing, at which point the president of the congregation turns to the rabbi and says, look who things he's nothing. (Laughter)

And with that ode to the paradoxes of humility, the floor is yours. I will tell you what, I will recognize and you answer. And what I'm going to do in order to make sure that I walk rightly and do justly by everybody, I'm now going to stand up so I can see everybody. And I'm going to start with the gentleman in the very back there, the man with the gray hair. Yes, you, sir. Please identify yourself so Rabbi Hartman --

MR. GALLS: Sure. My name is Mike Galls. I consider myself a pluralist, meaning respecting the otherness of others. I loved your analogies, the stories. People in the religious text, all the religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, they talk about ethical God, but somehow we make a damn villain out of God by making God side with me, choose me, give me preference. Why would God want to give preference to one over the other? We don't need a damn God like that who sides with others behind my back. We need a God who is just, fair, honest, humble, and loving to all humanity. And I'm writing my book about don't make a villain out of God.

Thank you.

The question I have is you mention about the ethics. In Koran there is a beautiful verse that says, repeated about 13 times, it says whether you are a Jew, Christian, Pagan, it doesn't matter, if you take care of your fellow beings I'll take care of you.

Thank you.

RABBI HARTMAN: As I said, I'm interested in a cultural war and I'm happy to have someone who is willing to be an officer in that army.

Thank you.

MR. GALSTON: Next question please. I'm going to work my way forward. There is a young man in a checked shirt. And then I'm going to come forward one row.

MR. POTEK: Hi, Rabbi. Aaron Potek.

RABBI HARTMAN: How are you? Nice to see you.

MR. POTEK: I've studied with you in Israel. I guess I'm coming at this from an insider perspective. I think we're probably going to lose this cultural war just from a purely statistical perspective. It seems that the people with whom we are arguing are producing at a rate of about 8-10 kids per family and the people that are in your camp are having 2-3 at best.

RABBI HARTMAN: We also have adoption, don't forget. (Laughter)

MR. POTEK: See, I guess what gives you hope that we'll actually win this cultural war?

RABBI HARTMAN: First of all I was raised in the tradition that the value of the life is judged by what you aspired, not what you achieved. And so I don't know if I'm going to be successful. I'm fighting now for an Israel and for Jewish people for my grandchildren. And actually that community, who by the way not all of them violate these principles that I mention. In other words, the ultra-orthodox aren't necessarily the vanguards of either of God intoxication or God manipulation. It depends. Some of them are, but it's actually across the board. But one of the things that they teach us is that right, for example, in Israel the ultra-orthodox community is eight percent. Look what eight percent could shape and could do. In Israel you become prime minister when you win 25 percent of the vote. That's all. You don't need 30, 25 percent guarantees you prime minister. And that's the secret to Netanyahu's success. But that means that if you need 25 percent I don't need to win, I just need a very powerful 20 percent, 30 percent, who are willing to stand up and to say what does a Jewish state mean. That a Jewish state means a country in which our moral principles and our moral values guides our military and foreign policy. That in a Jewish state all human beings are treated as being created in the image of God and equally. That a stranger or refugee who comes into our country should believe that they won the lottery instead of being seen as somebody who's dangerous. Over and over and over I can give you my political -- I can give you the political platform. If I get 20 percent who are willing to vote on that, I won, I won. But more than that, and this is -- I want to share with you just one good news because the insider conversation in the Jewish community is constantly shadowed by the doom of the birth rate, the demographic problem of which Jews are becoming more numerous.

The greatest assimilation in Jewish history always happens from the ultra-orthodox

community. The two greatest moments in assimilation, at the end of the 17th, beginning of the 18th century, and the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th, in which millions and millions of Jews left or shifted their beliefs and observances. It always happens from within the ultra-orthodox community. When you give people a choice between all or nothing, people will more than -- the rule of thumb is that eventually they will choose nothing.

