

You Shall Walk In His Ways

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Abstract: This essay examines “*V’halakhtah B’drakhav*” (*Imitatio Dei*) as the fundamental principle of Jewish ethics and the basis of halakhic morality. The principle is a meta-norm—a category by which Jewish legal rules, commands and prohibitions are to be judged—and is superior to the principles of “You shall love your fellow as yourself,” (Lev. 19:18) identified as such by R. Akiva, and to “This is the record of Adam’s line,” (Gen. 5:1) identified as such by Ben Azai. The author discusses these three principles as metaethical norms and their relationship to *halakhah*, demonstrating that the command to emulate God’s attributes is analytically tied to the concepts of humanity created in the image of God (*Tselem Elohim*), sanctifying God’s name (*Qiddush Ha-Shem*) and profaning God’s name (*Hilul Ha-Shem*). Unlike Lev. 19:18, its ethical significance is not utilitarian and points to human perfection. Its application has reference to gentiles, Jews and scholars.



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A.

R. Akiva said, “You shall love your fellow as yourself” (Lev. 19:18)—that is the Torah’s great general precept.” Ben Azai said, “This is the record of Adam’s line’ (Gen. 5:1)—that is a greater general precept.”²

Much has been written about the philosophical significance of this dispute.³ Without doubt, R. Akiva is here expressing some sort of universalistic principle. Indeed, Malbim recognized as much when he identified this statement with the well-known Kantian principle:

This is indicated by use of the letter lamed [as the preposition preceding “fellow” in the verse cited by R. Akiva],⁴ which implies standing in one’s fellow’s position, in that one wishes for one’s fellow what one wishes for oneself. And the philosophers have already explained that the principal rule, the source of ethical science, is the desire that all of one’s actions be of general applicability; that is, if one wishes to derive benefit through evil befalling another, one must first assess whether he would be

willing to see his action universally applied, such that anyone could impose a loss on his fellow for the sake of his own benefit. And since it makes no sense to incur a loss out of self-interest, one would likewise refrain from imposing that loss on his fellow. And so, too, if one were able to benefit one’s fellow.⁵

This reading no doubt approaches the plain meaning of R. Akiva’s statement. But what does Ben Azai add to the discussion? We can probe his position more deeply by referring to the parallel version of his statement in the *Sifra*, as understood in Rabad’s commentary:

Ben Azai says, “This is record of Adam’s line.—When God created [man], He made him in the likeness of God’—that is a greater general precept.” Which is to say, the first verse [the one cited by R. Akiva] teaches only [that your fellow should be] “as yourself”: if one is demeaned, or accursed, or robbed, or beaten, his fellow is demeaned or accursed or beaten with him. Accordingly, the second verse adds “in the likeness of God He made

¹ First published in Hebrew in *Filosofiyah Yisra’elit*, ed. Mosheh Halamish and Asa Kasher (Tel Aviv, 5743 [1982-83]). English translation by Joel Linsider.

² *Gen. Rabbah*, ed. Theodor-Albeck (Jerusalem, 5725 [1964-65]), p. 237.

³ See the summary by H. Y. Roth, *Religion and Human Values* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 5733 [1972-73]), pp. 95 et seq.

⁴ Malbim bases his interpretation on the distinction between *ohev et* [in which a simple direct object follows the verb “love”] and *ohev le-* [in which the object is preceded by a preposition meaning “to”].

⁵ Malbim, *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Mitsvot, Sifra Vayiqra* 45 (on Lev. 19:18). Cf. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Commentary on the Torah*, Heb. translation by R. Mordechai Breuer (Jerusalem, 5738 [1977-78]), pp. 318-319).

him.” Whom do you demean or curse [when you demean or curse a person]? The image of the likeness of God. That is a greater general precept than the first.⁶

The first, essentially formal, precept simply asserts equivalent standing. The second adds material ethical demands, by establishing barriers that preclude any compromise of that equivalence. I must honor my counterpart not merely because he is like me, but primarily because he is created in the image of God.⁷

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We will not dwell here on the implications and meanings of these two precepts, but only on their significance as a matter of principle. We have here two examples not of norms but of meta-norms; that is, a category of principles by which rules, commands, and prohibitions, rather than deeds and conduct, are to be judged. This incursion into the realm of meta-ethics, and its relationship to *halakhah*, are the subject of the following discussion.⁸

B.

As noted, the great innovation in R. Akiva's statement

(even in its third formulation, by Hillel the Elder, “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow” [*Shabbat* 31b]) is rooted, in my view, in its transformation of the commandment to “love your fellow as yourself” into a “great general precept,” that is, a principle from which additional commandments and general rules may be derived.

To be sure, one can understand this commandment as mandating a particular emotion or even as requiring actions of a particular sort vis a vis the other. Such an understanding implies the transformation of this commandment into an added, specific obligation. But the true significance of R. Akiva's and Hillel's statements rests on the fact that we have here not a specific commandment but a meta-commandment, a principle to be used in deriving new norms. This approach is prominent in the thinking of Maimonides, who explicitly emphasizes it in his various writings on the second method (*ha-derekh ha-sheniyah*). In *Sefer ha-Mitsvot* (second *shoresh*), for example, in the course of criticizing the method adopted by the author of *Halakhot Gedolot*, he says that

Those who rely on this idea list among the commandments visitation of the sick, comforting the bereaved, and burying the dead, in view of the aforementioned midrash on Scripture's statement

⁶ *Peirush ha-Rabad* (Jerusalem, 5719 [1958-59]), 89b.

⁷ According to Malbim, Ben Azai moves to an entirely different ethical principle. One who follows R. Akiva's precept still “acts in all respects for the sake of self-interest.” It is proper, however, that a person “act in all respects on account of the rules of the higher, inclusive understanding, free of any admixture of self-interest.” Ben Azai builds his precept not on interest but on the claim that all people are as “one person and one corpus.” From this, it follows that one must love the other “because he is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.”

⁸ See H.Z. Reines, “*Yahas ha-yehudim le-nokhrim*,” *Sura* 4 (Jerusalem and New York, 5724 [1963-64]):192-221; Ze'ev Falk, “*Nokhri ve-ger toshav be-mishpat ha-ivri*,” *Mahalkhim* 2 (5729 [1968-69]):9-15; David Rokeah, “*Le-parashat yahasam shel ha-hakhamim la-goyyim ve-la-gerim*,” *Mahalkhim* 5 (5731 [1970-71]):68-75. See also the important work of Yehezqel Kohen, *Ha-yahas el ha-nokhri ba-halakhah u-ve-metsi'ut bitequfat ha-tanna'im* (doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University, *Shevat* 5735 [1975]) and the many bibliographical references there. Many of the articles considered there are labeled “apologetics,” and the present article may be deemed worthy of that disparaging characterization as well. But it seems to me that the term alludes to only one significant and productive distinction: that between, on the one hand, an effort to deal with a conflict between a system and an external principle and, on the other, a similar effort when the confrontation arises between principles indigenous to the system,

(Exod. 18:20) “make known to them the way [in which] they are to go and the practices they are to follow.” They say “the way” refers to acts of kindness; “they are to go” refers to visiting the sick; “in which” refers to burying the dead; “and the practices” refers to the laws; and “they are to follow” refers to actions beyond what the laws require (*Bava Qamma* 30b). And they believe that each of these acts is a separate commandment, failing to recognize that all of the acts, and others like them, fall within the rubric of a single commandment, namely, His statement (may He be blessed) “Love your fellow as yourself.”