Now, for ultra-orthodox ideology to sustain itself it has to be very, very small. It has to be able to control where you live, who your friends are, who you speak to, your sources of knowledge, how you're educated, the books you read, who you literally even see. The ultra-orthodox community is now suffering from its own success. As they move from five percent to ten percent now, eight percent in Israeli society, they have also shifted from being anti-Zionist to being Zionist. They couldn't contain the conversation anymore. More than 50 percent of orthodox men, over 70 percent of ultra-orthodox women are now in the job force, the workplace. They're not working, they're meeting. When my grandmother -- all my family comes from the ultra-orthodox community -- when my grandmother was getting older she couldn't get out, she wanted to watch television. You couldn't put a television, you had to hide it in the closet. Now it's on your phone. It's on your phone. So now we know there's Kosher phones. Kosher phones are phones that don't have internet but most ultra-orthodox have two phones. The one that they show their Rabbi and the one that they're part of the world with.

The ultra-orthodox community, as it grew to 10 percent, is now engaging modernity in ways that it never was before. The word might be the same. One of the fundamental flaws of most sociological analyses is that it takes a current reality with its features and its phenomenon, multiplies a growth or a shrinkage, but let's say it projects a certain growth and assumes that the current situation will stay the same, but will now be magnified on a different number. And the one thing we know is that nothing stays the same, that changes in quantity will also affect changes in quality, in particular when your ideology is an isolationist ideology. When you become a number that you're engaged in a society -- the ultra-orthodox community is now suffering from a huge fall off rate. In the United States historically 60 percent of those Jews who are raised orthodox don't remain orthodox. The whole myth that everything

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stays the same is just that, it's a myth. But even if -- see I will have an ideology to sustain my optimism in any event because I'm optimistic because I have no other choice because I have grandchildren. I'm optimistic because I don't give up on history. I'm part of a people who fight and who fight for the world that we want. But I don't need 80 percent to win. If I have 20 percent I have the ability to change Jewish history.

MR. GALSTON: Could the people who have questions raise their hands so I have a chance of how to organize things. I'm going to take two more questions from over here, shift over here, and then shift back since there seems to be an imbalance of questions. The gentleman right on the aisle with the baseball cap.

MR. HURWITZ: Thank you, Rabbi, for a wonderful presentation. I'm Elliott Hurwitz. I'm a former State Department and World Bank person. I was going to ask you -- I think you mentioned fundamentalism and I was going to ask you about three of the monotheistic religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and would you compare and contrast fundamentalism in those three religions please?

RABBI HARTMAN: Without showing disrespect, I don't want to do that. What I want to do, I think it's -- as a Rabbi I don't want to be the voice of Christianity or Islam. I've spent many, many years of my life studying Christianity and Islam, many, many years. And I've spent enough years to be able to grow as a Jew because of my encounter with Christianity and Islam, and that my encounter with other religious traditions and other testimonies of what life with God is about, has shaped profoundly how I understand Judaism and who I am. But I don't want to be the spokesman or the judge of that. That is for them and it is for you, because while you as a consumer, as we all are, you consume the product that is put forth, and you consume it or watch and you judge accordingly. I would suffice it to say that all of our religious traditions have those chapters and sources which could be profound sources of moral inspiration and good. And all of our traditions have chapters and sources which can be profound sources for evil. I believe very clearly that there is Jewish, there is Christian, and there is Islamic terror. And I think the verbal gymnastics being portrayed within political discourse in the United States is frankly not only ludicrous, it's destructive. It's destructive because you're not demanding of religion to deal with its

difficult sources.

And I want here, if I can, I want to speak in the name of Christianity. And here it's as a spectator. After the Second World War Christianity started to look seriously at itself and to ask itself what am I doing? And Christianity embarked in the last 60-70 years in one of the most remarkable, communal, collective processes of transformation and repentance which is an inspiration for any religious tradition. Just watch -- watch how a tradition said I have sinned. Second Vatican Council in 1963 officially starts to remove the notion of supersessionism, which was so fundamental to Christian thinking.