The significance of this distinction becomes clear when we consider the standing of the commandment “Love your fellow as yourself.” In interpreting that commandment (positive commandment 206), Maimonides says:

This refers to His having commanded us to love one another as we love ourselves, such that one’s love and compassion for his brother will be the same as one’s love and compassion for oneself, with respect to both person and property. Whatever he wishes, I will wish; whatever I wish for myself, I will wish for him—as God (may He be exalted) says, “Love your fellow as yourself.”⁹

In *Hilkhot Aveil* (14:1), Maimonides restates that determination: “It is within the precept of ‘Love your fellow as yourself’ that all things that you wish others to do for you, you should do for your brother in Torah and com-

mandments.” To similar effect is his *Commentary on the Mishnah* (on *Pe’ah* 1:1), where he says, “All interpersonal commandments are included within the general precept of performing acts of kindness. Examine them and you will find them there; as Hillel the Elder responded, when asked by the gentile to teach him the Torah while standing on one foot, ‘What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.’”¹⁰

C.

Although “Love your fellow as yourself” would seem to be the highest ethical rule in the halakhic system, that is not in fact the case. A second, insufficiently recognized rule complements the first, representing an additional meta-ethical principle that transcends the first precept. This rule is articulated by Maimonides in *Sefer ha-Mitsvot* as follows:

It is that we are commanded to imitate Him (may He be exalted) to the extent we can, as Scripture says, “You shall walk in His paths” (Deut. 28:9). And this command is reiterated as “Walk in all His paths” [Deut. 10:12, 11:22], meaning, just as He called compassionate, so shall you be compassionate; just as He is called merciful, so shall you be merciful; just as He is called kind, so shall you be kind.¹¹ The matter is otherwise expressed in the statement, “After the Lord your God shall you walk” (Deut. 13:5), meaning that resembling the good actions and worthy qualities used metaphorically to describe God, may He be exalted, will greatly exalt all humans.¹² We have here two similar principles from

one of which has gained greater emphasis. In what follows, I attempt to show that to be the case here.

⁹ Compare *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De’ot* 6:3. Here [in the passage from *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, in contrast to *Hilkhot De’ot*, which speaks of actions], the emphasis is on the emotional relationship between a man and his fellow. The distinction becomes apparent when we compare the positive commandment to love one’s fellow with the negative commandment forbidding hatred. “One who hates a fellow Jew in his heart violates a negative commandment, as Scripture says, “Do not hate your brother in your heart (Lev. 19:17).” The violation is not punished by lashes, however, for it entails no action, inasmuch as the Torah here admonishes us only regarding feelings of hatred. In contrast, the positive commandment entails action, and it is not limited to feelings.

¹⁰ Maimonides, *Peirush ha-Mishnah* (ed. Kapah), p. 94.

¹¹ Maimonides’ various commentators have considered the rabbinic basis for his statement here. *Kesef Mishneh* (on *Mishneh*

which the very same laws are derived, making it all the more important to try to distinguish between them. The distinction I propose here is tied to the fundamental nature of the meta-norm “Love your fellow as yourself” and its potential limitations. We can easily assess the precept’s limitations by referring to the conclusion of Maimonides’ statement in *Hilkhot Aveil*, cited above: “Do [so] for your brother in Torah and commandments.” The rule without doubt is based on the idea of the covenant, that is,

the aspiration to create a community embodying its religious mission. The members of that community are envisioned as the organs of a body, obligated to see one another as such. It follows that “Love your fellow as yourself” constitutes a basic ethical rule, but one based on the principle of mutuality; and it is bounded by the limits of the term “your fellow.”¹³ On this view, love for one’s fellow is the basis for social ethics. Following in God’s paths, in contrast, creates an ethical system based on an in

Torah, *Hilkhot De`ot* 1:6) refers us to *Shabbat* 133b, and see also *Sotah* 14a. Similar wording presented in the name of Abba Sha’ul appears in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, *Masekhta de-Shirta* (Jerusalem, 5720 [1959-60]), p. 137: “I will resemble Him: just as He is merciful and compassionate, so shall you be merciful and compassionate. (See there as well the statements of R. Yosi ha-Galili: “Declare the pleasantness and praise of God before all the nations of the world” and of R. Akiva: “I will speak of His pleasantness and praises...before all the nations of the world...‘therefore maidens have loved you’ (Song. Of Sol. 1:3)...--loved you unto death.” Both of these statements are tied to the motif of *qiddush ha-shem* (sanctifying God’s name), to which we shall return presently.) Compare as well *Yerushalmi P’e’ah* 1 (15b) and *Masekhet Soferim* 3:12. These formulations lack the wording “called merciful,” but as R. Elijah David Rabinowitz Teumim has written (*Benei Binyamin* on *Hilkhot De`ot* 1:6), Maimonides’ wording “has its clear source in *Sifrei* on *Parashat `Egev*.” *Sifrei* there (par. 49, ed. Finkelstein, New York, 5729 [1968-69]), p. 114) indeed uses the wording “is called...merciful”: “‘To walk in all His paths’ (Deut. 11:22)—these are paths of God. The Lord is a merciful and compassionate God, who declares (Joel 3:5) ‘everyone who calls on [or, as the *Sifrei* appears to read it, who is called by—*trans.*] the Name of the Lord shall escape.’ But is it possible for a human being to be called by the name of God? Rather, God is called merciful, and so shall you be merciful...so shall you be compassionate, as is said, ‘Compassionate and merciful is God...’ (Ps. 145:8), bestowing gratuitous gifts... and therefore it is said ‘all who are called by the Name of the Lord shall escape,’ and it is said ‘all who are called by my Name’ (Isa. 43:7) and it is said ‘the Lord has made everything for His own purpose (Prov. 16:4).’ Nevertheless, in *Guide of the Perplexed* (I:54), Maimonides does not use the locution “is called.” We will treat the idea of being like God more expansively below, noting for now only that Abba Sha’ul’s formulation in *Sifra* uses the term “imitation”: “Abba Shau’l says, ‘What is higher than to be in the king’s retinue? To imitate the king.’” (*Sifra*, ed. Weiss (Vienna, 1862), 86c. A different version of the text reads “to await the king” [reading *mehakeh* instead of *mehaqeh*], and on that basis, Rabad interprets “awaiting for the king to determine his route or the city against which he will wage war...and so, what is the duty of Israel as the retinue of the Holy One Blessed be He? They must heed His words, go where He directs and follow the path He determines, and not separate from Him.” The concept of resembling God appears in many formulations, explicitly or implicitly. Compare, among many other examples, *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, chapter 26: “Just as the Holy One Blessed be He loves Israel wherever they may dwell..., so shall a person love all Israel wherever they may dwell”. On the sages’ concept of *imitatio dei*, see A. Marmorstein, “*Die Nachahmung Gottes (Imitatio Dei) in der Agada*,” *Juedische Studien Josef Wohlgemut...gewidmet* (Frankfurt am Main, 1928), pp. 114-159, [=“The Imitation of God in the Haggadah,” *Studies in Jewish Theology* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 109-121]. See there at p. 113 the quotation from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Deut. 34:6 and parallel texts cited by Christian apologists who claim that the children of Israel strive to imitate God in their kindness. Marmorstein associates *imitatio dei* with the frequently encountered term “a partner of God” (id., p. 116), but that link, in my view, is problematic. Among other instances in rabbinic literature, the parallel to the righteous person who sustains the needy is particularly interesting. See the references cited by Marmorstein (id., p. 15, nn. 1, 2) and I. Abrahams, “The Imitation of God,” *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels, Second Series* (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 138-182; Hans Kosmala, “*Nachfolge und Nachahmung Gottes, Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute, Im griechischen Denken*, vol. II, 1963, pp. 38-85; *Im juedischen Denken*, vol III, 1964, pp. 65-110. Kosmala believes the concept of imitation is a foreign transplant in tannaitic thought. I am not persuaded by his evidence, and I will deal with matter elsewhere.

¹² *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, Positive Commandment 8.

¹³ It should be noted that the limitation on the term “your fellow” is understood as excluding not only the gentile but also the

personam principle, the impulse to be like God. “You shall walk in His paths” is a broad ethical precept lacking the foregoing limitations, for the Holy One Blessed be He is good to the wicked and the righteous alike.

Although “Love your fellow as yourself” would seem to be the highest ethical rule in the halakhic system, that is not in fact the case.

In my view, Maimonides explicitly recognized all the ethical implications of relying on the precept of resembling God, thereby transcending the limitations of the other laws. Proof of this can be found in Maimonides’ statement in *Hilkhot Melakhim* 10:12:

The sages commanded us to tend to the gentile ill and bury their dead along with the Jewish dead, and to sustain their indigent along with all Jewish indigent, for the sake of peace. As it is said, “the Lord is

good to all, and His mercy is on all his creatures” (Ps. 145:9); and it is said, “its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace” (Prov. 3:17).¹⁴

The quotation from Psalms supplements this discussion, demonstrating the extent to which Maimonides regards *imitatio dei* as a clear meta-halakhic principle, whose force transcends the limits that constrain other precepts.

H. Y. Roth has examined the concept of *imitatio dei*.¹⁵ Starting from the premise that God’s essential attribute is “holy,”¹⁶ Roth determines “that for us (in Jewish thought), the idea of *imitatio dei* entails no obligations.”¹⁷ Going further, Roth comments “that it is impossible to derive (and, if we evaluate the matter on the basis of the texts themselves, no attempt was made to derive) a positive ethical program from the idea of *imitatio dei*. The reason is simple. The God of Israel is a ‘hidden God,’ whose name, according to an appealing

Jew who is not “your brother in Torah and commandments.” On the limitations of the commandment to “Love your fellow as yourself,” see *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (ed. Schechter, version A, chapter 16, 32b): “If he is with you in deed, you must love him; if not, you do not love him.” (See, on this, the introduction by L. Finkelstein [New York, 5711 (1950-51)], pp. 47 et seq.) Finkelstein is of the view that this limitation is erroneously attributed to R. Akiva, who in fact claims that one is obligated to love all creatures, without limit, for the addition of “I am the Lord” [at the end of the verse] implies that “I, the Lord, created him,” and your love therefore should not be confined. See as well id., p. 49, n. 88 for Finkelstein’s finding that the effort to limit the rule even according to R. Akiva led to an emended formulation.

¹⁴ As we will see below, the underpinning for all these laws is the promotion of peace, paralleling the second quotation from Maimonides. The link between them and the idea of *imitatio dei*, in my view, is Maimonides’ innovation. This tie is made explicit at the end of *Hilkhot Avadim* (9:8): “So, too, with reference to the qualities of the Holy One Blessed be He that we are commanded to emulate, he says, ‘His mercy is on all His creatures.’” My thanks to Prof. Isadore Twersky who called this parallel to my attention; and compare *Bava Metsi`a* 85a. All this notwithstanding, it is possible to find a talmudic source for this nexus, in the account (*Berakhot* 7a) of R. Joshua b. Levi, who wanted to curse the heretic who had aggrieved him. When he failed to do so because the anger of the Holy One Blessed be He had been quelled, he said, “from this we learn that it is not the way of the world to do this: it is written “His mercy is on all his creatures” and “to punish is not good for the righteous” (Prov. 17:26). [The verse in Proverbs actually means “To punish also the righteous is not good”; the midrashic understanding here alters the syntax.—*trans.*]

¹⁵ H.Y. Roth, “*Ha-hiddamut la-el ve-ra`ayon ha-qedushah*,” in *Ha-dat ve-`erkhei ha-hayyim* (Jerusalem, 5733 [1972-73]), pp. 20-30.

¹⁶ Roth gives this quality a philosophical interpretation, hinting at divine transcendence, thereby denying Rudolf Otto’s phenomenological stance.

¹⁷ Id., p. 30. Interestingly, Resh Laqish interprets Lev. 19:2 in a manner that actually negates imitation of God: “You shall be holy”—lest you think ‘holy like Me,’ the verse continues ‘for I am holy’—My holiness is beyond yours.” (*Lev. Rabbah* 24:9, ed.

homily, is ‘to conceal’¹⁸; and inasmuch as He is concealed from us, it is impossible for us to imitate or come to resemble Him.” In Christianity, such an undertaking is possible, as, for example, in the classic instance of Thomas a Kempis in *De Imitatione Christi*, following the doctrine of the Incarnation, according to which God became human. But despite all this, Roth claims, one unique attribute that lends itself to imitation does flow from the idea of holiness, and that is the attribute of righteousness.¹⁹

In my view, Roth’s analysis is incorrect. Maimonides’ determination, which is followed by other enumerators of the commandments, leads in a direction that Roth would appear to close off. Downplaying the importance of the multi-layered principle of *imitatio dei* skews our understanding of the ethical viewpoint of the medieval Jewish thinkers.

In his *Guide* (I:54), Maimonides explicates God’s revelation to Moses in the rocky crevice [Exod. 33:12-23] and draws the well-known distinction between “comprehension of God’s essence, may He be exalted,” which Moses requests when says “Show me, I pray, Your glory” (Exod. 33:18), and comprehension of God’s governance of the world, requested in “Show me, I pray, Your ways” (Exod. 33:13). This governance is identical with the attributes of action: “these are the actions that emanate from Him, may He be blessed, and the sages call them *middot* (characteristics).” Here Maimonides distinguishes explicitly between two possible meanings of the term *middot*: (a) “aptitudes of the soul,” and (b) “actions resembling the actions that in us proceed from moral qualities.”²⁰

Only in the second sense can one understand “*middot*” when they are ascribed to the Holy One Blessed be He; on no account can they be understood as aptitudes of the soul. The conclusion to be reached through knowledge of the attributes of action must be understood, in Maimonides’ view, against the background of the doctrine of *imitatio dei*.

"You shall walk in His paths" is a broad ethical precept... the Holy One Blessed be He is good to the wicked and the righteous alike.

And here lies the key to understanding Moses’ request “that I may know You, so that I may find grace in Your sight; and consider that this nation is Your people” (Exod. 33:13). The nation’s leader must adhere to God’s path; that is, he must follow the attributes of action: “the leader of the state, when he is a prophet, must strive to resemble these attributes.” Surprisingly, it should be added, not only do the attributes of action provide a model; so, too, does their very ontological status. As already noted, a distinction must be drawn between the attributes that describe actions that can be ascribed to God and the attributes that describe aptitudes of the soul or the passions. That is a theological distinction; but it, too, must be emulated by the leader, who must distinguish sharply and absolutely between his actions and deeds on the one hand and his passions on the other. Still, he must act in the ways suggested by the characteristics:

And these actions [i.e., punishments] should flow from him in a measured, appropriate manner, not

M. A. Merkin [Tel Aviv, 1962], part 2, p. 61.) Marmorstein, “Imitation of God,” p. 117, tries to show on this basis that Resh Laqish objected to the concept of *imitatio dei*, but he fails to prove his case. We see here a limitation on the doctrine, but not necessarily a negation.