And one of the most remarkable things that I have encountered as I've met Christian leaders and teachers who have been leading this process throughout Christendom, and today if there is anti-Semitism in the world, it is almost never ever motivated from within Christian faith. And it's remarkable what's happened within 60-70 years. But one of the most key features of that is that the teachers and people who I met and who shared and who I saw leading this process, took full responsibility for the chapters in their scripture which taught the other. They didn't say it wasn't there, this is just -- the last 2000 years of Christian history were somehow an aberration, it's not true Christianity, this is what it is. Of course there was. There's a place for Christian terror, Muslim terror, and Jewish terror. We will only overcome it when we recognize the sources of it and then we say that's there, but I am choosing this. That's there, but I have to now engage in decades of interpretation and to tell people that's not the way you should read it, or you have an obligation to set that aside because it's a certain context. Those verses don't disappear the minute you say it's not Muslim, or it's not Jewish, or it's not Christian. So when we say there is no Muslim terror, there just happens to be Muslims who for some reason are killing in the name of Islam. We're not helping Islam.

Every religious tradition, all of us, have to encounter and engage in this type of inner correction, and inner correction comes when we recognize those flaws. And so all of our traditions are susceptible to it. Some of us are more engaged in it than others and our responsibility is to know that every religious tradition has the potential to heal itself if it does the work that it needs to do.

That would be as far as I would choose to go as a Rabbi today.



MR. GALSTON: It's a little farther than you suggested you would go at the beginning of the answer (laughter), but so the --

RABBI HARTMAN: I changed my mind. (Laughter)

MR. GALSTON: That's good, that's good. This gentleman over here has been most patient.

MR. CHANDLER: Thank you very much. Gerald Chandler. In the answer that you just gave you partially answered the question I was going to ask. But still, if I understood your thesis -- well, I don't know whether to apply it only to Judaism or to all religions when you said there's no way of choosing among different beliefs within a religion. So there are a lot of people in this country who say that certain aspects of Al Qaida's beliefs, of Saudi Arabian beliefs, of ISIL's beliefs are not true Islam. So do I understand you right to say that that is another true Islam even if you don't agree with it?

RABBI HARTMAN: Yes. And I studied enough Islam to know that it is true. And to think that Islam is the only tradition in which the devil doesn't quote scripture would be intellectually dishonest.

MR. GALSTON: Next question please. Yes, this gentleman over here and then I'm going to come forward, promise.

MR. SHARMA: Bill Sharma. Rabbi, very thought provoking and incisive talk. I thought I was listening to a Hindu priest. (Laughter) I'm very serious. Hindu is pluralism and I'm surprised you talk about all religions, but not the oldest religion in the world.

Now, coming to the topic that I have moral excellence and what Hillel says, do your duty. Hinduism is the karmic way of life. Even if you don't believe in God but do your dharma you reach salvation. So what is the place of the karmic values in Judaism?

RABBI HARTMAN: Elaborate the question a little more for me please. And the reason why, I've studied a little Buddhism. I don't speak about those traditions of which I have not spent years studying, so I apologize. I have work to do. I'm still young.

MR. SHARMA: So I'm giving you a thought provoking --

RABBI HARTMAN: I have work to do.

MR. SHARMA: I'm giving you a thought provoking idea. What you are saying, your pluralism, your rationality, your arguments, are exactly Hinduism. Hinduism says (speaking Hindu), if you ask who is God I say I am God. I merge with God, God is me. We have no sin, we have no concept of sin. There is absolutely no sin. You are a very nice person. The only thing you have to do is do your karmic, which is the virtuous path in life. If you traverse the virtuous path in life you are God. You don't need salvation, you don't need rituals.

So you are saying very similar things. Hillel is a very similar thing. So if you just do Hillel do you reach God? If you follow Hillel do -- be nice to your neighbor, love your neighbor?

RABBI HARTMAN: Thank you for that, and I look forward to studying more. There are two parts -- and I'm not arguing with you in that there are two sensitivities that I have from within the Jewish tradition. The first is I get very frightened when people think they're God. In other words, I understand what you mean, but that language unleashes -- there's an evil inclination in humankind which scares the living daylights out of me. When the imperfect human being is able to function under the umbrella of divinity, scares me profoundly. And so I don't use --

MR. SHARMA: If I may -- it says God is inside me. That's what I mean.

RABBI HARTMAN: No, I understand. I appreciate that. And I am actually -- part of my teaching -- maybe it's because I come -- ideas work within certain cultural milieus in which certain words mean certain things. And within the 3000 years of a Jewish conversation my people need very much to recognize the differences between them and God. Like to heal themselves they have to connect to their humanity, not to their divinity. But that's just part of -- and the more we do -- like we almost -- we've owned God for too long. Like we've actually thought that we own God for a long time and therefore we need a little loneliness for a while. Like we need a little separation. So that would be one part.

The other part is that when Hillel says that's the whole Torah, the rest is commentary, he ends with one other line, go and study. And traditionally the interpretation of that, one which I feel very close to, is I don't want to reduce religion to the ethical because I think we're not only selling religion short we're selling the human experience short. Faith, spirituality, culture, language, values aren't just what's

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hateful unto you, do not do unto others. And while as I said that could make you a good Jew, it is the greatness, it's what else is added. What's value added when you have a particular story with your traditions and your songs and your language, and your rituals, which all advocate -- they remind you to do the good, they open your soul to be able to experience the transcendent, to experience other dimensions in life. So I worry when religion gets reduced too much. I think one of religion's greatest powers is that it has that complexity as long as God is put second. Then I could embrace the other voices as long as that comes afterwards. It's when it comes first that I'm fighting.

I hope that's a sufficient response.

MR. GALSTON: May I see the hands of remaining questions please so I can try -- okay, there I see four in the front and that's it. So what I'd like to do now is to take these four questions -- do you have a pen? Excellent. You may have my notes, yes. And take the four questions, think of it as a preparation for the holiday (laughter) and then I want to conclude with a question and we will be done by 11:30. So question one.

Did I miss anybody?

MR. CHECCO: Thank you very much. This is an interesting time. I'm going to throw a little monkey wrench into this. I walked away from my religion that I was born into many decades ago and eventually I walked away from all religions. I found it too confining, I found it too guilt ridden, I could not self-actualize. I've spent my whole life on a journey to become that moral person. Probably fallen short many times. But if I have a God it is the God of infinite possibilities, the universe of infinite possibilities.

I guess my question is do you believe it personally that you have to have a belief in God to become a moral person? And one just aside, ownership, you used the word and I think the more people own their God the more fundamental they become, which is a real problem as we've seen.

Thank you.

MR. GALSTON: Okay. I'll take the one in the front row and then the one directly in back and then over here.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Rabbi. My name is --

RABBI HARTMAN: Thank you for coming back.

QUESTIONER: Oh, thank you. I heard the Rabbi yesterday and he -- I think he's causing sleepless nights here. (Laughter)

MR. GALSTON: Then he's doing his job.

QUESTIONER: Exactly. I once studied years ago at Temple University briefly with Maurice Friedman who was a giant of a scholar, particularly of the thought of Martin Buber. And one insight that came out of that study, and from the outlook of Martin Buber, is that God would be in the second person, or thou, or in Buber's language, eternal thou. So the notion of putting God second kind of comes over as a lead balloon even though about 90 percent of what you have said is remarkably challenging and insightful. I wonder if the banner that you're promoting -- of course it's also a book and I realize I guess you can't take the title of your book back, but I wonder if you would consider a different banner, perhaps God is relational as in God in the second person. Martin Buber, as opposed to third person God, I-it. And Buber didn't go to synagogues but he was a great man.

RABBI HARTMAN: Thank you. I understand. Thank you.

MR. GALSTON: Right here.

MR. MITCHELL: Rabbi, I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write the Mitchell Report. I would just say at the outset that it's been my practice after every governing ideas session to approach Bill Galston and say, you know, one of these days you're going to fail. It just keeps getting better and I have to say today is another time when I will say to Bill Galston after the session is over, you've done it again. So thank you very, very much.