¹⁸ *Le`alem*, apparently a play on *le`olam*, “Eternal.”—*trans*

¹⁹ Roth explains this in another article, “*Tovo shel ha-el*,” in *Ha-dat ve-`erkei ha-hayyim*, pp. 5-19.

²⁰ “*Tekhunot nafshiyot*” and “*pe`ulot domot le-peu`ulot ha-ba`ot mei-ittanu mi-middot*.” The English renderings of these terms are per Shlomo Pines, trans., *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago and London, 1963) 1:124.—*trans*.

simply to pursue his passion. He should not unleash his anger or allow his passion to dominate, for all passion is bad and must be guarded against to the extent possible. In some circumstances and with respect to some persons, he should act with mercy and compassion, not only from motives of mercy and compassion but because they merit it; and in some circumstances and with respect to some persons he should act with vengeance and anger, again not from motives of anger but because their guilt warrants it. He must be able to condemn a person to death by fire without anger or loathing for him, but only in a manner appropriate to the condemned person's guilt and taking account of the action's benefit to the general welfare of the people.

Without doubt, the thirteen *middot* (divine characteristics listed in Exod. 34:6-7) account for only a small por-

tion of the attributes of action. Taken as a whole, they describe all the workings of the world and pertain to all fields of knowledge. The thirteen *middot* are selected from this array, and were revealed to Moses "because they are needed for sound government."²¹

In the *Guide* I:56, Maimonides denies the existence of any resemblance whatsoever between God and His creatures. But that is an ontological position; on the ethical plain (I:54), there can be resemblance, through imitation of the attributes of action:

For the highest goal of man is to resemble the Exalted One to the greatest extent he can; that is, for our actions to resemble God's actions, as the Sages explained in interpreting "You shall be holy" [Lev. 21:2] to mean "Just as He is compassionate, so, too, shall you be compassionate; just as He is

²¹ Maimonides thus overcomes a serious difficulty in the doctrine of *imitatio dei*: does the obligation apply as well to such qualities as jealousy and vengeance? Maimonides distinguishes, as noted, between actions and passions. And a limitation on the doctrine of *imitatio dei* can thus be found in *Midrash ha-Gadol*: "As Scripture says, 'Come, and see the works of God; He is terrible in His doing (*'alilah*) toward the children of men' (Ps. 66:5)—this verse refers to the deeds (*'alilot*) through which God governs His world, embodying one of the four qualities that are appropriately employed by God alone and not by man, i.e., jealousy, vengeance, pride, and cunning [*'alilah*, playing on a different sense of the word—*trans.*]." (*Midrash ha-Gadol*, ed. Margalio [Jerusalem, 5707 (1946-47)] p. 619.) The sages certainly emphasized many limitations on the idea of acting like God; for example: "Do not adjudicate as a court of one, for the only court of one is the One, as Scripture says, 'He is singular (*be-ehad*) and who can dissuade Him' (Job 23:13). And what the meaning of 'He is singular'?—Resh Laqish said, the Holy One Blessed be He judges and renders verdicts by Himself." (*Deut. Rabbah* 1:10; compare *Avot* 4:8; *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* chap. 1, 18a.) Compare Resh Laqish's statement quoted above, in note 16. The concept of cunning used by *Midrash ha-Gadol* resembles the "kindness of the crafty" and the scheming of nature in Maimonides' system. See the introduction by S. Pines to the *Guide*, *Ben mahshevet yisra'el le-mahshevet ha-amim* (Jerusalem, 5737 [1976-77]), pp. 117 et seq., 163. And Maimonides writes in the *Guide* (III:32) "When you examine divine actions, that is, natural actions, you will see God's craftiness..." The author of *Sefer ha-Hinukh*, who generally follows Maimonides in interpreting the commandment of *imitatio dei*, treats this issue in a consistent manner: "Perhaps, my son, you will challenge me by reference to Scripture's statement 'God is indignant every day' (Ps. 7:12)...But do not thereby be misled, my son; Heaven forbid that God be wicked. Believe only that He, may He be blessed, is the pinnacle of perfection...and the indignation attributed to Him is merely a metaphor taken from the way of the world...in that all would deserve at that moment to be wiped out if the quality of justice were applied, but the quality mercy immediately restrains Him. Accept my interpretation, my son, until you hear a better one." (*Sefer ha-Hinukh*, ed. H. D. Chavel [Jerusalem 5716 (1955-56)], commandment 608, pp. 726 et seq.) One must emphasize the distinction between Maimonides' treatment of the matter in the *Guide* (I:54) and his parallel treatment in *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilkhot De'ot* 1:6). In the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides stresses only the vital qualities "merciful, gracious, just, righteous, complete, mighty, strong, and so forth, to proclaim them to be good and proper ways." That consideration of the issue is directed to people in general. In contrast, the *Guide's* comparison encompasses the quality of judgment as well, in the context of the need to guide leaders. Comments of the Sages are no doubt echoed here: "the good qualities abound" and "the quality of strife is limited." (See *Mekhilta* 1:55, 103.)

merciful, so, too, shall you be merciful.” For the attributes ascribed to Him, may He be exalted, are the attributes of his actions, without implying that He Himself, may He be exalted, possesses qualities.

We may compare three different literary layers of Maimonides’ comments on “You shall walk in His ways.” In *Sefer ha-Mitsvot* his views are offered in general, programmatic form. Resembling God consists of walking in his paths. These general comments are supplemented in *Mishneh Torah* by a consideration of the nature of those paths.²² Each quality must be understood as “the middle way, in contrast to the two extremes.” There can be no doubt that Maimonides believed this Aristotelian teaching to be paralleled in rabbinic literature. And so he writes explicitly that this way of moderation is the way of the wise, in contrast to

the way of the early pious ones, who “would stray in their views from the middle path and veer toward the extremes.” It seems to me that a *midrash* on the path between the extremes served as Maimonides’ source here:

To what can this be compared? To a high road running between two paths, one of fire and one of snow. If one walks near the fire, he is burned; if one walks near the snow, he is chilled. What should he do? Walk between them, taking care to be neither burned nor chilled.²³

The ties between the doctrine of *imitatio dei* and the attributes of action, only hinted at in *Hilkhot De`ot*, are developed and explained in the *Guide*, both in the first part and at the conclusion of the work (III:54), as expli-

²² *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De`ot* 1:5-6. Maimonides adds here “just as He is called holy...” (!)