I want to ask you a question that may end up being an extremely short answer, and it wasn't the one I intended to ask. But when I was thinking about your observation about the importance of interpreting scripture in historical context, I thought about something far afield from religion, and that is a sentiment that seems to be sweeping the country these days, wherein institutions in particular, educational institutions, are sort of engaging in what might be termed revisionist history or in the sense that it relates to your subject matter, acting morally. It is places like Princeton where they're rethinking

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whether it should be called the Woodrow Wilson School because of his politics, whether Calhoun College at Yale needs to be renamed, whether the logo for the Harvard Law School needs to be replaced, and on and on. And so my question is whether that's something that speaks to you?

QUESTIONER: Thank you. And Rabbi, again, I also appreciated your remarks tremendously, but I have a more maybe political practical question. In light of what you've presented do you really see any alternative to the current situation in Israel changing in really the indefinite future, the near-term, long-term, any term, given what you presented and the seemingly hardened sides that have developed over the last any number of years?

MR. GALSTON: I'm sorry, is there one more hand that I missed? Sure, please. And is there -- yes, okay, we'll take two more questions. And in order to accommodate the last two questions I will suppress my concluding question. So, sir.

MR. ROBINSON: Good morning and thank you, Rabbi. I'm Gene Robinson. For nearly 40 years I was a priest and then a bishop in the Episcopal church, and probably could be described as putting God first many of those years. I'm now a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, the other great progressive think tank here in D.C., where I'm engaged in an experiment of putting God second I think, particularly as it relates to gay and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. And I'm working on the notion of dignitary harm, that is to say that the damage done to one's sense of dignity and worth, and especially as it relates to the harm done by religious institutions.

So my question is how might you suggest that religious institutions repair the harm they have done to LGBT people, people of color, women and others?

MS. GOLDSTEIN: Hi, I'm Hannah Goldstein. I'm a reform rabbi in Washington, D.C. And my question is if you open up the system, and I think we're pretty comfortable opening up the religious system in reformed Judaism, where do you turn for moral guidance? I mean I think for many people they look to religion as a source of moral authority or moral guidance. And when we open that up, which I think is an important thing to do, you know, where else can we look and what are the other sources of wisdom that we should turn to?

MR. GALSTON: Six questions, six minutes. (Laughter)

SPEAKER: And don't forget the final four.

RABBI HARTMAN: I want to start by saying thank you. I've travelled extensively; I don't remember ever the quality of the types of questions. It's just been remarkable, so I am very, very much in your debt and it was really -- and now I'd like to respond to these worlds of issues.

The first, as I said, I have no doubt in my mind that you do not have to believe in God in order to be a good person. And the only people who believe other than that are people who don't get out enough. (Laughter) If your whole life if all you live in your little -- what, that's like the most -- that is empirically -- it's just self evident to me. And if I'm calling for an independent ethic of religion, you definitely don't need -- part of my journey is the God you don't believe in I don't believe in either. The question is whether there is another God. Now you don't need saving, so you're doing just fine. I'm not out to save anybody, I'm just out in many ways just to save myself. Could I who shares much of the values and yearnings that you have, can I find a voice there in my tradition. And there my primary teacher was my father of blessed memory whose whole theology and whose book, "A Living Covenant", was central in enabling the type of human spirit that you expressed very briefly to have its place within the Jewish tradition, within a religious life. And I'm able to breathe in Judaism because of him and this book is an attempt to add more oxygen into the conversation so that people don't have to leave. But the answer is self evident. That's on the first.

I understand that the title is problematic. My wife didn't like the title. She says, Donniel, I love the book but the title, I can't get beyond the title. And I understand that. I chose it intentionally and the publisher said it's the first time that they let the author pick the title because they said it was perfect. I didn't pick it in order to be provocative. I have no yearning to be provocative. It just doesn't do anything for me. That's not true, but let's say it doesn't. (Laughter) At least my image of myself is that I have no yearning to be provocative. I really believe that we have to put the challenge in front of us. We have to create a spiritual world in which God being put second is not an act of faithlessness. God being put second is not an alienation from God. The last line of the book is, when you put God second you put

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God's will first. That's the way the book ends. And part of the title is because I'm not -- I don't just write books, I run an educational institution. This is an educational program and we're going to come to how do we help institutions. This is an educational program of how we begin to talk about God, because monotheism -- we have all the -- just Google it. Put God first is like this is what it means to be religious. And when we do that we're unleashing evil potentially. And so we need to create a different religious discourse. And I appreciate that it's hard, but this is the work that needs to be done.

I am very, very troubled by this revisionism. I find it intellectually dishonest and I find it unnecessary because it's not willing to do the move that recognizes that there is progress. Now there might be a difference between -- and again I don't mean -- I really apologize if I'm stepping on anybody's sacred cows, and I really don't mean to do so as a visitor. I can understand that there might be certain symbols, a Confederate flag, that someone says, excuse me, this is -- you're saying it now and it's here, and when you use that symbol I'm not in the room. It's like, for example, when I now speak about God I don't use the word "he". I have all these confused sentences because I always use "God said about God" -- I never say he because I've learned that half the -- when you say (inaudible) -- I don't have -- I've -- I'm not in the room. And so that obligates me. It obligates me when somebody says I'm being hurt by your language, I need space. We need to be more -- and I hear that, but it's part of this notion that we have to make the whole -- everything is about what I believe right now. There's no room -- let's look at -- there is another Abraham. And by the way that other Abraham of Genesis 22 is horrific, but also there's something there, there's a voice I have to hear. When you revise you flatten. There is no discourse, there's no debate, there's no moral growth. All the richness of our culture gets removed. And so I owned -- I find some of that -- it's like -- when somebody says that's not Jewish, it always scares me. What do you mean it's not Jewish? Because I joke, you know, there's an Israeli party who uses what you call not Jewish as their political platform. You know, like what you're -- it's there, it's in the room, and it's only when we confront and we recognize that that was there, it's like almost a continual symbol of what's possible so that we could know where we grew, where we failed, what we learned. But the constant flattening and the erasing of the intellectual journeys I think is going to create impoverishment and not

moral enlightenment. So that's on that one.

Is there any possibility of change in Israel? Possibility? Sure. I would say there needs to be change. I think everybody knows what the deal will be. And let's say I'm leaving the issues of state and religion aside, when it comes to foreign policy the deal is clear. Everybody knows that we're going to be talking about returning to 1967 borders with swaps. Some people don't know what the swaps are. Swaps are between anywhere from 3 to 15 percent of the West Bank which will be swapped for land of equal value, because 80 percent of the settlers live in these -- you're not going to be able to move 300,000 people, you're not going to be able to move forth in any peace process if the -- sometimes the enemy of -- what's the enemy of the good -- is the -- what is it?

SPEAKER: The perfect.

RABBI HARTMAN: The perfect. You want to have perfect justice, perfect justice will create the establishment of perennial injustice, therefore swaps taking into account realities on the ground, starting from Bush, this is now core international doctrine. No one talks about -- everybody knows what the deal is. That's what the deal is going to be. The problem is that on both sides each one has a fantasy that that reality will not come to fruition. And each side -- and I don't believe by the way it's a one-sided story -- each side has a lot of work to do. As this book is getting translated into Hebrew, and there's going to be other sections in the Hebrew book that weren't in the English section, part of what I worry about is the place that religion is playing in strengthening this status quo. And will it change? It needs to. And when something needs to change we need armies of people who are going to spend their lives on changing it. But the change in Israel is not going to take place from the top down. This is what people have to understand. In a democracy the sovereign is the citizen. And if the citizen -- and by the way now I need to get to America, America's challenge is not Trump. Trump might personify a much deeper challenge and if you don't look at that -- it's very easy to blame the leader and then you think there's nothing wrong. And if he loses then we're fine, that's it, it's done, it's just fine? You know, again, I don't know but Hillary -- we've now entered the promised land. There's something here that we -- this -- if you want to change a society's politics you have to change it through its education. You actually need to



move from both sides, but unless you change the sovereign, the sovereign is going to perennially be attracted to a politician who knows how to speak to the worst of them, but the society has to take account for the worst that they've allowed, to grow in their midst. That's what we need in Israel. There isn't going to be peace tomorrow because our societies aren't committed to it. The hatred is deep. The mutual vilification is deep; the narratives we tell about each other are narratives which undermine seeing the other as having inalienable rights which obligate me. And so we have a lot of work, the question is whether we have the time to do so. But that's the challenge, but it is a very, very difficult one.