²³ *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, version A, chapter 28, ed. Schechter, p. 43 col. 3. See also *Tosefta Hagigah* 2:5; *Yerushalmi Hagigah* 2:1—“This teaching resembles two paths [one of fire and one of snow]...what can one do? Walk between them” (Venice ed. 9a). This passage is without doubt paralleled by the “middle way” of *Hilkhot De`ot*. The cross-references between the doctrine of *imitatio dei* and the doctrine of the golden mean are seen by Maimonides as interpreting the commandment to walk in God’s paths. Compare as well: “It is the nature of fire, that a person who comes too near to it is burned, but one too distant from it is chilled. The best course for a person is to warm himself in its glow” (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, section 4, ed. Horovitch-Rabin [Jerusalem 5720 (1959-60)], p. 215; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai* [Jerusalem 5715 (1954-55)], p. 143). The link between the Torah and the scholars who walk in its path stands out in *Sifrei Deut.*, section 343. I see little doubt that the path in which Israel is obligated to walk is seen as the path of God. Of particular interest in this connection is the comment of the author of *Sefer Ha-Hinukh*: “The sages of blessed memory said that one should always direct his attention to this general principle [of moderation]; that is, he should intend to conduct all his activities in a moderate and proper manner; and they found scriptural support for the idea in the verse ‘to him who sets his way properly, I will show the salvation of God’ (Ps. 50:23)—read not *sam* (sets) but *sham* (assesses).” Also pertinent to our subject is a passage in *Mo`ed Qatan* 5a, which poses the question “Where are grave markers alluded to in the Torah?” The various answers include: “R. Joshua the son of R. Idi said, “You shall inform them of the path in which they are to walk” (Ex. 18:30)’...Ravina said, “to him who sets his way properly, I will show the salvation of God”; R. Joshua b. Levi said, ‘one who evaluates his way merits seeing the salvation of Holy One Blessed be He, as Scripture says, “one who sets his way”—read not *sam* (sets) but *sham* (assesses)...R. Yanai had a student who posed questions to him every day [during his discourse] but did not do so on the Sabbath during a festival [when the audience was large and it may have been difficult to respond to the questions]. He applied to that student the verse ‘to one who evaluates his way [knowing when to refrain from a particular conduct] I will show the salvation of God.’” The author of *Sefer ha-Hinukh* takes these statements as alluding to the kinds of assessments that should guide a person in making moral decisions, and he identified those assessments with Maimonides’ doctrine of the middle way. Particularly noteworthy is Rashi’s comment on the passage in *Mo`ed Qatan*: “‘One who assesses his way’—he considers when to ask questions and when not to,” that is, he takes account of the practicalities of the situation. (By the way, the marking of graves was considered an act of kindness. It should be emphasized that Abba Sha’ul was active in burying the dead, “as the *baraita* says, ‘I was a burier of the dead’” [*Niddah* 24b; compare *Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, 5:9 and *Devarim Zuta* 27]. There can be no doubt that he was not simply an ordinary grave-digger [“a grave-digger of

cating a passage in Jeremiah: “Thus said the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom...but let the one that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me” (Jer. 9:22-23).²⁴

In explicating them, Maimonides determines that these verses present us with three imagined goals that people pursue: perfection of property (wealth), perfection of physical well being (might) and perfection of character (wisdom). Perfection of character is included in this category, for it is a form of perfection directed to the welfare of society, and, accordingly, to that of the other: “it is as if this perfection of character benefits people, being directed toward the other.” This form of perfection has no meaning to an isolated individual, but there is fur-

ther ideal: “understand and know Me,” that is, the ability “to portray concepts so as to derive from them true ideas about Godliness.” That is the true wisdom; but even that did not satisfy the prophet. The verse concludes “for I, the Lord, act with mercy, justice, and righteousness in the world.” That addition, too, is tied to comprehending God, but here, the understanding progresses through the attributes of action. This understanding brings us back to the real world, via the doctrine of *imitatio dei* and by walking in the path of the thirteen characteristics:

For the purpose is to resemble [God] through them, thereby walking in His ways. Given that, the purpose alluded to in this verse is the prophet’s explana-

later times”], as suggested by L. Ginsburg [*The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1947)], but a sage who both taught and carried out his teachings in a proper manner.)

It would be reasonable to infer that Maimonides generalized from “you shall walk in his paths” to the concept of “the way.” Thus, for example, one might supplement Abba Sha’ul’s homily with that of R. Joseph (*Bava Metsi`a* 30b): “‘You shall inform them’ (Exod. 18:20)—this refers to ways of making a living (*beit hayyeibem*); ‘of the way’—this refers to acts of kindness; ‘they shall walk’—this refers to visiting the sick; ‘in’—this refers to burying the dead; ‘and of the action’—this refers to the law; ‘which they shall do’—this refers to doing more than the law requires.” This homily underlies that of the author of *Halakhot Gedolot*, noted above. In his commentary on Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, Nachmanides provides a very interesting explanation of the homily in accordance with Maimonides’ system: “According to his (Maimonides’) view, no specific commandment is to be derived [from the verse ‘You shall inform them...’]. Jethro’s advice to Moses [which the verse recites] was intended to move Moses to inform the Israelites of the commandments and to urge them to be eternally diligent in observing them, so there might be among them love, brotherhood, peace and amity, thereby keeping ill-will and lawsuits to a minimum and obviating frequent litigation. Jethro’s advice concludes ‘and this entire nation shall reach its destination in peace,’ recalling the comment that ‘you shall inform them’ refers to ways of making a living, meaning that if they learn crafts and skills through which they can support themselves, thefts and lawsuits will be reduced; but no one includes this in enumerating the commandments.” (Commentary on the first principle [Jerusalem, 5719 (1959-60)], p. 22.) According to this interpretation, the purpose of this line of commandments is solely utilitarian; but one could also see the contrary claim in this homily. The statements in the Talmud clearly suggest that the homily is understood to require moral conduct, even beyond what the law demands. (Visiting the sick...[which seems to be within the category of “acts of kindness”] is specified to include even visiting one born under the same sign [in which case the visitor is believed to be placed at risk by the visit]; burying the dead is specified to include [as subject to the obligation] an elderly person whose dignity might be considered to exempt him; “which they shall do”—refers to doing more than what the law requires.) It may be assumed that Maimonides thought the two homilies to be identical in their content, from which flows the connection between “the way” and “more than the law requires,” a connection that Maimonides develops in *Hilkhot De`ot* 1:5. This homily is cited in the *Mekhilta* in the name of R. El`azar ha-Mode`i. Let me note in passing that the opening line of the homily—“you shall inform them—this refers to ways of making a living (*beit hayyeibem*)”—resonates with an association from Ps. 128:1-2: “Happy is the one who fears God and walks in His ways. You will eat the fruit of your labors; you will be happy and prosper.”

²⁴ See also *Guide* I:18: “One who attains closeness to Him is exalted in his understanding.” The early commentators connected this comment with I:59, 60. See also II:36.

²⁵ I will not deal here with the question of how this layer of the moral system relates to the previous one, the instrumental per-

tion that the human perfection in which one can truly glory is to comprehend God in accordance with his ability and to recognize his oversight of his creatures...and to follow that comprehension in ways directed toward always exercising mercy, justice, and righteousness in order to resemble God's actions, as I have explained here several times.²⁵

Here we have the ultimate ideal of the scholar, that is, the true philosopher: resembling God.

D.

Let me now examine an additional way to understand the idea of *imitatio dei*. We have considered Maimonides' comments on the connection between this idea and the array of ethical norms. The idea acquires a powerful corollary when it is applied to Israel. In that instance, we can say the order is reversed. We previously saw the doctrine of *imitatio dei* as a commandment, but

it also can be seen as a statement of fact. Israel carries with it the name of God; the nation of Israel therefore walks in God's ways; and Israel's conduct thus entails a sanctification of God's name—or, God forbid, the opposite.²⁶

Here we have the ultimate ideal of the true philosopher: resembling God."