The most significant way in which religious institutions could repair themselves is by ensuring that there are profound outside critics which it believes it has to always foster and listen to. The greatest danger of religious institutions is that religious ideology creates an ancillary conversation. And as a result I don't have to hear when a gay or lesbian, when a person of a different sexual orientation speaks to me and says, you're not seeing me. That's the blind, I don't see you. You're not hearing, look at me. I don't have to see you because God has told me that you're not you. And I have to save you from you, not speak of saving the rest of the world from you. And I don't hear you. Religious institutions create this moral isolationism. What did you call it? Epistemological --

SPEAKER: Tribalism.

RABBI HARTMAN: And it's like there's an epistemological tribalism which is fostered by religious ideology which makes it immune from the necessary new ideas which it needs to correct itself. And therefore the most important thing for every religious tradition is to have the voice of those who in theory don't get it, have not only a seat at the table, but to have leadership in their midst. And when we do that then the chances of our not falling or failing in God manipulation, the chances decrease. That outside voice, it's like every system, the minute -- like in the Jewish tradition one of our great challenges is that anybody who criticizes us becomes anti-Semitic. So if you're an anti-Semite I don't have to listen to you, but then we rob ourselves of that voice. Every tradition does it. And so we have to institutionalize the authority of the outsider in order to ensure that the insider could become who they ought to be.

Where do you turn for moral guidance? To your conscience, to your humanity. Do we

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know that your conscience and humanity are going to get it right? Not necessarily. Human conscious, human thought could get it wrong just like human interpretation of God could get it wrong. It's like people accuse me of like you're ruining it for people. I'm not ruining anything. There was no there there that you thought that you had there. (Laughter) It's just you thought that there was a there there, and therefore you're not taking responsibility for the there that you created because you're assuming it was there independent of you, but you created it anyway. There was no there. All there was was thou shalt not murder and you gave it content. There was no there. There is no source which is telling you what to do. Human beings have to use the whole wealth of our experiences and our knowledge and our accumulated growth to try to understand what does it mean, what's hateful unto you, do not do unto others and who is the other. And part of moral growth is that we're expanding that other to more and more people who were never included. Love your neighbor as yourself. Who is your neighbor? Is your neighbor the fellow Jew? Who is your neighbor? We never had it, so I'm not saying we lost it, it's just not there. The only difference is that there are some people who say it's there and then what they do is they give it a content and then immunize it from outside correctives by saying it wasn't me, it was God. God's word is what you understood it to -- I don't know what God wants. I don't have a clue. I don't have a clue. In my tradition, I belong in a tradition where God tried to get involved in a debate. And Rabbi Joshua gets on his feet and says God is not in heaven. Get out of the room. You know, the notion that you are going to try to tell us what you meant, I don't want -- it doesn't matter because the minute tell us I have to then figure out what is the word you said that -- it just -- there was no there. Now it's true, where do we get it from, where everybody gets it from, and that's the story of humanity. We learn, we aspire, we acquire knowledge, we grow. Sometimes we take steps back, sometimes we take steps forward. Welcome to a non-redeemed world. Religion doesn't redeem us from a non-redeemed world, religion becomes redemptive when it recognizes that it is as non-redeemed as all of us. And in the midst of this non-redemption it tries to push us to be decent.

Thank you.

MR. GALSTON: Talk about ending with a flourish. (Applause)

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Now, under normal circumstances I would say that Rabbi Hartman would be glad to sign books and answer further question --

RABBI HARTMAN: Actually I can. My plane was delayed by three hours.

MR. GALSTON: Oh, you can? Well, this is wonderful. Then I can proceed as usual. There are books back there, Rabbi Hartman is up here. That gap will close in good time. But thank you so much for sharing an hour and a half of our time with us. We really appreciate it.

RABBI HARTMAN: Thank you. (Applause)

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