Numerous anecdotes bring home the linkage between ethical conduct and sanctification of God's Name. Shimon ben Shetah, for example, when confronted by surprise that he had returned a gentile's lost property, responded, "Do you take me for a barbarian? I wanted to hear them say 'Blessed be the God of the Jews, Who benefits this entire world.'"²⁷ At first blush, these anecdotes appear to teach us that the sages wanted to lead the gentile to recognize or acknowledge the God of Israel, even if this recognition has ulterior purposes.

fection of traits; I have no solution to that problem. See S. Pines, op cit. n. 20, p. 162. R. Moshe of Coucy, in *Sefer Mitsvot Gadol*, positive commandment 7 (Venice, 5307 [1556-57], 97a) likewise relies on the verse in Jeremiah, and adds in that connection: "And thus have I interpreted for the Spanish sages the verse 'Know the God of your father and serve Him' (1Chr. 28:9)—just as He is gracious and merciful, doing kindness, justice, and righteousness in the world, so shall you do. And here are two witnesses [to that idea, one in connection with King] Josiah, of whom it is said that he "ate and drank, and did justice and righteousness, then it was well with him; he judged the cause of the poor and the needy, then it was well; this is to know Me, says the Lord' (Jer. 22:15-16)." The second witness is the verse from Jeremiah cited by Maimonides. We have here an additional example of the identity between knowing the attributes of action and the doctrine of *imitatio dei*.

26 God uniquely applied His Name to Israel: "Hear, My people, and I will speak; Israel, and I will testify against you; God, your God, am I' (Ps. 50:7) —I am God to all who inhabit the world, yet I uniquely applied My Name only to Israel" (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Mishpatim*, chap. 9, p. 334 and parallels). See also E.E. Urbach, *Hazal—Pirqei emunot ve-de'ot* (Jerusalem, 5729 [1968-69]) p. 480. But we have here more than unique application of the Name. The righteous person is called by God's Name: "a mortal king is not addressed by name, as, for example, 'Caesar Augustus Basilius'...but the Holy One Blessed be He said to Moses, 'Behold, I have made you like Myself to Pharaoh' [apparently based on Exod. 7:1, 'Behold I have made you *elohim* to Pharaoh—*trans.*]." (*Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, Part 2, 11b.) Of particular importance is the comparison drawn between the people of Israel and God: "Israel says 'there is none like God,' and the Holy Spirit says 'Yeshurun is God' [reading *el yeshurun* in that manner, rather than as "God of Yeshurun"—*trans.*]." This linkage reflects R. Yohanan's statement, "The righteous are destined to be called by the Name of the Holy One Blessed Be He." (*Bava Batra* 75b, and see further there.) It is possible that the emphasis there is on limiting those called by His Name, as those going up to Jerusalem are limited. (See. id.)

27 *Yerushalmi Bava Metsi'a* 2:5 (Venice 5283 [1522-23]) 8, col. 3. See also E. E. Urbach, op. cit., pp. 315-316 and other examples in the *Yerushalmi*, *ibid.* Particularly interesting is Abba Oshaya's comment, "the Torah decreed that it be returned," or R. Samuel b. Susrat's, "so that you not say I did it for fear of you but, rather, for fear of God," both of which comments evoked the response, "Blessed be the God of the Jews." What is significant here is the emphasis on doing the good deed for the sake of God, not out of personal interest (mere "avoidance of hatred" or "the ways of peace"); see more on this below. Compare as well *Yerushalmi Bava Batra* 2:11 (7, col. 2), where the praise for God is elicited by the judge subjecting himself to the ruling he imposes on others.

Looked at differently, however, these cases exemplify the principle discussed above. They reflect more than a drive for acknowledgement of the God of Jews and gratitude to Him; in my view, they recognize the fact that by acting in this manner, the Jew, who bears God's name, walks in God's paths. Of him Scripture says, "He said to me 'You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified'" (Isa. 49:3).²⁸

In light of this premise, we can probe the differences between the two moral principles being analyzed here: loving one's fellow and walking in God's paths. These differences can be illustrated with references to the halakhic treatment of the relationship between Jew and gentile.²⁹

The concepts of sanctifying or desecrating God's name draw from the idea of walking in God's paths.

It is well known that many laws are limited in their applicability to "your brother," "your people," or "your fellow." The *halakhah* extended their reach beyond those boundaries by the use of such concepts as "for the sake of peace (*mipenei darkhei shalom*)" and "for the sake

of [avoiding] hatred [of Jews] (*mishum eivah*)." These principles broaden the commandment to "love your fellow as yourself" in several areas, and they rest, in principle, on the effort to construct a well-ordered society. There exist, to be sure, situations in which the gentile is seen as an enemy, and my relations with him are literally war-like. But if he is seen as a partner in building society, I need to call on those principles that ensure the survival of society: the pursuit of peace and the avoidance of hatred. There may be a distinction to be drawn between "hatred [of Jews]" and "danger"³⁰; but that being as it may, this broadening of the commandment for the sake of peace can be seen as utilitarian. The broadened concept is grounded in mutuality, and its essence is clearly societal. But side-by-side with these utilitarian precepts lies an additional precept, different in its very essence from pursuit of peace. I am referring to the application in this context of the concepts of sanctifying or desecrating God's name, a usage that draws, in my view, from the idea of walking in God's paths.³¹

This sort of activity, when guided by the purpose of sanctifying the Name of Heaven, transcends mere utilitarianism. It is grounded in the individual, lacking any element of mutuality. A striking example of the con-

²⁸ See *Yoma* 86a.

²⁹ See generally Simon, *op cit.*, and the works cited above, note 8.

³⁰ Some distinguish between "[avoidance of] hatred" and "ways of peace"; that was the position of J. Z. Lauterbach in "The Attitude of the Jew towards the Non-Jew," *CCAR Year Book* 31 (1921):186-233. A similar approach is taken by Z. Falk, *op. cit.* n. 7, and see the critique of D. Rokeah, *op. cit.* n. 7, who negates the distinction between the positive and negative formulations. See also the remarks of Y. Kohen, *op. cit.* n. 7, pp. 273 et seq.

³¹ According to Rokeah, the coinage "for the sake of [avoiding] hatred" can be attributed to a late-third-century Babylonian *amora*, while "for the sake of the ways of peace" "belongs almost certainly to the period of Yavneh [late first-early second century Land of Israel]." Rokeah may be right in arguing that the effort to distinguish between the two concepts is fundamentally erroneous, but that would not negate the distinction between [avoidance of] hatred and ways of peace on the one hand and desecration of God's name on the other. Rokeah writes, for example, "... 'because of desecration of the Name' (=concern about retribution by the government), *Bava Qamma* 113b: 'A *baraita* teaches: R. Pinhas b. Ya'ir says, "where desecration of God's name is at stake, even [a gentile's] lost property is forbidden [and must be returned]" (=concern about 'cursing God' or retribution by the gentiles)." Rokeah thus interprets "because of desecration of the Name" as equivalent to or encompassing "for the sake of [avoiding] hatred," but there is not a scintilla of proof for that view. It is difficult to tell just what R. Pinhas b. Ya'ir meant by

clusions that flow from applying the principle of “you shall walk in His ways” rather than that of “love your neighbor as yourself” (or, in their parallel negative formulations, from use of “because of [the need to avoid] desecration of the Name” rather than “because of [the need to avoid] hatred”) can be found, I believe, in Rabban Gamaliel’s response to complaints by government emissaries regarding the alleged injustice of certain Jewish laws: “at that point, Rabban Gamaliel decreed that theft from a gentile is forbidden because it desecrates God’s Name.”³² This wording may be compared with that of the *Tosefta*: “One who steals from a gentile must return the property to the gentile; stealing from a gentile is a more serious matter than stealing from a fellow Jew, because it entails desecration of God’s Name.”³³ This formulation suggests that the *Tosefta* here not only regards the prohibition against stealing from a gentile as biblical [*min ha-torah*, rather than only rabbinic, *mi-de-rabbanan*], but considers the offense to be compounded by incorporating the sin of desecrating the Name. This analysis, in turn, leads to two senses of “desecration of the Name” that need to be distinguished. The first, evident in the *Tosefta*, finds expression in the action of an individual violating his religion’s commandment. His unethical conduct brings about desecration of the Name inasmuch as the individual is identified by others with the God Whose Name he bears.

Desecration in the second sense, an idea powerfully presented in Rabban Gamaliel’s decree, is occasioned by the

existence of unjust or discriminatory laws. This is a sort of collective desecration of the Name, a reaction to a nation whose laws are not proper and just. This distinction between the two senses of “desecration of the Name,” though fine, is abundantly meaningful. The first sense is the more common one, setting a sort of norm for conduct. The second, in contrast, highlights the full meaning of “sanctification of the Name” as a meta-norm, through which other ethical or legal norms may be determined or evaluated.

This analysis remains incomplete and problematic, however, for these concepts are meaningful only the context of public actions. A further example will show, however, that the concept of “sanctification of the Name” transcends the public/private distinction.

To clarify this point, we consider the well-known dispute between R. Yishmael and R. Akiva:

If a Jew and a gentile are before you in a lawsuit and you can vindicate the Jew pursuant to Jewish law, do so and tell the gentile “such is our law”; if you can vindicate the Jew under gentile law, do so and tell the gentile “such is your law”; if you can do neither, contrive against him [to vindicate the Jew]. That is the view of R. Yishmael, but R. Akiva says, we do not contrive against him, because of sanctification of the Name. (*Bava Qamma* 113a.)

“where desecration of God’s Name is at stake,” but it seems reasonable to understand him to mean that desecration is occasioned by the gentile sensing the injustice in not returning the lost property, when returning it is one of his own moral values. The key to understanding these various *halakhot* may lie in an informed comparison of Jewish social legislation (“the laws between man and man”) and the juridical norms and accepted practices of the general culture within which the *halakhab* took shape. In any event, the principle “for the sake of sanctifying God’s Name” implies assessment of the action itself, with emphasis on the actor, who bears God’s Name.

³² *Yerushalmi Bava Qamma* 4:3 (4b).

³³ *Tosefta Bava Qamma* 6:15 (ed. Zuckerman), p. 368; see also E. E. Urbach, op. cit. n. 25, p. 315.

³⁴ As to whether “because of sanctification” or “because of desecration” is the correct version of R. Akiva’s statement, see D. Rokeah, op. cit. n. 7, p. 68, n. 2 and the response of Z. Falk, op. cit. n. 7, p. 74.

This text uses the positive formulation “because of sanctification of the Name” instead of the more common “because of desecration of the Name.” But without going into that textual issue,³⁴ the situation considered here is no doubt one in which the gentile is held liable and the Jew vindicated in accordance with laws that do not discriminate but that are applied improperly (“contrive against him”) without the gentile realizing it. Even in such a case, involving no publicity, the commandment of “sanctifying God” must be carried out.³⁵ Prominent here once again are Maimonides’ limitation on R. Yishmael’s view, noted above, and his ensuing reference to the doctrine of *imitatio dei* (*Hilkhot Melakhim*

10:12).

The nexus between the principle of walking in God’s paths and the commandment of sanctifying His name stands out not only in the context of relationships with the outside world, but also in internal relationships among Jews themselves. In that context, one who walks in God’s paths is identified with the scholar, inspiring Rav’s statement that a scholar desecrates God’s name by failing to pay debts immediately.³⁶ “Desecration of God’s Name” here means bringing about a loss of faith or causing the multitude to sin, as Rashi comments in explaining Rav’s concern: “One

³⁵ Even in the case of one compelled to commit idolatry, R. Yishmael argues that in private, a person should commit the offense and save his life; he is obligated to suffer death rather than commit the offense only where the incident is public. (*Sanhedrin* 74a; *Avodah Zarah* 27b.) This passage, however, is problematic. R. Akiva’s statement corresponds to his “liberal” views with respect to gentiles and lends support to Finkelstein’s view (*supra*, n. 12). One clearly must distinguish between two separate matters that implicate publicity. (A) In a case of religious coercion, publicity transforms a minor offense into a serious one, such that even in the absence of general persecution, “in public one must suffer death rather than violate even a minor commandment” (*Sanhedrin* 74a; see Urbach, *op. cit.* n. 25, p. 308). (B) An offense that is not compelled, if committed in public, involves an element of desecration of God’s Name, as R. Haninah says: “better a man should violate a commandment in private, and not publicly desecrate the Name of Heaven” (*Qiddushin* 40a). That said, even in such a case the rabbis often emphasize the severity of a sin committed in private: “One who sins privately is as if he undermines God” (*Hagigah* 16a). In the first type of case, publicity accompanies an act that already entails desecration of the Name, such as an idolater cursing God. In the second, it transforms a minor offense, or even a neutral act, into a desecration of the Name. There can be no doubt that these concepts correspond to two different senses of “sanctification of the Name”: (1) a person’s readiness to sacrifice or endanger his life in order to avoid sinning; and (2) his performance of an action that brings others to accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, as Abayye says, “‘You shall love the Lord your God’ [Deut. 6:5]—cause the Name of Heaven to become beloved” (*Yoma* 86a). In *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, positive commandment 83, Maimonides explicitly draws similar distinctions. With respect to desecration of the Name, he distinguishes (1) a case in which a Jew is compelled by force to violate commandments, regardless of whether it is a time of general persecution from (2) a case in which a person known for piety and righteousness commits a specific action that appears to the public to be sinful... even if it is a permitted act. Category (3) includes sins committed by a person who satisfies no lusts and derives no pleasure from performing them. Max Kadushin considers a fourth category, particularly in Chapter 7 of his *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York, 1952); it is represented by sanctifying God’s Name through public worship and may parallel the third category. A totally different motif is the linkage of desecration of God’s Name with failing to do what God wills, as stated by R. Shimon b. Elazar: “When Israel performs God’s will, His Name is made great in the world...but when they fail to perform His will, His Name is desecrated in the world.” The statement may reflect the view that as a consequence of sin, God declines to show his providence to Israel and that, in turn, misleads gentiles who see confirmation that Israel’s beliefs are incorrect. See *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Masekhta de-Shirah* 63, p. 128. This ties in with another very important distinction related to the idea of sanctification of God’s Name. See the apposite interpretation of Eccl. 7:9 cited by Urbach, *op. cit.* n. 25, p. 313; I believe this interpretation links the biblical and rabbinic senses of sanctification of God’s Name—a distinction drawn by A. Holtz—according to which only category (4) is characteristically rabbinic.

³⁶ *Yoma* 86a. The text there reads “In what situation [is there desecration of God’s Name]? Rav said, ‘If one such as I purchase meat from a butcher and fail to pay immediately.’”—*trans.*

³⁷ *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, positive commandment 6.

³⁸ See *Thaetatetus* 176a-b. For Philo’s view of *imitatio dei*, see *De Specialibus Legibus* IV, 188 and Colson’s comment in his

would learn from me to take theft lightly.” But it means as well deprecating the Torah that the scholar represents: “This person who has studied Torah, look how flawed are his ways, how vile his deeds” (id.). This idea brings Maimonides to the next stage, the commandment to embrace scholars “so we bring ourselves to emulate their actions.”³⁷ Imitation of God generates imitation of the sages.

Even were we to deny the link I am positing between the principle of striving to resemble God and the idea of sanctifying His Name, application of the concept to the matter of relations between Jews and gentiles implies the existence of moral criteria by which the laws of the Torah and the conduct of Jews are judged and the correspondence of those moral criteria to God’s characteristics. But the link seems to me to make sense, given that cases in which sanctification or desecration of God’s Name is considered raise clear ethical concerns. From that point of view it is striking, as we saw earlier, that there are two moral principles: one limited in its applicability to a particular group, and one broadened beyond any such limits through its reference to walking in God’s path and sanctifying His Name.

E.

Having considered the various implications of the concept of resembling God, let me conclude this survey with a particularly important conceptual observation. If we disregard the philological and historical components

of the problem, and focus only on the conceptual aspect, we can distinguish several concepts included within the idea of *imitatio dei*. These concepts can be described schematically as regarding resemblance to God to be a path, a goal, or a starting point.

The first concept underlies the foregoing inquiry. Imitating God and walking in His paths are norms that determine our actions. More precisely, they are meta-norms that determine rules; they are directions transformed into laws. The first concept emphasizes the path.

Imitation of God generates imitation of the sages.

In its second sense, *imitatio dei* is taken not as a commandment but as a goal and a promise. Resembling God is promised as an eschatological destiny, as the purpose of personal redemption. This meaning finds expression in Plato’s *Theaetetus* and, following Plato, in the writings of Philo.³⁸ Righteousness brings man to resemble God and, thereby, to immortality. This idea is found as well in rabbinic thought:

R. Levi b. Hama said, “If an idolater resembles his idol, as is written (Ps. 115), ‘Those who worship them are like them...,’ how much more so will one who worships the Holy One Blessed Be He resemble Him. And how do we know this to be so? It is written (Jer. 17:7), ‘Blessed is the man who trusts in

English translation, vol. VIII, p. 43b. In Colson’s view, Philo explicitly states that *imitatio dei* involves being righteous, holy, and wise (*De Fuga et Inventione*); see also p. 63. See, as well, S. H. Bergman, “*Qiddush ha-shem*” in *Be-Mish`ol* (Tel Aviv, 5736 [1975-76]), pp. 182 et seq. Bergman directs attention to the *Zohar* (Part I, 9b-10a) as exemplifying the idea that “the Holy One Blessed Be He Himself commands man to be like Him in all respects.” On close examination, however, that text, though it forcefully presents the concept of *imitatio dei*, does not see it as a source of moral conduct; the concept is presented in the second sense described above, not the first. Bergman’s ideas in this article are particularly important overall, despite what I believe to be the flimsiness of the connections with early rabbinic literature and kabbalistic sources drawn there.

³⁹ *Deut. Rabbah* 1:12. And see *id.* 1:9, where R. Simon says in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi, “Anyone who trusts in the Holy One Blessed Be He merits becoming like Him.” Compare *Yalqut Mekhiri* (ed. Buber) 146a and *Pesiqta Rabbah* (ed. Friedman) 46b: “But in the future, they will exist and resemble the Holy One Blessed Be He; just as the Holy One Blessed Be He is fire that

the Lord...”³⁹

Marmorstein has noted the interesting parallel to this doctrine in the teachings of Philo, who uses the idea of resembling God to ridicule idolaters.⁴⁰ Examples of this idea abound. Prominent among them is the statement of R. Elazar regarding the righteous person who attains that status, which employs the motif of sanctity that forms the basis for H. Y. Roth’s thesis: “In the future, righteous people will be proclaimed ‘holy’ just as the Holy One Blessed Be He is proclaimed ‘holy,’ as Scripture says, ‘Those that remain in Zion and the remnant in Jerusalem will be proclaimed holy’ (Isa. 4:3).⁴¹

Alongside these two senses of “resemblance” is a third, which also approaches but is not identical to the doctrine of *imitatio dei*. Taken in this way, the term brings us back to our starting point, the dispute between R. Akiva and Ben Azai. Prominent in Ben Azai’s comment is an idea that underlies as well various statements by R. Akiva and many other sages, that is, the emphasis on man having been created in the image of God. Seen in this manner, resemblance to God is not a commandment but a fact; not a goal but a starting point for human development. Moral conduct has two sources. As a subject, a person must direct his actions so his ways

are the ways of God. But as an object, a person possesses rights, and these define areas and set boundaries for his actions, inasmuch as he is created in the image of God. This idea appears in many variations; there is, for example, a line of thought similar in principle, which sees the image of God not in the individual but in collective humanity.⁴² The common thread is their emphasis on the value of man, the subject of human activity.

Resemblance to God is not a commandment but a fact; not a goal but a starting point.

Contrary to Martin Buber’s view, a living ethic is not to be gauged by this array of values, insofar as it determines “what is proper and what is not proper—here and now.”⁴³ I have elsewhere considered the fact that the distinction discussed here parallels the one between *halakhah* and case-specific ruling. I do not wish to dwell here on this aspect of the problem, but only to point out that the tension between *halakhah* and ethics does not flow from some extra-halakhic category but is prominent within the halakhic realm itself. This tension finds its expression in concrete halakhic determinations. The present inquiry involves principles that establish, in

consumes fire...so they will constitute fire that consumes fire.”

⁴⁰ *De Decalogo* 39.

⁴¹ *Bava Batra* 75b. The stress on sanctity is especially prominent in light of Resh Laqish’s reservations about comparing man and God in this area. See above, n. 16.

⁴² Examples of this idea can easily be found in kabbalistic literature. Radbaz explains the commandment to love one’s fellow as follows: “When he loves his fellow in the terrestrial world, it is as if he loves his fatherly fellow, the Holy One Blessed Be He; and the reason is that their forms allude to the same idea, as is written, ‘in the image of God He created him’—his head encompasses three spiritual qualities, his arms are kindness and fearsomeness... Given that, in loving his fellow he loves God as well, for his fellow is God’s likeness... And you can understand on this basis the comment in *Nedarim* regarding whether one whose hand is struck by a knife can in turn strike the hand that struck him, and the reason is that all Israel are a single *corpus* and their soul is hewn from the divine unity; and of this it is said, ‘all Israel are responsible for one another’” (*Metsudat David*, 3b). I have cited this example because it intermingles the two motifs: the individual and the collective are both in the Heavenly likeness.

⁴³ Martin Buber, “*Dat u-musar*,” in *Penei Adam* (Jerusalem, 5722 [1961-62]), p. 296.

⁴⁴ In his *Yad Ramah* on *Sanhedrin*, R. Me’ir Ha-Levi Abulafia explains this paradoxically: “Love your fellow refers even to the wicked among you [playing on *re`a*, fellow, and *ra`*, wicked].” (See *Shitah Mequbetsset* ad loc.; and the passage is cited by Finkelstein in his introduction to *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, p. 50, n.89.) *Shitah Mequbetsset* cites another interpretation based on the

my view, the frameworks for halakhic morality. The transition from these principles to concrete norms is difficult and complicated in the halakhic system as in all ethical systems. Without going into the matter in detail, let me allude to it through one classic, pointed example:

R. Nahman said in the name of Rabbah bar Avuah, “Scripture says, ‘Love your fellow as yourself,’ [that is,] choose for him a decent death. (*Ketubot* 37b.)

On the surface, capital punishment epitomizes the failure of ethical principles. Nevertheless, the principle of “Love your fellow as yourself” applies even in making a halakhic determination of this sort. There may be circumstances in which one is obligated to take steps that are somehow morally compromised. Even then, however, one remains bound by ethical principles that show one the path in which to walk.⁴⁴

idea that “once the verdict is carried out against the evildoer, he is considered righteous,” or “once he is punished, he is [again] called your fellow.” Abulafia’s innovation, of course, is to apply that principle even before the verdict is executed.